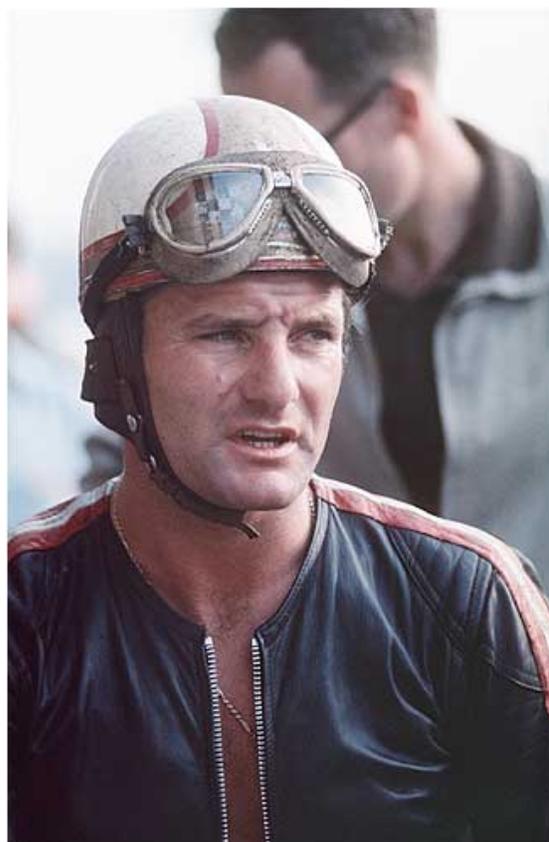


My Memories of Mike Hailwood



By Elizabeth McCarthy

I don't quite know how to begin - at the beginning, I suppose is the logical answer - but my story is one that bends logic, as you will see.

Let me begin then before the beginning of Mike and me. I was a very good student in school. My family lived in a village on the edge of Toronto, Canada. My parents wanted me to go to a better school than the local school, but it was beyond their means. My grandmother took me to meet the Anglican archbishop of Toronto. He very graciously arranged a scholarship at St. Clement's for me on the conditions that I placed in the top 10% on the entrance exams, kept that high standing and most important of all - used that education for the benefit of humanity in some way.

I discovered that I had a talent for math and science. I was fascinated by cars and racing. There was a time when I could have drawn maps of the some of the great GP circuits because I has studied them so much. I was engrossed in the details of circuit design. My interests progressed to F1 suspensions, tires, circuit pavements and safety features. I went to marshalling school at Mosport, nearly fainted during the first aid film and so they put me on signaling and communications. I worked at several races and also participated in rallies as a navigator. At 15 I was the only female and the youngest student member of the Society of Automotive Engineers. My contribution to the school yearbook was an article on F1 racing - a first for that very traditional girl's school.

Who knows where all of that might have led? But, what happened next convinced me that I had gotten off my path. I was in a terrible car accident - so terrible that I died, went to heaven and came back. (Today we call that a near-death experience or NDE). I saw many wonderful things there. Since then I have tried to live my life according to what I saw and learned that day. I saw my future - or at least part of it. I was shown things that I was told I had promised to do before I came into this life and emerged determined to fulfill those promises.

Fast-forward 2 years to 1967. I was just beginning my career in public education and fundraising for international development and relief agencies. I worked full-time for one that could afford to pay me and volunteered nights and weekends for several others.

I had a friend from my engineering period who was very keen on racing. He had two tickets to a reception for the factory teams that were in Toronto for the first ever Canadian motorcycle Grand Prix to be held that next weekend at Mosport. I was out of touch with racing and wasn't that keen, but he convinced me to go. He also gave me a stack of magazines to read. He told me as much as he could about the riders, bikes, etc. In the summer of 1967 there had been a number of squabbles over starting money and other issues between the factory and non-factory riders. Emotions ran high and a lot of them were directed at Mike Hailwood. Those stories combined with stories depicting Mike Hailwood as a glamorous playboy shaped my negative mental image of him.

When my friend and I arrived at the reception at the Westbury Hotel we saw that there were about 200 people there.

We separated because he wanted to try to get some autographs. I went over to the buffet table. The only one there was a rather forlorn looking Japanese man.

I said, *"Hello"* and started talking with him. He showed me pictures of his family in Japan and asked about my family - that sort of thing. Out of the corner of my eye I became aware that someone was watching me. You know that feeling.

Soon a very nice looking man with a stylish moustache walked over to me and said *"I think that is just about the nicest thing I have ever seen a woman do"*.

"What's that?" I asked, as my Japanese friend faded away.

"I've been watching you and you have been spending about 10 minutes talking to Teddy - that's what we call him - and you gave him your full attention - that was very nice. And unless you speak Japanese it must have been a very limited conversation," he said with a nice laugh.

I laughed and replied, *"Well, he looked lonely"*.

To which he replied, *"Well, I'm lonely, would you talk to me?"*

We talked for approximately 5 hours. We talked about music, history, travel - everything but racing. I actually assumed that he was a journalist or a public relations type for one of the teams. I was impressed by his gentleness and wide knowledge of the world.

