

How We Found The BMC --The Mike & MJ Story

by MJ

Some of this story may be familiar; as I'm writing, I recall an earlier version I sent to then-president Toni Thomas to read at the November 2015 Planning Session. What follows is the whole story . . .

Way back in September of 1988, MJ needed a new car. We looked around and discovered a brand new 1989 Mazda 323 4-door sedan - it was our first Mazda (we're on our 5th and 6th now - yeah, we're big fans). We bought it for a number of very good reasons, but Mike had already begun reading about this new little convertible coming on the market pretty soon. Six months later the first Miata's were imported to the USA and car envy began . . . if we'd only waited a little bit longer, we coulda' had a Miata! It would be four long years of rubber-necking for us every time we saw a Miata zoom by.

Finally, in May of 1994, Mike decided to trade in his Pontiac POS for a brand new red & tan Miata. It came with headrest speakers and a complimentary copy of Miata Magazine - which contained an ad for a Skip Barber Miata-only driving school in Sebring FL. We immediately bought a subscription to the magazine and signed up for the driving school in the spring of the next year. In April of 1995, we packed the Miata trunk to nearly overflowing and headed out to Sebring International Speedway, where Mike discovered just what the little red convertible could actually do! He didn't stop smiling for the entire week - MJ got a sunburn. We met some VERY crazy but nice people and decided this traveling around the country in a little car with a trunk the size of a breadbox was just the ticket for us! From Miata magazine, we discovered national Miata conventions, and the little car's attributes expanded to include vacation destinations.

In October of 1996, we attended our first Miata national convention in Atlanta, hoping to hook up with other miataphiles from the Badger State. That year, there were two conventions - the BMC decided to go to the one earlier-in-the-year in Canada. But in Atlanta, we met the crazies from Mass Miata - the Massachusetts state club. The first of our life-long Miata friendships were born. We joined Mass Miata in September of 1997 for their regional rally in Vermont - the first of their four rallies we attended - and planned to meet up with them again the next year for the national convention in the Pocono Mountains.

Nine months later, in July of 1998 at the rally in the Poconos, we FINALLY hooked up with the BMC over a shirt at a vendor table. Then BMC prez Peter Herman had taken hold of one end of a shirt on the Crazy Red Italian table as I picked up the other end of it - we met in the middle. He looked at my ID tankard as I looked at his, and we proclaimed over each other, "You're the Wisconsin people we've been looking for," - "You're the Miata club people we've been looking for." And the rest is history. We met membership chairman Marilyn Arvan, exchanged contact information to get an application form, and joined the club as soon as we got home. .

The first BMC event we were able to attend after July was the Planning Session for the 1999 events, coincidentally held that year in Sheboygan at the Herman's home. It's most notable for us because we purchased our first BMC shirts from Linda Carlson, and met Cathie and Tom Anderson (the next life-long friendship to be formed) and the late Joe and Michelle Menigoz. For those of you who remember Joe, well, he can best be described as, "his middle name should have been Miata." He was the biggest and best cheerleader for the car we've ever met. We still miss him. When he discovered Mike's career was in computer science, he corralled us into taking a look at the old BMC website to see if it could be

resurrected. We agreed. The next month, we went to December Christmas party held at Pat and Barb Arvan's home. Later in December we met with computer science instructor and BMC member Susan Harrison at our home and began learning website programming. Over the next two months, MJ developed a skill for web programming that exists to this day. After Mike arranged for new web hosting and took control of the former BMC site, MJ took over the task of updating and programming.

At the February, 1999 event - dinner and a play hosted by Linda and Ron Carlson (at a Mystery Dinner Theatre - those there will remember the performances by Michelle Menigoz and Marilyn Arvan among others - the cry of "Mona-Mona" still reverberates in my ears) we introduced the new website at it's new web address. By the April event, the first of many tech sessions hosted by Joe Menigoz, this one in Fond du Lac, the website was up and running and MJ was trying to figure out how to get digital photos online. We joined Joe in his big recruitment endeavor for the club - he used to follow unfamiliar Miatas around in his AmeriTech van until they parked and then regaled them with hilarious stories about the club and its members in an effort to get them to "join the fun," yup - that's where that phrase came from. About that time, references to ourselves changed from "the club" to "the BMC".

Next up, we attended 1999's Bill Run - the third event run by Bill and Marinette Wanezek - they did I think 10 original runs and a couple of anniversary runs along the way. HOLY COW! BIG learning experience there! Mike learned from Bill how to organize a drive for the club and we both learned about a whole slew of Miata-worthy roads right in our own back yard! Bill and Marinette are retired members who now live outside Asheville NC - we still see them on occasion and reminisce about the good old days of the club. They're doing well, by the way, and still have a Miata, and are very active in their own local club. And thus began our often-and-many drives with and for the BMC all over our Badger state. We both lived in Wisconsin all our lives, but we hadn't learned a darn thing about the state outside of a classroom until we joined the club. Did you know there are horse ranches here? Or a glacial driftless area? Or Wildcat Mountain? Lighthouse and wineries? Canopies of yellow leaves in the fall? A gorgeous church on a holy hill? Do you know what and where coulees are? All these things we learned . . . and many, many more.

In 2008, Mike bought his second Miata - metallic green with a retractable hardtop. In between 1998 and 2008, we both were officers in the club, MJ ran the website for a good long time, then edited the newsletter a couple of times, we planned a multitude of drives and nondriving events over the years, initiated - inadvertently - The Mud Run, and made many, many more life-long friends - most especially Marcy and Jim Hotz, and Dale Mosher and Brenda Nelson. I'd tell you now about some of our vacation escapades - but some things are better left to the imagination. We also lost some good friends - Joe Menigoz, Dave Bonfield, Marilyn Arvan to name only a few.

In 2013, we retired Saint Augustine FL, but have yet to join a local club here - we're too busy being retired. But In 2015, we returned to our roots for the 25th anniversary of the BMC weekend. It was nice of the BMC to throw us a party - even Tom Matano showed up. We were privileged to be named honorary members of the BMC during the weekend and we're still flabbergasted by that. MJ gets choked up just thinking about it.

The club has changed a bit over the years - the inclusion of Moo-ata and Buster comes to mind - I'm sure by now there are other Miata-buddies going on drives with you all. The friendships continue. We still do Miata-related vacations all over the country, and we're very happy to be joining some of you later this year for 'The Twisted Triangle' event in mid-June. The one thing that hasn't changed for us - and for the club - is the people. It's always been and continues to be about the people. Miata people. Of

all ages and all walks of life. Of different opinions and backgrounds. But with a lot more than just the love of a little car in common.

We discovered this by becoming involved in the BMC. The more we became involved, the more friends we made. The more friends we made, the more we wanted to become involved. You should try it - it's fun. And it's really pretty easy. Almost as easy as showing up for a drive. Take some photos for the website or the newsletter - do an event write up - or write up a story like this one (hopefully not quite as long) - help plan a driving event, or a picnic, or call up some BMC buddies from your neck of the woods some weekend afternoon and do an impromptu mini-drive to get popcorn or a burger or something. Just give it a try - you won't be sorry.