

André Pierre Joseph Bihet

12 January 1928 – 18 November 2010



André was born in Woodlands Cottage in the Bouet – where the Bucktrouts store is now. He was the youngest of seven children born to Marie Josephine Bihet (née Allain) who was originally from Plouha in Brittany and who came to Guernsey with her family as a young child. 'Jo' had been widowed twice (both Frenchmen) and had had two children with each husband (Charles & Yvonne Perrot and Florence & Louise Michoux), before meeting Marcel George Bihet, who was the fourth of nine children, born of parents who eloped from Normandy. After serving with the Royal Field Artillery in WWI, Marcel returned to Guernsey and worked as a stoker for the gas company. Marcel and 'Jo' married on 28 March 1921. Together they had three children – Thérèse, John and lastly, André when 'Jo' was 40.



André had a strict upbringing within a poor French catholic family, and a strict work ethic. He served as an altar boy at Notre Dame Church and attended Notre Dame and St Joseph's schools.

This extract about the Evacuation in 1940 is paraphrased from Molly Bihet's book 'Reflections of Guernsey':



André was 12 years old, and a pupil of St Joseph's Roman Catholic School in 1940. He remembers meeting very early in the morning at the school with a small carrier bag containing a little lunch, a change of under clothing and a few coppers. Children were to be evacuated together as a school with some teachers willing to go and travel with them. André arrived in Weymouth after a long weary journey. They got on a train and eventually arrived in Scotland. He remembers very well being lined up at Dixon Hall with the others, and being looked over by prospective foster parents. André did not enjoy this inspection and was not chosen, so was taken with other boys from the school and looked after in a Catholic Church Hall on Paisley Road where he waited for news - hoping his parents, brothers and sisters would be able to find him.

It was at the Church Hall that one day, after four months or so, he was most surprised and couldn't believe if he was seeing right, as the gentleman talking to his teacher, Mr Cooper, looked very much like his dad! He looked again and sure enough it was.

The family were all re-united and settled in Wolverhampton. André was not happy at school - he was slightly built, rather quiet and shy, and his name "André Bihet" made him a target for bullies. He also had spoken much more French at home, than English, so to the older boys he was definitely a "froggie". Everyday there were incidents and children can be very cruel. André could not take his tales home either as his mother (although a good mum) would have given him another bashing! It must have

been a very trying time, as there were four families living in the terraced cottage, 11 people in all.

After 18 months at St Joseph's School (co-incidentally the same name as his Guernsey school), André left at the age of 14, to work in Gibbons factory, assembling munitions. He stayed there for just over a year, then moved to Midland Metal Spinning Company where he stayed for another 15 months.

Five years later, when the family returned home to Guernsey, it was only André and his parents that did so. His older brothers were in the forces, and his sister had married in Wolverhampton. They returned to their old home at 5 Contree Mansell - to find it empty of all furniture. The neighbouring families who had "borrowed" the furniture did return it though!

André's father died of a heart attack, aged 59, in 1948, making his mum a widow for the third time. André was a good son and did whatever he could to help, support and provide for his Mum until she died in 1964. He was the perfect son and he also took on the role of being a great supporter to his older siblings. His last surviving sibling, his sister Florrie, died last year.

André met Molly in their teens, in the post-war period. He liked to recount a story of travelling to London with his friends, and bumping into Molly on the platform at Waterloo station and how she was kissing another boy! After getting together, they loved dancing at St George's Hall.



André worked as a nurseryman at Caledonia Nursery in Fosse André from when he was 17, until he retired at the age of 62. He loved working with plants and flowers; there was nothing he didn't know about them!



André and Molly married at St Joseph's Church on 9 December 1954 and lived at Mon Rêve, a cottage in La Ramée. Sally was born in December 1955 and Carol in December 1959 (December's a busy month!)

The family moved to Rosedale, Amherst in 1962, where they started running a guest house. The family moved into two bedrooms in the lean-to greenhouse each Summer, whilst the guests took over the bedrooms in the house. André would cycle to work down the road, wearing his beret and looking every bit the Frenchman. He came home for his lunch and on his return home each evening, Molly and André cooked the guests' evening meal and were kept busy until 10pm each night. André was an excellent 'washer-upper' and assistant cook every evening and all day on Sundays.