At one point during the evening flash bulbs went off amidst a burst of laughter at the opposite end of the very large room. I was startled and looked in the direction of the lights for a second.

He asked if I would rather be over there. I said, laughing, *'No, not at all.'*

Then it happened again and he repeated the question a little more insistently.

When I replied, *'No'* a second time he asked, *'Are you sure?'*

I replied with a laugh, and giggling - *"Oh no, that's probably just Mike Hailwood and I wouldn't walk across the room to meet him."*

I want to emphasize that I was laughing when I said that. He looked stricken for a second and asked, *'Why ever not?'* I explained about my friend, the magazines and the stories. I said that from everything I had heard Mike Hailwood was a jet setting playboy and womanizer, probably rather superficial and not at all the kind of person I would enjoy talking to.

He asked if I was enjoying talking to him and I replied, *"Oh yes, very much so!"*

A little after midnight the reception was breaking up. Amazingly we hadn't been interrupted during the whole evening.

My new friend asked me to have breakfast with him. When I said I couldn't, he suggested lunch, dinner, etc. With each suggestion I kept explaining that I had commitments at work. He suggested every day until the weekend. I was blushing and giggling at his persistence.

Then he asked me if I was going to the practice on Friday.

I said, *"No, I told you I am really not a racing fan and besides I have to work."* Then finally he asked if I was going to go to the races on Saturday.

I asked him if he was going to be there and he got an odd look on his face and said, *"You really don't know who I am, do you?"*

Laughing again (I laugh and giggle a lot) I said, *"No, who are you?"*

He replied, *"I'm Mike Hailwood and I'm going to marry you".*

Needless to say we saw each other the next day and every day that week.

The following week was magical.

Mike was a man of extraordinary depth and sensitivity. We didn't go dancing or anything like that. All he wanted to do was spend our time together talking. This annoyed his great friend and fellow racer, Bill Ivy, to no end, as he had lost his carousing partner. He would make comments to the effect that Mike was turning into an old man. We spent a lot of time alone in the room which Mike shared with his Honda teammate, Ralph Bryans. Ralph was always gracious and left us alone as much as he could.

Mike talked a little about racing. He was sincerely astonished that people thought what he did was worth getting excited about. I remember one specific thing he said. *'They could strap a monkey on a bike and he could do what I do'*. He had seen that in a circus and remembered it. Mike was in a time of deep introspection and self-examination - what we would call today a mid-life crisis.

He felt that Honda might quit racing and wasn't sure what he wanted to do with his life. A love relationship with a very beautiful film star had just ended and left him deeply hurt.

When I had read the racing magazines I had seen a few pictures of him wearing a helmet and goggles. He didn't have a moustache in those pictures. Mike had grown that to cover the evidence of a recent accident. He often said that my not recognizing him was a great gift because he knew he could trust me. I wasn't one of what he called racetrack dollies who just wanted to be with him because of his fame, or money or glamour. He talked about living the public relations image of himself - the celebrity side - as *'being Mike Hailwood'* as in *"I don't know how to do anything else except to be Mike Hailwood"*.

Partly because his mother had left the family when he was a toddler (he didn't see her again until 1974) and partly because of his other experiences he was extremely leery of people in general and women in particular. Like all of us he didn't want to be hurt again.

One of the unexpected things that we had in common was that we had both been to very good schools and been unhappy there - I was teased because I was a scholarship student in a school for girls from wealthy families. Even though Mike's family was certainly wealthy he was teased about his accent.

Mike wasn't a big man. He was actually rather thin in those days. But he had great strength in his arms and hands - probably from wrestling the Beast as he called the Honda 500 - 4. Mike had very large hands like a football player's. He could easily pick me up and carry me. Mike was a great hand holder. But, sometimes he would hold my hand so tightly that I thought he was going to crush it.

The dark cloud hanging over our week was that we both knew he had to go back to England to race in the Race of the Year at Brands Hatch. England. I was astonished when he brought up the subject of marriage again. I really thought that when he said it the first time he was just being funny - I never dreamed that he meant it.

One night he mentioned it again and pressed for an answer. I was really torn. I hadn't told another soul about my near-death experience at that point. People just didn't discuss those things the way they do today. So instead I told him that I didn't think I could bear to watch him risk his life every weekend for the entertainment of a crowd of people, some of whom would just as soon see a spectacular crash as anything else.

He replied, *'I am not going to be killed on a race track - so you don't need to worry about that'* (no mention of serious bodily harm!)

I was startled. *"How can you be so sure of that?"* I asked.

He proceeded to tell me something that he said he hadn't told another person.

"Ten years ago I was starting racing in South Africa. One Saturday night after a day of racing some of us went to a nightclub in Durban. There were 8 of us - all about the same age sitting at one table. A very old Indian fortune-teller came into the club. He came over to us to read our palms. He proceeded to tell us our fortunes and how each of us would die. He said that none of us would live past the age of 40. I would be the last to die.

