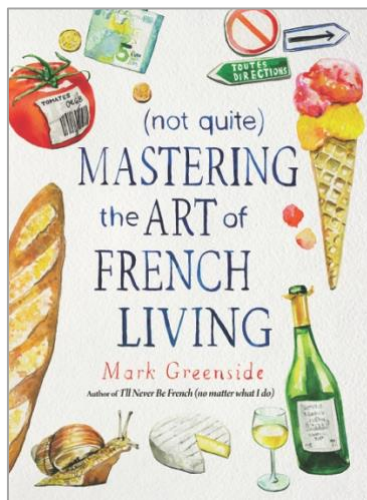


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Dear Friend,

Donna and I are traveling again. That's the good news—though not to France. That's the bad news. It's been two years—October 2019—since we were there, and our absence is a hole in our lives. I know several people who have gone this year and no one has had a problem—beyond the normal, *de rigueur* problems—with the health pass or anything else. France's infection rates are lower than the U.S. and its vaccination rates are higher, and few places are as safe as Brittany and Plobien. Still, I've

seen pictures of those full ICUs....

The traveling we've done is by car, mostly to the Pacific Coast—Mendocino/Fort Bragg, Monterey/Carmel, Inverness/Pt. Reyes, Morro Bay/Avila Beach/San Luis Obispo—and Richardson Grove to see the giant Sequoias while they—and we—are still here.

Amazingly, we avoided the wildfires and the worst of the drought. We've been boosted with Pfizer #3 and are thinking of being bolder, but neither one of us is ready to fly or be ventilated by anything other than a fan or an open window.

I'm reading Bill Bryson's, *Neither Here Nor There* (not his best) about his travels in Europe in the 1990s, and I know how he feels—not being there or here. That's how I feel in the U.S. now all the time... Displaced. The same with a new Julie Delpy Netflix series, *On the Verge*, (not her best) about a French couple living in L.A... Displaced. And if you want to see a lovely French-Chinese movie about displacement during the

Cultural Revolution, see *Balzac and the Little Seamstress*... Displacement is my new norm.

Oddly enough—since I'll never fit in—I center myself by writing about my life in France. Last February, I wrote about Monsieur C and my *bac dégraisseur*, the kitchen degreaser, and told you I'd tell you the rest of the story about my furnace. Well, here it is:

Monsieur C, continued....

I'm trying to decide if I need a new furnace. Yesterday, my shower was lukewarm—never a good sign, as usually the hot water is endless—and this morning it was cold. I don't know if I should go for another short-term fix, hoping to get through another year without a new furnace, or pay for a new one now. All I know is I want hot water.

I call Monsieur C, which for me is like calling 911 and AAA at the same time. Amazingly, he knows who it is, and he still answers, "Bonjour, Marc."

"Bonjour, Monsieur C. Encore le probleme avec le chauffage. Pas de l'eau chaud." Another problem with the heater. No hot water.

Forty minutes later, he arrives and fixes the furnace. Afterward, sitting in the kitchen drinking coffee, he gives me what I'm hoping is a forensics report, not an autopsy. "Le brûler ne fonctionne pas...." The burner doesn't work. "Le chauffage est vieux et pas efficace...." The furnace is old, not efficient. "Il consomme beaucoup de fioul ce qui est cher et il est couteux de continuer à réparer." It uses lots of fuel, which is expensive—\$6.00/gallon!—and expensive to repair.

None of this is new or unexpected, but it's not what I want to hear. "Combien pour tout?" I reluctantly ask. "Le nouveau brûler, l'installation, et votre travaille pour le

locataire l'année dernière." How much for all. A new burner, the installation, and your work for the renter last year?

"Huit cents euro."

A thousand dollars—and I'd still have an old, expensive, inefficient furnace and need a new one in a year or two anyhow.... The septic tank wasn't as expensive as I feared, but a furnace? I see another five thousand dollars floating away as I swallow, and ask the question I've been hoping to avoid for thirty years. "Combien pour le nouveau chauffage?"

"Huit mille euro."

Ten thousand dollars! Holy shit! When Donna replaced the water heater *and* furnace—two separate devices and systems—it cost a third of that. I point to my head, and say, "Je ponce. Je voudrai téléphoner vous en une semaine."

I think. I'll telephone you in a week.

All week I ponder: spend one thousand dollars now and continue as I have been for another year or two and hope for the best, which could also become the worst: the one thousand could easily become two or three thousand over the next two years; the price of the new furnace could increase, as could the price and use of fuel, from six dollars a gallon to eight, burning more and more, faster and faster in my increasingly older and inefficient furnace—so the choice is really between ten thousand dollars now and thirteen to fifteen thousand in two years. There are also the renters to consider: they will not all be as kind and understanding as the woman, especially those people who rent in March and November as opposed to August and September.

