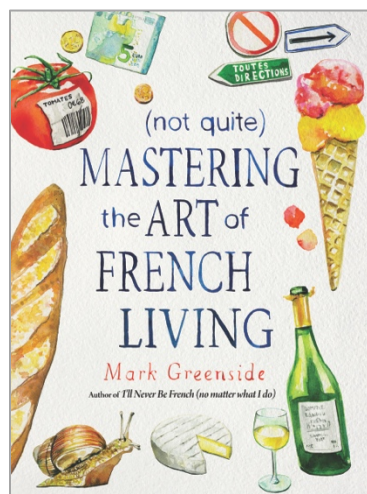




Volume 6, Number 1, April 2022



Dear Friend,

I did it! I bought our tickets to France—from June to September with the last three weeks in Paris, staying at a friend's apartment in the Marais. It will be our first time back since October, 2019.

Booking the flight was easy: which airline would allow a change of flight (because who knows what's coming) with the minimum change fees: Delta—and I got the seats in the four or five two seat rows in the back of the plane, not too near the toilets, I think, I hope...

Booking the car was something else. First, because there are none to lease until July 15, and second, because Donna, who does not drive a manual transmission anything, said she wanted to drive. I'm surprised and pleased, and I hope you are too, to know I was smart enough to not say, "Why?"

Still, getting an automatic transmission car where few exist in normal times is hard enough, and now, when hardly any exist is all but impossible, but Rob, my go-to car guru and buddy did it for a sum I'm too embarrassed to write down.

So we're going, and to avoid another airport, flight, and Covid, we're driving from Charles de Gaulle airport to Brittany, something I haven't done in years, and if you've read *(not quite) Mastering the Art of French Living*, you know why. This time, though, I figure I'll have GPS to giving me a driving chance—and I do, or could, or would, if I paid eighteen euros/twenty dollars a day, so I don't. I could buy a GPS for a tenth of the cost,

but I don't want to carry it, install it, and deal with it—so we're using our smart phones and Mapquest, and we'll see how smart they—and we—are. I'll keep you posted. If you don't hear from me again, you'll know why.

Meanwhile, I've been writing. Below is a section I've been working on—and off—for a while. I like it, but I'm not sure what to do with it, not sure where it fits in the next book, which is 85-90% done. This is a work in process. Please, let me know what you think.

Déjà Vu All Over Again

I remember the first time I saw Paris, when I was twenty-one going on twenty-two. I'd just graduated from the University of Wisconsin in Madison with a bachelor's degree in history and was on my low-end, left-wing, grand European tour the summer before I started graduate school.

I cashed out my Bar Mitzvah bonds a year early and bought a two hundred-ten-dollar round-trip ticket on Northwest—an airline, like so many other things I can recall that no longer exists. I was with a group of college friends, including the woman who two years later would become my wife—a marriage that officially lasted four years, but folded in less than two.

We arrived *en groupe*, four women and three men, at Heathrow Airport, where we met the eighth, a woman who recently completed her junior year in Aix-en-Provence, the only one of us who spoke a semblance of French.

We explored London and England together, then took the train to Dover and the ferry to Calais, and two by two hitched to Paris in pairs, not couples. I don't remember who I thumbed with, but I know I wore blue jeans, white tee shirts, and sandals, because that's what I wore then, and brought wheat jeans (to be *au courant*), blue jean

cutoffs, a couple of sweatshirts that I wore inside out, a week's worth of underclothes, a dress shirt (by which I mean it had a collar, sleeves, and buttons down the front), a rain poncho, windbreaker, sleeping bag (flannel, not down), dress shoes, sneakers, and toiletries that I carried in a drab, olive green, canvas, steel frame, World War Two military surplus backpack that sat on my hips and broke my back. I doubt I could even lift it today, let alone carry it for ten weeks across Europe.

Martin Luther King Jr. and Bobby Kennedy were alive. So were Elvis, Otis, Janis, Jim, Jimi, and John. De Gaulle was President of France—again, Mao in his twenty third-year of dictating China, the Shah his twenty-fifth in Iran, and Franco his twenty-seventh in Spain. It was a year before *Sgt. Pepper* and *The Graduate*, *Les Halles*, Zola's belly of Paris, still lived within Paris' city limits, and fewer than six-thousand Americans were dead in Vietnam.... It was 1966.... It sounds unbelievable even to me....

