Eight years ago, when we bought our barge, we moved into a village that we never knew existed until after we had been living there for several months.

Being a member of the international barging community means that you live in a "moving village" with different neighborhoods that appear wherever there are boats, water and something to throw a rope around.

This summer, for the 15th anniversary of the DBA-Barge Association, a new neighborhood formed in the Bassin de la Villette in the 19th arrondissement of Paris. By the end of June, barges started arriving in Paris from Holland, Belgium, and France, with many others coming from England, crossing the channel to arrive at the basin for a long weekend celebration.

Either by the canal St. Denis or by the canal St. Martin, boats cruised through the streets of Paris, passing through the locks one barge at a time, and entering the basin at the rate of 15 a day. By the weekend the basin, which is usually home to a few 38 meter barges and a couple of day trip boats, was transformed into a village of well cared for barges, each one decorated with code flags and pennants, and it was a beautiful sight.
The rally brought together 60 barges, and there were planned events, but the highlight of the rally was, as always, spending time with other boaters. It was a chance to catch up with old friends, and to meet boaters whose paths you had not yet crossed along the waterways.

After the rally, barges that wanted to stay in Paris either came here to the Arsenal or they moored near the Eiffel Tower at the other port in Paris that used to be called Port Grenelle. This immediately increased the number of people that we knew in Paris, and we were lucky enough to be invited to a couple of great parties on some spectacular barges, with friends that are gifted in the kitchen.

While shopping for dinner at the morning market at Place d'Aligre on the 13th of July, we drifted into Le Baron Rouge with friends and began what turned out to be a spectacular day. From the Baron we moved directly to lunch on "Libertijn's" deck, and the lunch lasted long enough that dinner became irrelevant, and we just moved down the street to the local firehouse for the Firemen's Ball.
France's national holiday is July 14th and because the French love to have a good time, the celebration starts the night before with different firehouses hosting dances.

It was a warm summer night, the dance was under the stars in one of the firehouse courtyards, and the crowd was a mix of young girls there to flirt with the firemen, families with kids and people of all ages just out to enjoy one of the few warm summer evenings.

We danced with friends and friendly French people, talked with the firemen, met other Americans who live in Paris, and enjoyed the party until well after midnight. When we were walking out, there was still a long line of people waiting to get in, and the real party was just warming up.
The good weather held up for the next night, the 14th, and we went across town with friends who were staying in the Arsenal to enjoy a pre-fireworks pot luck dinner at Port Tour Eiffel. Many of our winter port neighbors were staying on this side of town during their required 21 day absence from the Arsenal, and several others had cruised over just for the day so that they could moor close to the Eiffel Tower and enjoy a great view of the fireworks that were set off from the Trocadero.

Our friends on “Les Vieux Papillons” had pulled out all of the stops and made enough Cajun food to feed everyone in the port, and anyone else who happened by. We ate well, drank Champagne and watched the fireworks in comfort from Papillion’s deck. The evening was perfect, and when it was over we headed for home.

Even though we had not planned to return to our barges on the other side of Paris on foot, the fact that they had closed all of the metro stations near the Eiffel Tower for crowd control, meant that we had to start out that way. By the time that we had walked far enough away to be able to find an open metro station, we were enthralled by the beauty of the moon shining on the Seine, and we all decided to walk back to the Bastille. We left at just after midnight and didn’t get back to our boats until after 2am, but no one was complaining, because Paris on a warm summer night is a magical place.

At the end of July we went to the captain’s office to tell them the date and time that we were going to leave for our required absence from the port. At the appointed time, we entered the lock, they let the water out and when the gates opened onto the Seine, we turned left and headed up to the Marne towards Epernay. We love the Marne with all of it’s wonderful Champagne villages, and we planned to cruise along and stop wherever and whenever nice moorings presented themselves.

We didn’t get very far. Instead of cruising down to Epernay, we stopped in Meaux for one night and ended up staying there for a couple of weeks. When we arrived the port was full, and friends from Roanne on “Peppa” let us moor on them. In the morning, when boats left, we were able to move over to an empty pontoon, and after that the days just flowed along like the river current.

Boats came, stayed for a day or for several, and we got into the rhythm of the place. It was peaceful.

Meaux has a nice Saturday market, but aside from that, there isn’t much to do, so after being very busy in Paris, it was nice to find a place where we were not tempted to leave the boat everyday.

We read. We worked on projects. We did nothing and enjoyed it immensely. The biggest event of the day was the arrival of a new boat. With the strong river current, neighbors would go out to catch the lines for the newcomers, and sometimes this resulted in conversations that started on the pontoon and ended on someone’s deck. Joie de Vivre, a New Zealand boat from Roanne pulled up on our pontoon one day and stayed just like we did. Then we all did nothing together, and several times we discussed the joys of being lazy during dinner on our deck.

We met new people and spent time with old friends. We realized that even though we live in Paris, we still haven’t moved out of the village. The port would empty out in the morning and be full again by noon. Some days we didn’t know anyone and other days, we knew everyone on the block. Most neighborhoods change over the years, but in Meaux, we sat back, relaxed and watched our neighborhood change twice a day.
Back in our Arsenal mooring, we felt right at home as our winter neighbors returned to port. Our winter life doesn’t start until our French classes resume in October, so September was the time for us to enjoy Paris.

Our family came to visit and we play tourists walking all over Paris together, stopping for a meal or a snack as the mood struck. Friends that we had made through our website, but had only met through email, were able to stop by and introduce themselves, and we had the pleasure of meeting them in person. We lunch, brunched and dined with new friends that live in Paris, and old barge neighbors and French friends passing through Paris came to stay at what we are now calling “Hotel Eclaircie”.

One glorious Sunday, while we had our friends the chefs on board, we shopped for lunch at the Bastille market. Another San Francisco fireman and his wife were in town and lunch on the back deck was the plan.

Our guests arrived at 1pm and left at 8pm in proper French Sunday lunch style. They lived in Paris last year, so they already knew how to relax at the table.

The sky was clear blue, and the sun was warm. There were people out enjoying themselves in the park across from our back deck, music drifting down from the streets above, and more boats than usual cruising by our “table with a view”. It was a beautiful day on our back deck, and the perfect end to our summer.
Everyone leaves Paris in August - except us.

Firemen come to the port to train.
This guy came to the park on the other side of the port to do his laundry. He saw us taking his

Second course of our Sunday Lunch
Velib, Paris' newest transportation system, meant that we no longer had to carry our bikes off the boat and up 50 stairs to ride through the streets of Paris. We couldn't wait for our annual pass to arrive in the mail.
Now we hop on a bike more often than taking the metro.
There are so many things to do in Paris in the Summer, that we reluctantly left the port at the
We had an Elvis sighting along the Marne canal. The sister commercial barge named "Graceland" passed us just before Elvis appeared.