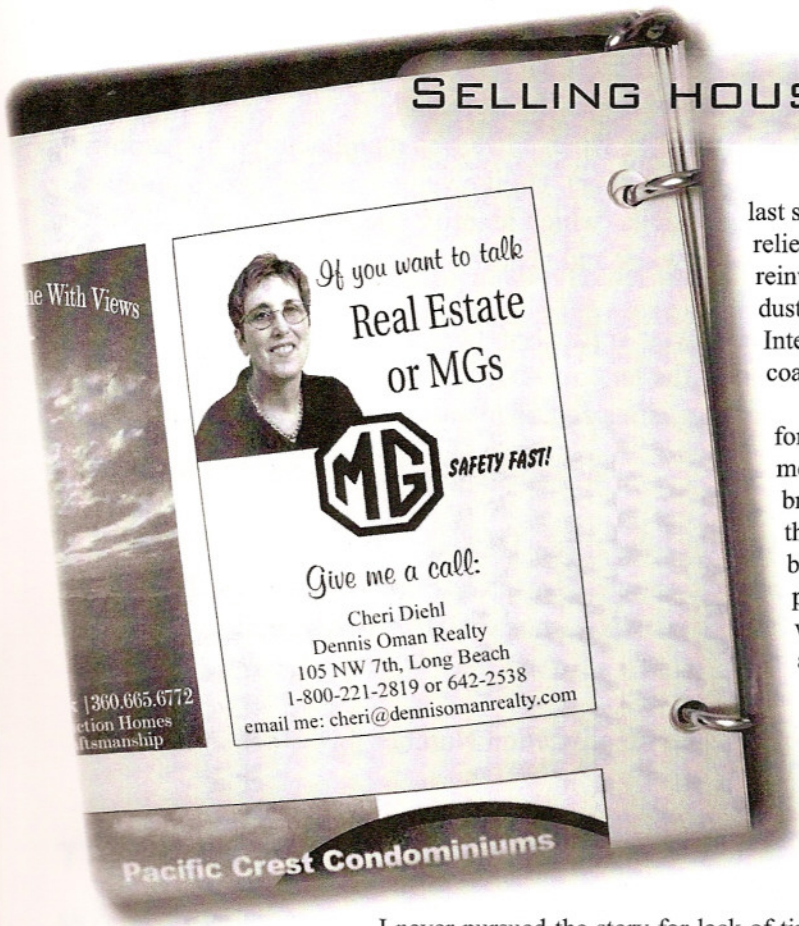


# SELLING HOUSES WITH "SAFETY FAST"?

By John Valentine, photos by Cheri Diehl

Linda and I usually go to Long Beach in the off season, the last several days before Christmas. As teachers, we wanted to get some relief from the pre-holiday chaos. Long Beach is a coastal town that reinvented itself as a summer recreation spot after various seafood industries diminished. It is very quiet and inexpensive before Christmas. Interestingly, a short high season starts on Christmas eve all along the coast.

Several years ago we arrived at a rental cottage and looked for a restaurant in the local tourism binder that is always found in motel rooms. To my surprise, I found the small ad for a real estate broker that can be seen to the right. As an MG owner, I was flattered that someone would appeal to me using the MG logo and slogan but I certainly and immediately wondered about that. How many people would even know what an MG is? At that time of year, without tourists in their Audis or SUVs, Long beach is an honest and humble town, dominated by working pick-up trucks and lots of tired 80's and 90's American cars. What's an "MG?" Why throw away a good ad using MGs as a draw? It's unusual and interesting to *me*, but how could that sell houses in Long beach?

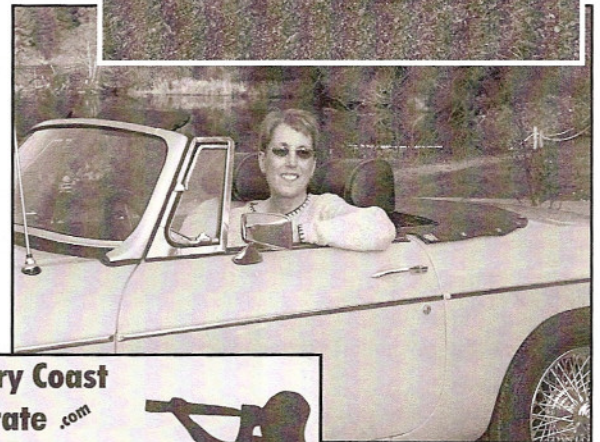
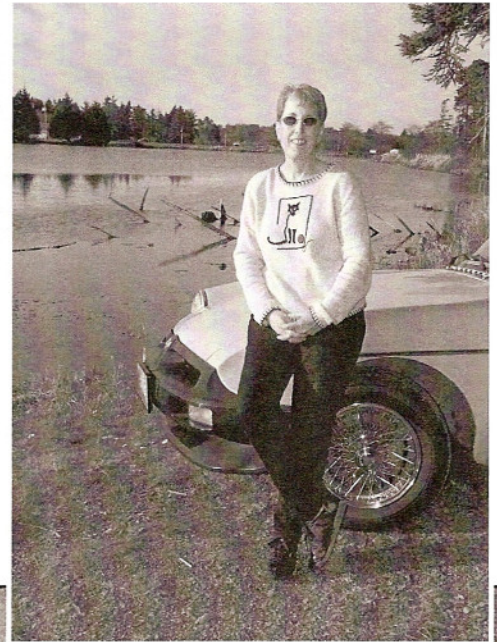


I never pursued the story for lack of time and because it didn't seem like much of day-before-Christmas thing to do. This year the Big Storm and Ice postponed the annual visit until MLK Day. Linda and I decided to track down Cheri Diehl and find out how MGs sell houses in Long Beach. I rehearsed my lines because I didn't want to sound like I was saying, "Why did you do something this stupid?" She no longer worked at Oman Realty, as indicated in the ad. Perhaps I was right- it was a frivolous ad. Perhaps not, though. Cheri seems to be opening her own office. That sounds promising. We went to the new office and she gave us an interview.

This shows how little I know. Cheri said the approach was to project something a little different. Much of the real estate market is out-of-towners; retired and summer customers. The weekend after Labor Day there is big road trip and car show called "Rod Run to the End of the World." You must be getting the picture by now. The show is mostly hot-rods but there are tons of car buffs. Cheri has parked a shiny MG out by the main drag and it pulls in people who know cars and plenty who don't.

Cheri has three MGs, a '73 that is his, a '75 that is hers, and a '79 that is probably just a parts car. Hers is Citron (bright, light yellow). She said there are probably ten resident British cars on the Long Beach Peninsula. An attorney has a 79 MG, there is a Midget, a motel owner has a Jaguar. Cheri is a Columbia Gorge Car Club member and regularly attends the Portland ABFM. She was at the MG 2000 and MG 2007 national meets. We talked about being sure to let her know about runs and tours, as well as planning a tour that ends at the Cape Disappointment lighthouse. She could probably get the park service to let our cars drive out to the dramatic towering point for a photo shoot.

So does it work? One person called solely because of the MG logo. He was from Massachusetts and in the cranberry business similar to the local ones and stopped by to talk. Otherwise, it gets the conversation going. No doubt about it, Cheri plans to park her '75 MGB roadster out in front of the new real estate agency.



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