So does this: twenty-one years after World War Two, the tap water in France and Europe was unsafe to swallow, so I drank lots of beer, wine, and Coca Cola; a typhoid shot and yellow proof of vaccination card were required to re-enter the U.S. No card, no entrée. I carried that card and my first passport (both of which I still have), a youth hostel card for cheap, group, dormitory sleeping bag nights, and a student ID for reduced fares. It was the last time you really could see Paris on ten dollars a day—and I did, by staying in a four-story walk-up.

Hotel rooms *sans* heat, *sans* water, *sans* bath, *sans* toilet, *sans* toilet paper, sometimes *sans* window, definitely *sans* housekeeping could be had for less than five dollars a night, and when the room was shared and the cost was split (with someone like a wife-to-be), along with the shower and towels that cost extra, the price of lodging

was a gift (for an American), a steal (if you were French), and left more than enough—seven or eight dollars a day—for me to eat and do anything else I wanted, which was mostly sit in the Luxembourg Gardens and the Tuileries (chairs cost), use the bathroom (toilets and hole in the floor non-toilets cost), ride the metro (second class), and visit museums (free or reduced price for students).

This was when French men still wore berets and blue workman's uniforms and people pedaled whiney gas-powered Motobécane bikes, drove 2CV Deux Chevaux cars, and began—or ended—each morning with a glass of red. Think Bresson and Doisneau! Public telephones and laundromats were hard to find, and when found, were expensive. I cashed American Express traveler's checks (no credit card) and bought francs (which no longer exist) at American Express and left notes for friends and received mail at Thomas Cooke (which is now only online). Television was not ubiquitous; neither were elevators, hot water, central heating, or indoor plumbing. Paris reeked of authenticity, and I loved it—like listening to Edith Piaf and Billie Holiday and going to the lower east side; it was more Henry Miller's and Louis-Ferdinand Céline's Paris than Macron's....

Buildings were dark, grimy, secretive, and mysterious, shrouded in decades of exhaust from cars and motorbikes, centuries of soot from wood and coal fires, and millennia of smoke from pipes, cigars, and gazillions of *Gauloises* and *Gitanes* cigarettes. They smelled of smoke, pee, bread, cheese, coffee, fish, and sweat—and even though I knew Haussmann had had his way with her less than a century before, Paris felt medieval to a kid from the New World.

Every night, a cluster of us congregated at a restaurant in the Latin Quarter—a gaggle of geese at a pond, rabble to be roused—and ate cheap, student fare, Greek and Italian food, drank even cheaper chianti and retsina, and recounted the day's explorations, each person telling the others where s/he went, what s/he saw, and where the others should go. Sometimes, we traveled together during the day, too, but mostly I traveled alone.... I was on a very personal journey.

I tripped, mentally, sometimes physically, rambling cramped, cobbled, labyrinthine streets, ogling stone, wrought iron, Mansard-roofed buildings; picnicked on baguettes, La Vache Qui Rit, and cheap red with friends and my wife-to-be in what seemed to me close-cropped, too neat, overly manicured seventeenth and eighteenth century imperial gardens; stood solemn and fluttery before monuments I'd only seen in movies and magazines: the Arc de Triomphe, Notre Dame, the Eiffel Tower, Shakespeare & Company, Saint-Chapelle.... Paris was Adventureland, Fantasyland, and Frontierland all in one, none of it yet Disney, who was still twenty six-years away.

I strolled—a *flâneur* before I knew the word or what it meant, paying homage to the birthplaces of revolution and Modernism, places I'd read about, studied, and imagined: Place de la Concorde, where the guillotine created equity; the Conciergerie, where Marie Antoinette lived her last days before being equalized; the Bastille, where the fire began; Versailles, where the spark was lit; *Places* I wanted to see: Saint-Germain-des-Prés, Saint-Michel, Vendôme; Montmartre, Montparnasse, Sacré-Coeur, Père Lachaise; Hemingway's apartment building, Victor Hugo's apartment, Henry Miller's Pigalle and Clichy, Nijinsky's and Diaghilev's Théâtre du Châtelet.... I was seeking, finding, and confirming my revolutionary and literary roots, fostering and

feeding notions of myself as the political, literary, and social revolutionary I earnestly yearned to be....

