

I love this story and I love telling it. It is a great pairing – the tale of a wonderful woman and how I got started with my wine hobby.

It was 1958, and I was working at St. Francis Hospital in Hartford, CT as an orderly in the Emergency Room. My goal was to save money because college was starting in September, and I needed additional funds for a trip to Europe. One of the nurses, a Miss Olga Sadotti, learned I was going to Europe for the summer and asked if I was going anywhere near the Riviera. When I replied “yes,” she stopped dead in her tracks. She asked if she gave me a letter of introduction and some money, would I stop at the home of a Mrs. Otilie Moore and take her to lunch or dinner. (The actual address was in Ville France sur Mer, a suburb of the Riviera.) Being a softy, I said yes.

So off to Europe we go. I was traveling with a life-long friend, Lennie, who by coincidence also had to see someone on the Riviera. No problem; no conflict. We arrived at The Riviera on the morning of August 15 and decided that our first stop should be the home of Mrs. Moore. We found her house easily enough and knocked on her door. Suddenly, my knees went rubbery. I realized I was very nervous. I had never done anything like this before. I was a 20-year-old beer-drinking sophomore who was in Europe to have fun, and in a split second I had to erase any thought of such things and become a serious adult on a diplomatic mission. I knocked on the door a second time, very gently so as not to irritate Mrs. Moore. She opened the door and in a terse manner asked what I was selling. The rubber in my knees increased, and with all the class and charm of a brick, I stuttered and stammered that I had a letter of introduction from a Miss Olga Sadotti of Hartford, CT. (The letter was sealed so I'd never seen the contents.) Mrs. Moore opened the letter, read it, and right away her grumpy exterior vanished. She invited us in and asked if we could stay a few days. Now the rubber in my legs was dissipating and a conversation started that lasted for several hours. My traveling friend Lennie had a lot to offer the conversation because he was a student from Yale University and was studying Architecture. I, on the other hand, was a boring old General Studies Student at Boston University, so I sat in the corner.

My patience paid handsome dividends when Mrs. Moore asked if we would like a drink. The offer was only good if we accompanied her to the wine cellar. We agreed, and off we went. As the saying goes – Oh My God! There I was with my jaw dropping on the ground, staring at – at the very least – 2000 bottles of wine. Some of the wine was covered with dust, as it had been hidden from the Germans during WWII. However, there was a section reserved for Champagne. Mrs. Moore asked me to select two bottles and take them to the garden area just off the dining room.

There I was, a young stallion, drinking Champagne in Mrs. Moore's Garden, when all of a sudden the rubber knees started to activate themselves again. It must have been the wine that helped loosen my tongue, because I began asking questions about Olga – who was just an acquaintance – and how she'd come to know Mrs. Moore. What happened next in the conversation was a stunner. It soon became clear that Lennie and I were in the presence of a woman who was personally responsible for the escape of approximately 1200 children from the horrors of Nazi Germany. The children were somehow moved from Germany to France to Spain and on to other safe havens, including the US.

(It is here that I must refer you to the Internet for a complete account. There you will discover in detail what an amazing feat it was. Mrs. Moore was not one for glory or publicity. Just go to Safari and type in Otilie Moore and spend some time reading an incredible story.)

As for my wine hobby; yes, it was born in Mrs. Moore's Garden. It sustained itself very nicely for the next three weeks as Lennie and I travelled through Italy, Austria, Germany, Belgium and finally home. I finished college, got married, and had four children – which, I discovered, did not leave any money left over for wine. However, in 1986, there were signs all over Boston Liquor stores that the 1982 Bordeaux wines had been released. This was the next great vintage to follow the 1961 Bordeaux. That was it. I was hooked again. For the next several years I purchased a great deal of wine from all over the planet. I enjoyed the drinking, but I also started to keep a journal of the wines that my wife and I were drinking. The journal contributed a great deal to my learning experience.

One morning I woke up and realized that I no longer had to pay college tuition. I was rich! A whole world full of wineries was out there waiting for a visit from Terry and Cathy. Over the next seven or eight years we schlepped through Burgundy, Bordeaux, The Rhone, Most of Italy, California, Oregon, Washington, and to some of the lesser known wineries in other states of the US. (Wine is now produced in all 50 States.)

I would be remiss if I did not mention the hundreds of talented people I've met on my winery visits, people who are really passionate about wine. If you have a chance to visit wineries, try to meet the owner *and* the winemaker. They are the decision makers. They have the final say for the product on the shelf. And do not be intimidated; they love talking about their work.

And finally, in all of my travels, did I find a favorite wine? You betcha! A 1993 Meo Camuzet Nuit Saint George. Bummer! It is all sold out.