This is another extract from 'Reflections of Guernsey':

In the 1960s, at Rosedale (our Guest House) we had a coincidence which André and I will never forget. A Mr and Mrs Dodd from Wolverhampton booked a holiday and duly arrived. A couple in their sixties whom again we got into conversation easily. In chatting to Mrs Dodd, she told me the main reason for their visit to Guernsey, was to try and find out what happened to a "French" refugee boy who had worked in her workshop where she was the supervisor at the Midland Metal Spinning Company from 1942 to 1945.

He had become quite ill and had left work before the war ended. I picked up the "Midland Metal Spinning Company" as André had worked there and I remembered him saying he had been very ill with jaundice! André as always was washing up dishes, but when I called and he got speaking to Mrs Dodd, they easily realised he was the boy she was looking for! There was great excitement and many tears by Mrs Dodd who had worried so much about this little refugee, who was pale and thin and who just never was able to return to work.



André continued to work hard, but was totally focused on his family. He loved his two daughters and never passed an opportunity to spend time with them. He was always very firm but gentle, loving and fair. Perhaps due to his own upbringing and childhood, he wanted them to have better. They couldn't have wished for better parents.

The family moved to Woodcote, in Les Canichers in 1969. André continued working at the Nursery, but he was by now driving a car, an old Austin A35, which regularly had its battery stolen until André put a padlock on the bonnet! It was possible to see the road through the bottom of the car in places, but it got the family around. In time, he graduated to a Hillman Husky van which was hearse shaped and horrible orange colour. It's what the girls learned to drive in, in spite of their embarrassment at being seen in it.

The Guest House business had got busier, so in the 1980s they switched to self-catering to give themselves more free time.

In spite of several European holidays, although France was on our doorstep they'd only managed day trips. Carol took them to Brittany for a week in 2001 to see the town of his mother's birth, Plouha. He was very moved when he sat in the church of her baptism



and his grandparent's marriage and later when an elderly Frenchman told him: "Vous êtes Français".

Molly's father, Bill Finigan, died in 1972 and Molly and André, who lived virtually opposite, took on the responsibility for overseeing her Mum, a well-known local character, known to many as 'Glad' or 'Aunty Glad'. Over the years, Glad became more dependent and she moved in with Molly and André in the late 70s. For all the care that she eventually needed, André was very caring and supportive.



His family has always been his priority and nothing was too much effort for him.

André has never enjoyed great health and had many scares in recent years, but had always bounced back. When asked how he was, he most often said "I'm fine" (which became a family joke), making light of his problems. Always very selfless, though that doesn't mean he was very patient as he got frustrated at his own limitations but has always been very kind and respectful to others.

André loved becoming a grandfather ('Papa') for the first time in 1982 (December of course) when Sally gave birth to Ryan. Carly followed in 1985, then Carol's children, Joshua

(1988) and Naomi (December 1990). It was a very happy surprise when, after remarrying, Carol presented 'Rosie' in 2005. A very late addition to his family, Rosie gave him so much pleasure and joy over the past five years.

André had always spoken of his contentment in having interesting and enjoyable work and a happy home life. He took great pleasure in his final years - in his family, garden and watching and feeding the birds. He enjoyed his outings in the car with Molly, which often ended at the Castle Emplacement eating ice-cream whilst watching the boats come and go.

André and Molly would have been married for 56 years in December and it's been clear to see that their love and devotion to each other and to their family only grew and strengthened over the decades. Even during this last testing time when words failed, the look that passed between them said all that ever needed to be said.

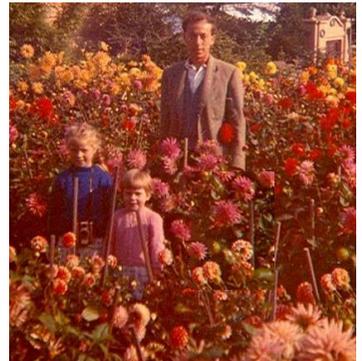


André was and always will be a very special and *gentle* man. Others have spoken of him being kind, honest, generous, respectful, gentle and loyal. He will live on in the memories of his family and friends and in the lives of his children and grand-children, who will miss him desperately, but remember him with the greatest love and respect.

Carol Vivyan 2010



The love we have for Dad
Will never fade away.
We'll think of him, our special friend
Throughout each passing day.
We'll walk into the room
And see his empty chair;
Although we know he's resting,
We'll feel his presence there.
The memories of his laughter,
His warm and loving smile,
His eyes so full of happiness,
His heart that of a child.
Memories are forever
Be they laughter or of tears,
Memories we will treasure
Through all the forthcoming years.



Anon