I would be killed by one of those damn lorries - so, you see, it won't happen on a track."
I was stunned.

He said that at that time 3 of the original 8 had died as predicted. I think one of them might have been Gary Hocking because he said one was a very good friend who had switched over to cars from bikes and been killed racing. I wish I had remembered their names and the details but I was too stunned by the thought that the man I loved was telling me that he had, at most, 13 years to live.

I told him that I hadn't been honest about my reasons for not marrying him. I told him about my near-death experience and how I felt that I was to be alone for about 10 years from that event (8 years to go from 1967 - both Mike and I married in 1975 - but not each other).

We talked about my work and how gratifying it was. Mike said that he would like to do something like that but was afraid of failing because he said, *"all I have ever known is being Mike Hailwood"*.

The instincts were definitely there, but, so too was the fear of the unknown and unfamiliar. He offered to fund any project I wanted if I would marry him.

My heart was breaking but I told him that I felt that somehow it wasn't meant to be that easy - that I had to sacrifice something. What greater sacrifice could there be than not marrying my soul mate?

Then he said something that haunts me to this day. *"Maybe if I lived your kind of life I wouldn't have to die and I could live to be an old geezer"*.

In the years since, I studied metaphysics and realized, to my deep regret, that he was wiser than I was. We can all change our 'fates' by changing the way we live. But I didn't understand at that time. He really wanted to do something meaningful with his life as far as helping others. I feel that in a way I let him down.

I remember the first time I met Giacomo Agostini who raced for MV. Mike asked me not to talk to him. He said, *"He steals all my girls"*

Giacomo was a very gallant gentleman around me. The teams were all staying in the same small hotel, the Flying Dutchman, near the track.

One evening I was walking back to the dining room when I passed him in the hall.

Ago said in very heavily accented English. *"You are very, very good for Mike. He is different with you. You're a very nice, very nice girl. I am happy for Mike."*



Mike & Giacomo, firm friends, but fierce rivals on the track.

Mike's Honda teammate, Ralph Bryans was also very kind. He told me not to let Bill Ivy hurt my feelings with his remarks. We only saw the others in passing because Mike and I were generally alone talking.

One evening Mike and I were alone in the dining room. A stunning redhead came over to our table and asked for his autograph. Then she dangled her room key in front of him and said that if he was bored later he should knock on her door. He thanked her and said that he didn't expect to be bored. When she left, Mike said, with a laugh, -*"you see what I have to put up with"*. I laughed and said that I didn't think it looked too onerous.

Mike started talking about some of the women who were around racing. He said that when he started racing he couldn't believe all the girls who were throwing themselves at him and, as he said, he wasn't one to let the opportunities go to waste.

Mike said that he knew that I probably thought he used them. *"But"*, he said *"it was mutual - they didn't give a damn about me whether I was hurt, tired, worried or cold. They just wanted to go back to their mates and brag that they had been with Mike Hailwood. They weren't really with me."*

I had never thought of it that way before.

Mike was famous for his practical jokes.

On practice day, Mike wanted to play a trick on Giacomo. I am short - 5'3" and today I have waist length blonde hair. It wasn't quite that long then. I was wearing black pants, sweater and ski jacket that day which he thought would look like leathers from a distance. He had the idea that I should ride the 500- 4 which he affectionately called the Beast because it was like riding an unruly camel. Knowing what we now know about its handling that was an outrageous idea. But, I trusted him completely.

His idea was that it would completely unnerve Ago to see me riding this awesome bike - never mind that it would also completely unnerve me!

I sat on it and immediately there was a problem. My feet didn't touch the ground. The Beast weighed well over 300 lbs. I could only slide to one side and put one foot on the ground. He asked me if I had ever ridden a motorcycle. I said that one summer I rode a Honda 50 that was more like a scooter. In a masterpiece of understatement he said, *"It's the same thing."*

Mike continued, *"It's really simple. There are five speeds. You shift out of first at 55 and I don't want you going out of second."* (The 500 4 actually had a six speed transmission. But Mike was always rather vague on technical matters).

I was thinking to myself - shift into second at 55! *"How fast will this thing go?"* I asked. *"Nobody knows for sure, but as light as you are - probably 200 on the back straight"* was his nonchalant reply.

The mechanics were worried, especially Teddy.

I don't know if they were more concerned about having to explain to Mr. Honda how one of his bikes was smashed or explaining to my mother how her daughter met a spectacular end!

Mike relented. What actually happened was that he took The Beast back out for a couple of record smashing laps and then quickly jumped off. I jumped on, putting his goggles around my neck and his helmet on my head and his gloves on my hands. I bent forward and pointed to the front wheel pretending to convey something of importance to the two mechanics who were surreptitiously helping me hold up the bike. I wonder what Ago thought when he walked by. Mike was in the back of the Honda pits, nearly doubled over with laughter.

It was a strange time for Mike. This was the first (and ultimately the only) Canadian Grand Prix to count towards the World Championship. It was so discounted by the racing press that the usual crowd of reporters and others didn't bother to attend. That was another reason we were able to have so much time to be alone together.