... On these streets, in this air, striding these cobbles, along that quay, avoiding that dog-do, drinking and eating in those bars and cafes, reading in that bookstore, Beckett, Joyce, Pound, Hemingway, Cummings, Fitzgerald, Gertrude and all the Steins; Picasso, Matisse, and Duchamp; Sartre, Camus, de Beauvoir, and the New Wave: Truffaut, Godard, Tati; Moreau, Deneuve, Seberg, Belmondo, and Bardot—Heroes of multiple revolutions!—and having read my Fanon, Marcuse, Pynchon, Heller, Robbe-Grillet, Debray, New York Review of Books, Ramparts, and Berkeley Barb, I was ripe to join them. I thought the long arc of history and the future were ours—civil rights, anti-war, Cuba libre, Yeah, yeah, yeah, Eleanor Rigby, all you need is love.... Who but Barry Goldwater, Richard Hofstadter, and W.B. Yeats could have guessed what was coming?

The second time I saw Paris we both had changed—she was a lot cleaner, modern, and more expensive; I had a job, a suitcase, and a Visa card, though I still carried traveler's checks in case.... It was 1987, and I was there for a romance and a revolution of a different kind: the sexual revolution. It had already passed, lasting from 1963 (the pill) to 1983 (AIDS), but there was plenty of spillover, and I wanted to drink.

I was in an on-again, off-again relationship with a very attractive, very talented, very willing, successful (National Book Award finalist), ingénue-faced femme (for me) fatale, poet—precisely the kind of person a mid-forties, barely published, unknown writer wants to be with in Paris, and—et Voila!— Freddie Laker and his ninety-nine dollar each way People's Express Airline opened a branch in San Francisco.

I bought two round trip tickets as a Christmas present, and a month later we flew from San Francisco to Brussels, landing at 4:00 a.m., the inconvenience, I'm sure, part of the reason for the convenient fare. We slept on the train to Paris and arrived in frigid, early morning winter darkness to a deserted, chilly, semi-lit Gare du Nord just as the cafés were opening and setting up for the day. She chose one that looked like Colette had eaten there and we sat at a polished round table with a wicker basket full of warm, flakey croissants and chunks of crispy baguette, butter, and multiple jams that were waiting for us.

Her French was better than mine—Everyone's French is better than mine—she ordered two *grande café crèmes*, and we devoured everything, butter and all. Then, as people with jobs and things to do began arriving, and sunlight ricocheted off windows, mirrors and the floor, we buttoned up and left, lugging our suitcases to the station's front doors, where, on the other side, through the glass whitely, all the way to the horizon, lay the longest, widest, whitest duvet of sparkling, shivering, glistening snow blanketing Paris: think Sisley winter white, Caillebotte urban, Utrillo quiet. I'll never forget it. It was the most romantic part of the trip.

We rode the metro to the hotel I booked in the no-longer-belly of Paris' new shlocky Les Halles area near the Pompidou. I was hoping for a night or three of Rabelaisian frolic, but it turned out to be one of our off-times, and Paris was more generous than she, as I'm sure it was also for her. We did lots of romancy things—walked along the quays in moonlight, searched the booksellers for trove, rode the *Bateau Mouche*, kissed under the statue of Henri IV, held hands in the Tuileries and Luxembourg Gardens, ate and drank in dark, secluded, amorous wine bars, all without

skipping a heartbeat. It would be another two years before she ended us, but this was surely the beginning of the end of the beginning. If you can't find Rabelais, or even Kinsey or Masters and Johnson in Paris, where can you?