A week later I call Monsieur C. “OK. D’accord—le nouveau chauffage. C’est existe le guarantee?”

“Bien sur,” he says. “Dix ans.” Ten years. Since the house is usually shut six months a year, I figure that means twenty. I don’t ask—as I always do in the U.S.—if the warranty is from the manufacturer, the shop where I purchased the item, or the installer, and if it includes parts and labor and replacement value. I do tell him my dilemma, though.

“Je ne pas d’argent.” I don’t have money. “J’ai trois mille euro maintenant et je voudrai payee le total en autumn.” I have three thousand euros now and I’ll pay the total in autumn. Basically, I’m asking him for a six thousand dollar loan that—trust me—I’ll pay back at some unspecified date between September and December, after the work is done and I’m in another country six thousand miles away—and he says exactly what I knew he would.

“OK. No problem.” No papers either. No contract. No signature. No handshake or eyeball to eyeball. My word on the telephone and his.

“Quand commence le travaille?” When start the work?

“Une semaine, dix jour.” Seven to ten days.

“Combien jours pour le travaille?” How many days for the work?

“Trois jours.” Three days to put in a furnace! I don’t get it. When Donna had a furnace installed, it took half a day, and cleaning and repairing the ducts a couple of hours more.

The next day, the old furnace, feeling betrayed and/or wanting revenge, gives up the ghost and dies. Kaput. It’s unseasonably hot—ninety degrees—and I’m well past

ripe to runny. For a week, I go to bed smelly and sweaty and wake up the same. The good news is the washing machine runs on cold water. The bad news is I don't. I change my routine from six a.m. showers to after the beach afternoon showers, hoping the new furnace arrives before the inevitable rains come, and the temperature drops to the sixties.

On the ninth day without hot water, I return from the beach and find ten thousand dollars' worth of parts spread like a jigsaw puzzle on the lawn. No wonder it takes three days to install. I'm surprised it doesn't take a month. Monsieur C isn't installing the furnace, he's building it. He's building the new one *and* dismantling the old.

Three days later, exactly as he said, I'm standing in front of my new, four feet high, three feet wide, strawberry red furnace that looks like a cross between a vertical fire engine and top of the line espresso machine: lights are blinking, pipes extruding, knobs, switches, valves, and gauges.... He walks me through: the pipes—red and blue—and their cut-off valves to regulate the hot water and radiators; the pressure gauge (0-10) and where to set it in summer—1—and winter—3—and never, ever, above 5, or boom; the water temperature gauge set at 55, which I thought was ridiculously low and needlessly frugal until he reminded me it's Centigrade and 131 degrees Fahrenheit; four blinking green lights, one of which tells me the furnace is on, the other three I haven't a clue, but as long as they're green, it's ok. The most important information he saves for last: the function knob. The dial has three markers: a circle on the left indicates off; a dripping faucet in the middle for hot water; a dripping faucet and three wavy parallel lines for radiator heat and hot water. It's ninety degrees, and the dial is on the wavy lines.

“C’est marche?” I ask. It works?

“Oui.”

“J’ai l’eau chaud?” I have hot water?

“Oui.”

“C’est bonne pour la d-d-douche?” a word I have trouble saying.

“Oui.”

“Moment.”

I run into the house and turn the hot water on in the kitchen. YES! I run up the stairs to the first/second floor bathroom and turn on the douche: YESS!! I run up to the attic and turn on that douche. YESSS!!! The water is hot and the spray is powerful. I’m delighted. I go back to the shed and thank him. “Merci, merci, beaucoup. Tout est parfait.” It’s perfect.

“Non.”

“No?”

“Non,” and he shows me the function knob isn’t working properly. When he turns the knob to hot water (the dripping faucet) the lights go off. It only works when turned to the radiator (wavy lines), which I think means using more fuel and more pressure, which I think means more use, which I think means more wear, and the ten year warranty will last five years instead of twenty, not to mention that it’s 90 degrees, and I don’t need more heat. This is what I’m thinking, and chastising myself for not asking those warranty questions, when Monsieur C says, “J’ai telephone un ami, un expert. Il arrivera demain et le réparera.”

The next day an old guy arrives in a rusty, beat up jalopy, what I'd call a mechanics car in the U.S., and is rare in clean and polished France. He has a Colonel Sanders beard and hair like Einstein's, meaning he's either very smart, or he's fried himself a couple of times too many—and he's smoking.

"Bonjour," I say, and shake his hand. His fingertips are mustard-color, his nails lemon, his beard has banana-colored streaks, and his teeth are the color of corn.