I teased him about the fact that in spite of his reputation as a Don Juan we hadn't gone much beyond kissing and lying together fully clothed on his bed just talking. He replied that he was trying to prove that he wasn't a womanizer and *"besides you're not a race track dolly. I'm going to marry you"*.

Mike wanted me to go back to London with him. He liked to tease me by reminding me that I had said that I wouldn't walk across the room to meet him. Once I joked, *"You're never going to let me forget that, are you?"* He said, *"No, I am going to tell our grandchildren, your grandmother once said she wouldn't walk across the room to meet me"*.

Practice day had been cold and rainy. Mike was starting to feel ill from the cold and dampness. By the afternoon we were both wet and cold. We agreed that the best thing was for me to go home – about 70 miles away and get out of my wet clothes. We were both going to rest and then have dinner together. There was an unspoken understanding that this might be the night when I wouldn't go home. He was going to call me when he woke up from his nap. When I didn't hear from him I assumed that he was sleeping and trying to recover his strength for the next day's racing.

It turned out that Mike did call. But, those were the days before answering machines and caller ID. So I didn't learn that he had called until he told me the next morning. He has assumed that I wasn't feeling well and had gone to bed.

I really believe that Mike was the most profoundly lonely person I have ever met. He hid it under a carefully maintained veneer of joviality. But, there was a real sadness there.

We talked about music a lot. Mike told me that he often traveled with a clarinet because it was easy to fit into a bag. I asked him if he would play for me. Mike said that he had been in such a funk when he left London that he had forgotten it. But, he promised that he would play for me one day. (This becomes important later on).

Mike teased me about my former desire to be an engineer and jokingly said that I should try to fix the awful handling of the Honda 500-4. He had little interest in the technical side of racing and joked that now he could stop worrying about it because he now had his personal

engineer.

My car accident had left me with very poor depth perception so I didn't drive. I asked him if he minded that I couldn't drive and he said that he drove enough for both of us.

We talked about his experiences in car racing. Mike talked about his fear of being trapped in a burning car. He had survived numerous spills on bikes, sometimes being able to pick up the bike and continue racing. He also felt that he wasn't accepted in F1 racing because of his bike racing.

Some of Mike's friends were racing cars or going into racing them. They wanted him to have another go, but, he had strong reservations about it.

Mike's previous experience racing cars had been frustrating and discouraging. I felt that car racing, like any racing, was such a demanding sport that it didn't make any sense to undertake it if it wasn't fulfilling. The only thing that had really been fulfilling in his life, the only place where he felt at home was in bike racing. He loved its relaxed informality, casual atmosphere and the genuineness of the people.

One day we were daydreaming about the future as lovers do. We talked about where we might live and he suggested the Isle of Man, at least for part of the year. His blue eyes sparkled whenever he spoke about the Island. He loved the place, not just the racing, but, also the warm – hearted people, the villages and the terrain of the Island. He described it in such detail that he made me see it in my mind's eye. He even told me about the wee folk, their legends and how important it was to always honour them. Mike went into great detail about leaving gifts of cakes and ale in certain places. He had a passion for the Isle of Man that was contagious. It was the one place in the world that his heart told him was home. Since I have a keen interest in the history of ancient Britain I knew of the Island in that sense. But, he made it come alive as an enchanted place in which to live. He planned to show me his beloved Island the following spring before he raced in the TT. That was not to be. Honda withdrew from racing at the end of the 1967 season. Mike signed a contract with them not to race for anyone else. He wouldn't again race in the Isle of Man TT for another 11 years, but no one could have guessed that on a September evening in 1967.

Race day was cold and wet - about 40 degrees and drizzling. Mike and I were sitting alone in a big rental sedan.

We talked about the missed communications of the night before. I told him that it was probably just as well, because if we had spent the night together I wouldn't have let him go back to London alone. I said, *"I guess I'm old-fashioned, but that's the way I feel"*.

I remember his reply. With a laugh he said, *"Now you bloody tell me! Here I thought I was winning points by being such a gentleman. Now you tell me, when I've checked out of the hotel and the helicopter's been ordered to take us to the airport right after the race. What am I going to do with you?"* Then he hugged me for a few moments without saying anything.

The pit area was bustling with activity and we were quickly losing our privacy.

This was the coldest day of the week. The clouds cast the whole scene in shades of gray.

Ralph Bryans brought us some hot tea, which was most welcome. Mike left for a few minutes. While he was gone Ralph told me that Mike had a ritual of polishing his goggles endlessly to concentrate his mind before a race. He said that Mike didn't talk at that time and Ralph didn't want me to be hurt by Mike's silence. Ralph was always extremely considerate and kind.

Mike came back and handed me something. *"Here, I got you a tower pass - that's where all the wives and girlfriends go."*

I said, with a laugh - *"but, I'm not your girlfriend, and I'm certainly not your wife."*

He just shook his head and laughed too. He said, *"You can be so stubborn"*.