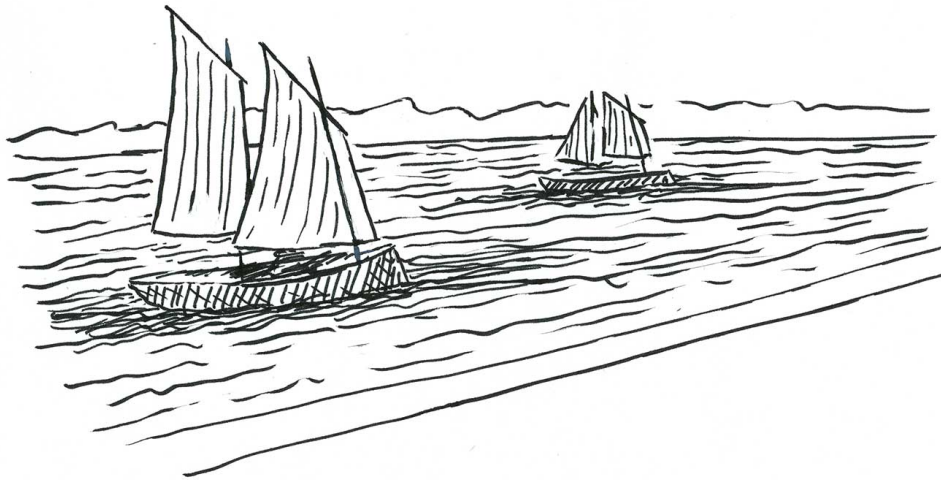
Four years later, in 1991, I returned to France with another very attractive, very talented, more than willing, Central-Park-West-elegant, poet, hoping for the romance I missed the last time. This time I was going to Brittany, where she'd been before and wanted to return and show me its beauty. All I remember is it was twice as good as the previous time, and an eighth as good as I wanted. I wrote about it in *I'll Never Be French (no matter what I do)*.

That was thirty years ago when life—*my* life—was full of *bonjours* and beginnings. Now, it's more *déjà vu* all over again....

I remember when my grandparents were my age now. All they seemed to talk about was what was and what used to be. It wasn't that their pasts were better than their presents—How could they be, leaving home, family, language, and country; pogroms, World War I, influenza pandemic, the Depression, Nazi's, the Holocaust, which is probably why they never talked about their lives in Hungary, Poland, and Ukraine, but about Flatbush, Brighton, Coney Island, Ebbets Field, Sheepshead Bay, Fulton and Canal Streets, the neighborhoods where they shopped, settled, and still lived. They'd pass a building, house, park, theater, store, and say, "Remember when....?" or "There used to be...." and now I'm doing it, too—less in the U.S., where I've moved too many times to have many of those memories, but in France, in Plobien, where I've now lived longer than anywhere else in my life.

When I wrote my first book about living in France, everything was first person present tense, because the present was new and overwhelming, but now, when backward is longer than forward, I'm thinking and writing about the past. To my amazement and chagrin, I'm becoming a 'used to be', 'remember when' kind of guy. My world is a palimpsest: I see what is and what was, what's there and what's not... I'm a time traveler with double vision.... When I was first here, I saw what was here and I was astonished. Now, I see what's gone, and I'm even more so.

to be continued, maybe....



**NEWS ABOUT *(not quite) Mastering the Art of French Living and
I'll Never Be French (no matter what I do)***

- Thirteen years after its initial publication, the audio book of *I'll Never Be French* is now available. I helped select the reader, and I'm very happy with the result. Check it out, and let me know what you think. [click here.](#)
- The Retirethere (www.retirethere.com) interview Donna and I did with Gilen Chan and Gene Preudhomme has been posted. To hear about some of our experiences living in France, [click here.](#)
- Alliance Française's, *Demystifying the French II* Zoom with Janet Hulstrand, Adrian Leeds, and Harriet Welty Rochefort was a major success with 750 people registering and over 500 people participating—the largest such event in Alliance Française, U.S.A. history. If you missed the event or would like to see it again, [here's the link.](#) And if you missed *Demystifying the French I*, or would like to see that again, [here's that link.](#) French people are so mystifying to Americans there could even be a *Demystifying III*. Stay tuned.
- My Zoom talk with the California Retired Teachers Association. (CalRTA), Tri-Valley Division 85 about *I'll Never* and *(not quite)* went very well, and it was a pleasure to be among colleagues and friends.
- It was also a pleasure to Zoom about *I'll Never* with a family based book club that has friends and members across the country.

I'd be happy and willing to Zoom with you and your book club, too. I have plenty of time, because, as far as I can see, I'd rather do anything than finish this book.

If you haven't reviewed the books on Amazon or Goodreads, please consider doing so.
Merci, merci, mercy....

If you'd like to contact me, I can be reached at:

Email: mark@markgreenside.com

Web site: www.markgreenside.com

Facebook author page : facebook.com/markgreensideauthor

Amazon author page: amazon.com/author/markgreenside

Please, feel free to share this newsletter with anyone. If you'd like to read previous newsletters, they are available on my website and Facebook.

Thank you. Be careful out there, and be well.

Yours Sincerely,

Mark

