

Il y a presque 40 ans: Les rallyes promenades du LFNY

Photos and text by Rafael Rodriguez ('71)

In the year 1975..or sometime before, **Jean François Galy ('69)** worked on Third Avenue not far from me and launched a *Renouveau 75* initiative to unite the Alumni of the Lycée along the lines of an American Alumni Association. He enlisted several of his friends and included me in meetings and discussions on how to go about it. The problem as I understood it was that many New York Lycée Alumni are of foreign origin, don't spend that much time in New York City, and go back abroad eventually. However, there were opportunities for camaraderie, networking, or plain loyalty to a class or group. I stayed away from the backgammon evenings and other social events, but attended meetings when I could, --this was long before I moved into the city from New Jersey.

It is a challenge however to retrace through memories the value of activities done, as opposed to projects left behind or that remained in the planning stages. Remembering *Rallye-Promenades* of earlier years that my family took part in with neighbors in Normandy, I suggested that we organize one such event in the New York area, with Montclair, my town, as the starting point. Since a number of Lycée families either owned automobiles or had houses in the country, or were simply picked up from school in a car, there could be enough participants to make it a "fun" event. An opportunity was lost to turn it into a fundraiser for some altruistic cause. I remember **Patrick Jacques ('69)** being picked up after class by the longest, shiniest Buick that ever was ! I liked automobiles since growing up in Cuba and going on walks with my father to see the latest models, a yearly ritual. Now I drove my Citroen DS which was economical enough for this country, safe, and sophisticated enough for my taste. But that is not the vehicle that I was planning to use in the *Rallye*.

Given the enthusiasm shown at one of these meetings with the alumni in Galy's office, I went to work on drawing a schedule. The starting point would be the parking lot at Eagle Rock, on the border of Montclair and West Orange, 10 miles as the crow flies from Manhattan, with a sweeping view that spanned the horizon, from the Verrazano to the GW Bridge, and a site of many happenings before: it is right up the road from Edison's home and lab and he filmed the Great Train Robbery, his first movie, there. Orson Welles also used the location in his famous 1938 broadcast. Between those times, Frederick Olmstead, of Central Park fame, had planned, designed, and built a park that was basically a forest preserve and today is enjoyed by hikers, horseback riders, and mountain bikers. It is also possible to just park and sit on a bench and admire the view, or go into the renovated Pavilion, today a restaurant. So a group of French-speaking Sunday drivers fit right in and added to the colorful character of the locale.

I used my 1966 slant six 225 cubic inch Dodge Van as the center of operations, and a flag made out to read "*Rallye soit qui bien y pense*" was commissioned, complete with a quilted driver wearing a beret and driving a sports car. Envelopes were handed to the participants, grouped in cars that drove off with instructions, such as: "drive down the road that bears the name of the Dutch Royal family..." "along the way pick up leaves from a beech tree..." "take a peak at the dining room in Washington's headquarters in Morristown and write down what the lithographs on the wall depict..." All in all there were close to 20 automobiles "competing" on a road that ended with a picnic at Washington Crossing in Pennsylvania, along the Delaware River, after driving through the beautiful NJ countryside, including a covered bridge. There were games and food and drink at various checkpoints along the way. I had to speed (in a manner

of speaking) from one checkpoint to another before the participating teams arrived. They had emergency envelopes that they could open in case that they were lost or couldn't find their way with the clues given. At this point it is necessary to thank many people who contributed enthusiastically to the whole planning and the implementation of the event, among them comes to mind **Denise Raab ('69)**, who travelled from Brooklyn to NJ to help me write up the instructions and prepare the envelopes – remember that this was before the computer or easy copy making! And, also the sponsors who offered prizes, La Côte Basque and Demarchelier come to mind.

In sum, it was a good time. A light rain on and off didn't dampen the spirit that also benefitted from a guitar and some singing along the way. And the timeliness of the event around the bicentennial of the Nation helped to spur another such *Rallye* a year later, in 1976. This time starting in the parking lot of Phillipsburg Manor in Tarrytown, or Sleepy Hollow as it is called today. That *Rallye* included the head of Maserati in the US who left us in the dust with his wheels, but was a fair competitor in our Lycée group. We ended that day with a banquet and prizes at the Inn in Cold Spring, NY.

Oh the simple pleasures that can be found in driving!