"So ?" he asked, *"Where are you going to watch the race?"*, he asked with a laugh

I said *"I'll stand in the pits with the mechanics."* He wanted to know why. I said, *"I want them to know that I appreciate what they do for you."*

Then he said *"but you'll get cold and wet"*.

I said something like, *"I think we all will - and then we'll be equal."*

He kissed me and then he took out his goggles and started polishing. I just sat quietly in the passenger seat laughing to myself at the accuracy of Ralph's kind warning.

After a while he said, *"You're not saying anything"*.

I said with a laugh, *"sure I am - I'm just not saying it out loud."*

"What are you saying then?" he asked. I said *"I just told you I loved you about a hundred times"*.

He kissed me and said, *"I'm off"*.

As he walked away the reality of the danger suddenly hit me.

I waited for a couple of minutes so that he could walk to the pits alone. Then I walked to the pits and stood behind the wall and watched.

Mike won, of course. But he was nearly frozen to death. Imagine 40 degrees and drizzling. Then factor in the wind chill from the weather plus the speeds of the bikes at over 160mph. The temperature felt well below zero to the racers.

Mike's teeth were chattering and his hands were stiff and blue. I bundled him up in his Dunlop parka and he drank some hot tea. Mike could barely hold the cup. The next race was to start in a little over 30 minutes.

I said, *"I know what we can do."* I put the lock button down on the doors.

I said, *"If you slide over to the passenger side and put your legs up on the seat I'll sit between your legs."* He made some naughty remarks. He wasn't that cold!

I took off my ski jacket. Then I pulled an extra parka from the back seat and put them both over us like blankets. Mike was still freezing.

So I said *'I have another idea.'* I pulled up my sweater and undid my bra.

I said, *"Put your hands under my sweater"*.

Mike said, *"But you'll freeze"*.

I said, *"The important thing is for you to warm up."*

I am quite well endowed in that area so he became a willing patient. Mike's hands felt like ice on my skin.

He said *"I can't believe that you would do that - make yourself cold for me - nobody has ever done things like that for me"*. I said something like - *maybe no one ever loved you the way I do.*

Mike just buried his face in my hair and was quiet.

He won the next race too, but because of the number of points Ago had, Mike still wouldn't win the 500cc world championship. I don't remember the details of the rules, but he was down about that.

By this time he was developing a fever and a poor colour. I was afraid that he was getting sick. He said he was feeling worse and didn't think he could go the awards presentation and might not even race at Brands Hatch the next day. He talked about staying in Toronto and meeting my family.

After much discussion with the team manager, Mike agreed to get in the helicopter and return to England. Mike had someone call BOAC (as British Airways was called in those days) and there was room on the plane for me. He wanted me to go home and get my passport and a few things and meet him at the airport. I wish with all of my heart that I had.

Instead, I said that I had things to take care of, but, would be there as soon as I could. Mike wanted me to join him in London in a few days.

Later, I told him that maybe we had been saved from ourselves and this was the way it was meant to be. Besides my work commitments, my mother had a recurrence of cancer and I had 3 younger brothers - 14, 11 and 9 who needed me. Mike said that he needed me.

Everything had seemed possible when we were together. But, once we each returned to our very different worlds – Mike to London and his friends who wanted him to try racing cars again and me to the path that my near-death experience laid out for me – it seemed that our chance to be together was slipping away.

We stayed in touch for several years. I even went to Nassau to meet his father, Stan. When Mike spoke about leaving racing he said that 'the old man wouldn't wear it' and wanted me to go to Nassau to meet Stan to sound him out on the idea of Mike living a different kind of life.

His father was probably the most powerful force in Mike's life. Mike introduced us on the telephone. I was hardheaded about not letting Mike spend money on me. So it wasn't until the following year that I was able to leave my family, my job and pay my own way. The plan was that I was to spend 2 weeks there, with Mike joining us for the second week. Being on a strict budget I stayed in a tourist cottage. Stan wanted to move me into the Montagu Beach Hotel, which was almost his second home. But, I stayed in my cottage.

Stan and I talked about many things from politics and racing to antiques. My mother and I both collected antiques. I remember him telling me that when he lived in England he had one maid who did nothing but polish his silver collections. Stan had to leave his silver and his other antiques in England because the salt air and the climate in Nassau would have ruined them.

I remember being surprised by Stan's house in Nassau. Mike had told me about the beautiful house that they had lived in when he was growing up in England. This was a modest bungalow - mind you it was on the Eastern Road and right on the Atlantic Ocean. But, it was not the kind of house you would turn around to look at.

Stan's next door neighbours were two retired American women who shared an almost identical bungalow to his. They also shared an infatuation with Stan. He looked a lot like Douglas Fairbanks Jr. and set many hearts aflutter himself. The women told me that Stan was known for never dating anyone in Nassau - much to their disappointment.

Stan and I spent many happy hours sitting on the floor in front of his hi-fi listening to race records. The wall above us was decorated with pictures of Mike.

