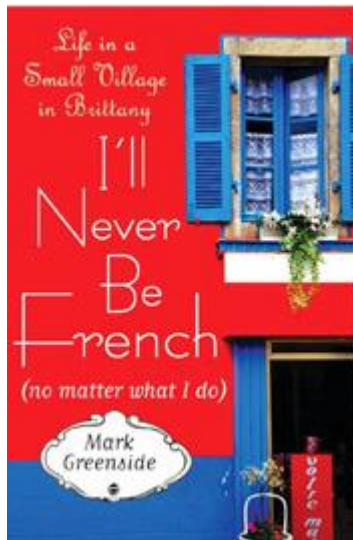


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Dear Friend,

Happy New Year to you and your family. I spent the holiday in California, reading galleys and proofing the new book, which will be published in May, 2018. While I did that, life went on in Plobien.

This year, after twenty years, I'm finally getting a sewer line. OK, *I'm* not getting a sewer line, the village is. Not the entire village, twenty-five percent of it. The other seventy-five percent already has a sewer line: half the village got theirs twenty years ago; twenty-five percent got hooked-up ten years ago. Now, it seems, it's my turn.

I found out from a friend who found out from a friend, who heard it from a neighbor who knows someone who works in the mayor's office. I can't say it's a surprise. The village has been working on this, planning it, and promising it for a generation now. I knew this day would come. I just didn't know it would be today—especially since the last time I heard anything official about the sewer line was in 2009.

I received an official looking letter on letterhead stationary from something called SPANC—Service Public d'Assainissement Non Collectif. I don't know who they are or what they want, but I'm not too concerned, as I often get official looking letters that say a lot and don't mean anything. This letter, though, looks important. It's entitled Diagnostic Assainissement Avis de Passage # 1. The key word is assainissement. I look it up: assainir: to

clean-up; it's something about cleaning up passage # 1, whatever that is, and I hope there aren't any passages # 2, 3, or 4. I don't have a clue, but it doesn't bode well, as the letter proposes a rendez-vous at my house in Plobien on Tuesday, November 17, the same day I have a colonoscopy exam in California. Guess where I'd rather be?

I email Bruno and Françoise, my unlucky for them, lucky for me, next-door neighbors. "Did you get the assainissement letter? What does it mean?"

"Plobien is completing the sewer line."

Of course, I support this. What's not to support? Sewer lines are safer, cleaner, and more efficient than septic tanks, though I've had no troubles with mine for almost thirty years. The issue isn't the principle, it's the principal, which I have, but would rather spend on something else, like a gazebo or a trip to Florence.

I write back to SPANC, "J' habite dans le Etas Unis. La maison en Plobien est une maison secondaire. C'est ferme pour hiver et printemps," and I propose a rendez-vous in late June.

This is how I learn the word propose is not a suggestion in French. They write back, "November 17. Be there!"

I call Bruno and Françoise. "Don't worry," he says, "I'll be there for our house. I'll be there for yours, too."

Great, I think, Bruno will take care of everything, and I'll never hear from them again.

Three months later, I receive a packet from SPANC. I open it and find a letter on the same letterhead as before and a ten-page, small-print report. The one word in the letter that I understand is: pollutant, pollutant.

I e-mail Bruno. "Je suis une pollutant, et vous?"

“Oui. Tout le monde est un polluant. C’est pour ça qu’on a besoin des égouts,” a word I know from World War II, the French resistance, and a tour of Paris’ sewers.

“What about the report? What else does it say in the small print?”

Bruno explains the report has three parts: the first has photos of my kitchen drain pipe, washing machine discharge hose, and open septic tank, documenting and proving I’m a pollutant; the second provides a list of certified and approved business enterprises to do the work and make me a non-pollutant; the third and longest and densest part explains SPANC’s authority and power and the SPANCing I will get if I don’t do what they want.

“What should I do?” I ask.

“Nothing.”

“Nothing?”

“First, the village has to dig the sewer line.”

“When will that happen?”

“It doesn’t say.”

“Is that it?”

“No. You owe them eighty five-euros for the report.”

I send a check to SPANC for 85 euros. Two months later I receive a letter from the mayor of Plobien telling me he has a copy of the report identifying me as a pollutant, and he and the village will come up with a plan by the end of the year. That was in 2009.

Last winter, eight years later, the village finally finished digging the sewer line. I was happy about that until I heard from a friend of a friend of a friend that Plobien bought a new sewer system, a vacuum system, one not used anywhere else in the world. Maybe that’s why, one year later, the certified assainissement person I hired to hook me up has yet to do the

work. Like most new systems, it probably doesn't do what it's supposed to do, or does it in a way it's not supposed to do it, and there are leaks, back-ups, and cloggings, things I've never experienced with my old septic tank. The good news is the system is German, but so is Volkswagen, and look what they did with the waste emissions from their cars! I'm waiting to see what happens next.

Meanwhile, I'm getting ready to launch the new book. I've hired someone to help me upgrade my Facebook and Linked-In pages and change my e-mail address. My friend Bruce is updating my webpage, and my friend Kim is updating my mailing list and distributing the newsletter, all of which means there are lots of ways for you to hear from me and me to hear from you.

Here is what the new book cover looks like. What do you think?

The next newsletter will be all about the book launch. Thanks, as always, for your interest and support. Feel free to share and distribute this newsletter to anyone you think might be interested.

All the best to you,

Mark