

CALYPSO UNDER INTENSIVE CARE, BUT RECOVERING

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Colliding with a barge in the harbour of Singapore sent J-Y. Cousteau's mythical *Calypso* to the bottom. She had overlived a war, ferry service and thousands of sailings to ungloriously end as a wreck (Figure 1).



Figure 1. The wreck, which was towed back from Singapore, moored in Marseille, then transferred to La Rochelle.



Figure 2. La Rochelle, France. The old port

Miraculously lifted from the waters, she was towed back to France, first to Marseille, then to La Rochelle (Figure 2). The municipality of La Rochelle, a historical city with a glorious past as a port on France’s Atlantic coast, had grandiose plans for her, eyeing her as a pole of attraction for the tourists who flock there every year. (Figure 3)



Figure 3. Location Map of La Rochelle, France and Brouage (just below Rochefort and above Marennes, famous for its oyster beds) where the ship had been planned, by some, to be sunk to become an underwater memorial that could be explored by divers.

Calypso was to be tied to a dock and be a pièce de résistance of the local maritime museum. But it soon became evident that the financial aspects of the undertaking had been underestimated. There was another La Rochelle, a namesake port on the USA’s eastern seaboard, eager to give her a berth, and with the agreement of its sister city, the City Council (or was it the Chamber of Commerce?) sent a delegation to France to assess repair, towing, and all other costs involved to create a world renowned attraction on its shore. But that city’s fathers also felt that their plans had to be shelved for financial reasons.

Carnival Lines, a giant of the tourism business (ships, airline, resorts, packaged tours) saw the potential of a big publicity stunt involving a mythical ship, and proposed to bring her to the Caribbean and incorporate her in a sport and show complex on an island they own. It is not clear why these plans also came to naught. Funds did not seem to be lacking, the tourist, divers’, the merely curious’ drawing potential appeared sufficient. True, the legal imbroglio in which *Calypso* bobbed up and down involved heirs to the Guinness interests and heirs to the Cousteau patrimony. The legal knots were far from unraveled. Perhaps there was a pique of national pride.

Anyhow, La Rochelle Museum’s conservator—who in petto once ventured “I wish she’d sink”—apparently was stuck with a former glory—a faded star—of the movies and of scientific research.

J.-Y. Cousteau's surviving son, Jean-Michel Cousteau, once involved in the *Queen Elizabeth* exhibit in California, proved resourceful and kindled French pride and interest. A foundation came up with sizeable funding and Cousteau junior thus managed to keep the ship in France, and afloat. All previous plans were shelved and she would not become a tourist attraction, nor an underwater memorial for divers to plunge to.

And thus *Calypso* has been brought to Concarneau, France's second fishing harbour on the coast of Cornouaille (Atlantic Ocean). She would not even become part of the tourist memorabilia of the fortified city. Concarneau is somewhat of a resort town and has naval yards nearby at Le Cabellou where artisans still have the skills to repair and refurbish smaller, older ships and the *Calypso* has found shelter in one of the shops. These "artists" see her plying the seas again within two years, and go on for another life, and if Jean-Michel Cousteau has his way, live again a scientific career.

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