Stan was delighted that I was able to identify different bikes by their sounds. During that week we listened to every racing record he had - some more than once. It was wonderful to hear his stories of Mike's racing - especially in the early days before he had factory sponsorship when it was just Stan and Mike and their Ecurie Sportive. Their motto "For love of the sport" was an expression of their shared passion for racing.

Stan talked about his own racing days and his business life. Stan was the son of a coal miner. His family was so poor that when Stan suffered a terrible injury to his leg they couldn't afford to have it set properly. That left him with a permanent limp and ended his budding career in gymnastics. Stan started working at the very lowest level in a motorcycle dealership, doing odd jobs. He had tremendous determination and drive. Stan worked his way up and eventually he bought the business. He had a flair for promotion. He was also willing to finance young men who were struggling as he once had and needed inexpensive transportation to get to work. Stan became the most successful motorcycle dealer in England.

In spite of his leg injury Stan was a keen competitor in sidecar and car racing. He raced in the same era as Jack Surtees, John's father, who was the top sidecar racer in England.

It seemed so sad to me that Stan obviously loved England, his life there and the excitement of travelling on the racing circuit with Mike. Yet, here he was in Nassau so very far away from it all. His life was on a much smaller scale than it had been in England, not just in respect to his house and his modest car (I think it was a several year old Vauxhall or similar sedan) but the lack of excitement. His day consisted of driving to the Montagu Beach to see if anyone interesting had arrived from England, swimming and sunbathing. He was only in his late 50's or possibly 60 - in the prime of life. It all seemed rather aimless for a man of such powerful drives. Stan was lovely to be with – charming, gracious and intelligent - so much like Mike.

We were together every day. He would pick me up in the morning and we would drive somewhere for breakfast - usually to the hotel. Then we would meet some of his friends or just go back to his house or stay at the hotel for the afternoon.

One day he was complaining to the two women next door that I was too stubborn to let him arrange for me to stay at the hotel. They very kindly invited me to stay for the rest of my time in their house. I remember Stan battling enormous crabs that had invaded both their garages.

One night a major storm was heading towards Nassau. The storm tides were predicted to reach 15 feet. The average height of New Providence Island is only about 6 feet above sea level. Both of the houses were less than 100 feet from the ocean. All of us spent a very anxious night without electricity or telephones.

Stan came over a little before midnight to check on us. The four of us talked until dawn, by candlelight, while the wind howled.

One of the women, Jean, had lived in Washington, D.C. for many years and had fascinating stories to tell about political scandals. She had been married 4 or 5 times. Her last husband had owned a gambling club on Paradise Island. She told us he had refused to sell his club to some people from Miami who were used to getting their own way. His body was found floating in the harbour. You can imagine the stories that were told that night. We were all grateful to be alive - and very sleepy - the next morning.

Stan took a mischievous delight in telling me this story. When Mike was begging to be allowed to leave school he asked Stan to get him a job at the Triumph factory. When Mike turned up on his first day he was expecting to be something exciting like a test rider. Instead he was given one of the dirtiest jobs on the factory floor, swabbing out the grease pits around the machinery. That was typical of Stan's determination to keep Mike down to earth.

But, he also had Mike driven to his first race in his Bentley - hardly a spartan beginning. You can imagine the looks on the faces of the other bike racers when they saw a skinny teenager in shiny new leathers, emerge from his father's Bentley. But, once on the track Mike had to do it all himself, and he did. In the process he won the respect of his fellow racers, and most important to Mike - he won their friendship.

When Mike began racing, Stan financed his first bike and a used van to transport it. He insisted that Mike pay him back from his winnings and then become self-financing. At least that's the story Stan told me.

I suspect that those terms were not always strictly adhered to and more loans might have been advanced to buy a faster bike, but, I am also sure those loans were paid back. That agreement showed Stan's desire to keep Mike from being pampered or worse in his mind - a snob.

A fascinating thing happened to that shy, skinny, insecure teenager. Mike, who had felt so out of place in an elite school, felt that he had really found his home in bike racing. Mike's unassuming, fun-loving personality won him numerous friends and fans. He delighted in playing elaborate practical jokes. He loved the camaraderie and down to earth atmosphere of bike racing. Mike had no patience for snobs or people who took themselves seriously.

Stan had introduced me to a number of his friends as Mike's girlfriend and then as his future daughter-in-law. I tried to correct him gently. He even brought up the subject of grandchildren. He thought that Mike and I were going to be married when Mike arrived.

I had to explain to him that it wasn't going to happen. Stan was confused by that. He said something like " *I know you two love each other. Mike has been talking about changing his life and now you are here. Why did you come if not to marry him?*"

I felt I had no choice but to tell Stan the whole story of my near-death experience and what I felt I had to do with my life. I couldn't tell him about the prediction of Mike's death. That was Mike's secret to tell or not to tell.

From the way our conversations went, I am sure that Stan knew nothing about any prediction. We talked about the possibility of Mike doing something other than racing. Stan felt strongly that he needed to give cars another chance for a few years. At that point, he said he just couldn't see Mike doing anything else. We talked a lot about my work and how satisfying it was.

Stan had an interest in economic development and some very good ideas on the subject. Somehow he just couldn't see Mike doing anything remotely like that and cutting back on his racing. Stan said that once racing is in your blood it is like a drug, you can't give it up. He was keen on the idea of my doing some kind of volunteer charity work and still being with Mike. I told Stan that I had thought of that but it just didn't seem to be what I was supposed to do.

Stan wanted my mother to fly down to join us.

In the end I lost my courage. I knew that I didn't have the willpower to say no to Mike a second time. It had taken all my strength not to go back to London with him before. I knew that if I looked into his eyes once more or felt his arms around me again, my resolve would melt.

I told Mike on the phone that my mother was ill and that I had to cut short my vacation.

We never saw each other again.

We talked on the phone a few times a year. By this time Mike seemed to have made his

decision to stay in his old lifestyle and was racing with John Surtees.

Mike felt that John, as a former motorcycle world champion himself was the best partner he could hope for to make the transition to cars. It was an opportunity that was too good to pass by. He said that if it didn't go well he would give up racing as a career - maybe just doing occasional club racing - but turning his life in a different direction. Mike won the European F2 championship with the Matchbox Surtees team and it seemed that his choice was made.

Unfortunately Mike never achieved the level of success on four wheels that he had on two wheels. Bike racing always pulled him back, it was his first love. From what he told me, I would say that it was always the warmth and camaraderie that drew him back to bikes. He had a few friends in car racing, but, nothing like the extended family that he had in bike racing.

Mike felt that he was an outsider in F1. While racing for Surtees, Mike rescued Clay Regazzoni who was unconscious and trapped in his blazing car during the South African Grand Prix. For that rescue Mike was awarded the George Medal which is Britain's highest award for civilian valor. You would think that would have made him more accepted in the F1 fraternity.

A couple of years ago a friend gave me a copy of the documentary, *The Quick And The Dead* which was filmed in 1974. In it Mike says that he is lonely in F1. He says that the drivers don't even sit at the same table in their hotel. Mike says that he has more in common with the mechanics, but they don't understand why a driver would want to spend time with them. So he remained very much the outsider.

Mike was famously un-technical. His attitude was to trust his mechanics to do their job. It was his job to ride. But, in car racing the drivers are expected to give technical feedback to the mechanics and engineers. This was very frustrating for Mike. It required learning a different language and a technical one at that. This was compounded by problems with the cars that led to numerous breakdowns. Mike began carrying paperback books to read while he waited to be towed back to the pits.

Mike left Surtees and moved on to McLaren and was beginning to have some success. After his crash at Nurburgring his close friendships with McLaren racing manager, Phil Kerr and fellow driver, Denis Hulme were among the reasons that he decided to move to New Zealand.

Mike's rescue of Clay Regazzoni and his triumphant return to the Isle of Man in 1978 were events in motorsport history. But, for me they were part of the story of the man I loved and still love.

I realize that my story may have left the impression that I was somehow opposed to Mike's racing - far from it. I would have supported him fully in anything that he found fulfilling.

I have a very old-fashioned attitude towards marriage in that I couldn't imagine staying in a career that was as demanding as mine, if I were married.

That was the crux of the problem, because after my near-death experience (NDE) I felt that I

had to stay in my career until I had done the things that I was shown. My sense was that it would take 10 years - or 8 more years from the time when Mike and I met.

To be the kind of wife that I wanted to be, I would have had to leave my job and devote myself completely to my life with Mike. I was torn because I could not imagine a better life than being married to Mike, but, I also felt committed to the course I had just embarked on. If I hadn't had the NDE, I would have been with Mike without a moment's hesitation - but then without the experience of dying and coming back I wouldn't have been the person he loved. Those are the eternal mysteries of life, love and destiny.

I probably made the biggest mistake of my life by not going back to London with Mike.

There were times when my work inevitably drew me into political conflicts and some danger. When I felt most threatened I drew on Mike's tremendous courage. I remembered what he said about not dying on the racetrack because it would be a truck that would kill him. I knew that as long as I hadn't done all the things that I was shown myself doing I wasn't going to be killed and so I kept going.

Mike genuinely wanted to do humanitarian work of some kind. His life took a different course, but without him I couldn't have done what I did. If there is any credit due for anything that I accomplished it belongs to Mike as well, because without his love I could not have persevered.

Our last conversation was in 1975.

He was teasing me saying something like *"Are you still trying to save the world?"* I joked back with something like *"I am disappointed that you haven't noticed how lovely everything is since I've been on the job"*. We both laughed.

Then he said something about saving a broken down racing driver. I said I didn't know any broken down ones.

Then he said, *"Oh, yes, you do. I mashed my foot last year in Germany and that put paid to my racing"*.

I asked him if it was at Nurburgring and he said it was. I said *"I've never liked that place"*.

Then he said - quite correctly - *"but you've never been there"*.

I told him that you don't have to go somewhere to feel the energy of the place - very sinister - full of Black Forest trolls and such.

Of course Nurburgring is a great circuit, but I always had a bad feeling about it. Perhaps it was a premonition that something would happen there to someone I loved.

"By the way", I told him, *"I wish you'd be more original and not copy me. I had my right foot smashed by a Manx Norton last year"*.

He laughed and said, "Don't you mean on a Manx?" "What a sight - you on a Manx!"

I laughed and told him that I had just moved and was cleaning out the garage when I unbalanced a rickety shelf. The cylinder head of a Manx Norton that had been left by the previous owner rolled off the shelf and onto my foot. It dislocated a couple of bones and it hurt like blazes for weeks.

I said "*it just goes to show that if you are fated to have a motorcycle accident you will have one - even if you are just peacefully cleaning out your garage - which confirms my belief that housework is dangerous*".

I could always make him laugh and it was good to hear him laughing again. It was an odd coincidence that we had both smashed our right feet within a week or so of each other. It was a lovely conversation between old friends.

After that conversation I kept in touch with him by sending cards for his birthday and at other times. I never put my new address on the envelopes. I didn't want a reply. I just wanted him to know that I loved him and was thinking of him.

Late 1980 and early 1981 was a very dark time. My mother's cancer had returned. I went back to Toronto for several months. Being back home I felt more connected to my old life and looked up a lot of old friends. More and more my thoughts turned to memories of Mike. He was always in my heart.

I even got his telephone number and put it by my phone. I started to call him several times but never did.

Sometime around the middle of March I sent him a birthday card.

I had lost track of which birthday this would be. In the card I wrote a note saying that I was thinking of coming to London for the trip that I should have made years ago. I was sure that he would understand what I meant. I wrote that I would call him on his birthday. (I had no idea that he was married and had two children.)

About 2 weeks later a friend of mine told me that she had found a fascinating place - a spiritualist church. She said they had regular services and then at the end the minister, or someone else, gives messages, predictions, etc. I was always curious about such things so we went that night.

At the end of the service the minister, who was a Scottish woman, began giving messages to people in the congregation.

Then she came to me and said, "*There is a man standing behind you who wants to be recognized. Do you know anyone who has recently passed to spirit?*"

"No, "I answered.

She said "*he is disappointed that you do not remember him. He is nice looking and I think he*

is probably English - Does that help you?"

"No" I replied.

"He is holding a little girl in his arms who looks just like you - Now do you know who he is?"

"No, I am sorry I don't." I answered

Then she said, *"He says he has three things he wants to tell you:*

The first is, *"It was so fast he didn't feel a thing".*

The second is, *"it was one of those damn lorries" (hearing that, tears flooded my eyes)*

The third thing is *'he loves you and will never leave you.'*

"Now do you know who he is?"

"Yes, now I know." I was fighting back tears.

He says he doesn't want you to cry and he wanted to tell you himself. He didn't want you to read about it.

There was one more message that is too personal for me to repeat in this article.

And then he was gone.

The next day it was in the Toronto papers. His little girl, Michelle, had died at the scene. Mike had died two days later in the hospital. But, I believe that his soul was not in his body during those two days and so he didn't suffer.

When I was able to collect myself, I called the man at Castrol to whom I had mailed all the cards and letters. I asked him to return the last card to me rather than give it to Pauline, Mike's widow. He told me that Mike had picked it up two days before he was killed.

He told me. *"I don't know what you wrote but, whatever it was, Mike lit up like a Roman candle."*

If I had to choose one word sum up Mike – both on and off the track- it would be 'grace' in all of its meanings and permutations – from graceful to gracious.

As to the predictions that Mike was given in Durban so many years earlier –

1- It was "one of those damn lorries".

2- He didn't live past the age of 40. He died 10 days before his 41st birthday.

3- I don't know if he was the last of the group to die. But the fact that the first 2 aspects of the prediction proved correct was enough for me.

I have tried to write an ending to our story. But there is no ending.

Since Mike's death almost 30 years ago I have been blessed with some amazing evidence of his presence.

The first one happened shortly after Mike died. I was moving from one city to another. I left my house one morning to visit my mother in the hospital. She took a sudden turn for the worse and I stayed with her for 6 weeks - well past my moving day. I had to rely on the movers to do it all.

A month later I got a phone call from the property agent. She asked me if I had felt that the house was haunted. I told her I hadn't and asked why she was asking me. She said that the new people heard music in the house and felt a very sad presence. She said they were thinking of calling in a psychic. I asked her to let me know what happened if they did.

A couple of weeks later she called to say that according to the psychic, the spirit of a man named Mike was in the house. This spirit said that I had left one morning and didn't come back. Mike was playing his clarinet while he waited for me to come back home. He told the psychic that in life he used to play music to calm his nerves.

I regret that I have never heard Mike's music. But, other people have heard it in every house I have lived in since then. Other things have also happened that have convinced me that Mike has kept his promises about staying with me and playing his clarinet for me.

I only wish that I could hear Mike's music - just once



Stanley Michael Bailey Hailwood, MBE, GM (2 April 1940 – 23 March 1981)