"Bonjour," he says, shakes my hand, exhales a blast of smoke, and goes into the shed, inhaling, and smelling like *Tobacco Road*—the novel, not the golf course. There are five hundred liters of oil in the tank, paint, turpentine, and gasoline in cans, and bottles of unidentifiable solvents, and he never stops smoking. I stay away from the shed as much as possible, wondering if my insurance will cover the damage from the explosion and who's paying for the expert—if he's part of the ten thousand dollar cost or on top of it?

The next day, Monsieur C knocks on the door and indicates I should follow him to the shed. He points to the dial where the knob is still on the wavy lines.

"Casse," he says. Broken.

I stand there, wondering if now is the time to ask about the warranty.

"Pas de problème," he says. "C'est marche." No problem. It works. And he shows me how: he turns all the radiators off, lowers the pressure on the gauge, and leaves the knob pointing to the wavy lines. "C'est bon," he says. I know if I call Jean, he'll fix it. I also know if I call Jean, Monsieur C would be embarrassed. Rather than embarrass him, I live with a new, ten thousand dollar furnace and broken knob.

The next day Monsieur C returns for a final check. The dial is on the wrong icon, where it's supposed to be, the burner is glowing, and all four green lights are glimmering. He goes into the house and turns the front hallway radiator on. Then he walks through the house and turns every radiator on—all nine of them—and goes back to the front hallway. He touches the radiator. It's cold. He walks through the house and touches every radiator. They're all cold. He makes one more circuit, and it's the same. He goes back to the shed and turns the knob on the pressure gauge. The needle goes up, then down. I don't know what this means, but Monsieur C does: there's a leak. There's no water on the floor in the house or the shed so the leak is underground—in the six feet between the shed and the house, or under my hundred plus year old terracotta tile floor in my favorite two fireplace, cathedral ceiling, granite wall living/dining room where the pipe enters the house. As much as I like heat, I don't want to destroy this floor. I'm going nuts thinking about my choices, but Monsieur C understands and has a solution. He takes me outside to show me.

He makes a digging motion and shows me where he'll dig up the area between the shed and the house. Then he makes drilling sounds and shows me where he will drill a hole through the three foot thick granite wall below ground level so when he covers the pipe with dirt the hole in the wall won't be seen. He takes me inside and shows me where the pipe will enter the room and run along the floor, parallel to the current pipe, behind the couch, then up the wall, in the corner, so it won't be conspicuous, along a twenty foot wall, where he will drill another hole through another three foot thick granite wall and connect the new pipe to the old pipes that converge under the stairs and run through the house to the radiators. It's a project that involves

digging, drilling, and cementing; laying more than sixty feet of copper pipe and bending the pipe so it turns five corners without crimping; adding an air vent—like the second hole in a can of evaporated milk—so the water flows freely and consistently, and doesn't balk or dribble as it rises three floors—all of which he does by himself in two days.

The finished work is flawless, the copper piping perfectly bent, flush, fitted exactly into the corners and through the holes he drilled in the walls. The work is so perfect Jean admires it every time he visits, and the price is so fair and reasonable, I'm embarrassed to write it.

I now have hot water, radiator heat (turned off), and form-follows-function exposed copper pipes—my own private Pompidou—a new furnace with a ten-year warranty that will last five to twenty years, and Monsieur C, my friend and rescuer, who stops by regularly to visit me and the furnace to make sure we're both working and well. Often, he'll sit with me in the kitchen sipping coffee I make for him: two unshaven guys, one graying, the other dark, me talking crazy French, him repeating, "No problème, no problème," neither of us sure what the other is saying, nor caring. It's our time together that counts, and the time is always good. It's early autumn now, but when the time comes I know I'll be ready for winter...



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 rights to *I'll Never Be French* have been bought and an audio book is forthcoming. I was given a choice of four readers, and the one I selected was selected. I'll let you know when it's released.
- The publisher of *I'll Never* (Simon and Schuster) and the publisher of *(not quite)* (Skyhorse) are working together to support both books: the ebook of *I'll Never* now includes the first chapter of *(not quite)* and the ebook of *(not quite)* includes the first chapter of *I'll Never*, proving that enlightened capitalism, at least in publishing, isn't only in fiction.
- October 23, Donna and I will be interviewed by Gilen Chan and Gene Preudhomme for their podcast Retirethere (www.retirethere.com). They currently have 53 podcasts in the series with people who have retired in Florida, Ecuador, Bulgaria, Canada, Hawaii, Spain, Mexico, and New Jersey. (Go figure!) I'll send you the link when it's posted.
- January 18, 2022, I will Zoom with the California Retired Teachers Association. (CalRTA), Tri-Valley Division 85, and talk about *I'll Never* and *(not quite)*.
- January 29, 2022, I will again Zoom with Janet Hulstrand, Adrian Leeds, and Harriet Welty Rochefort in a follow-up panel discussion, *Demystifying the French II*. The August 28 Zoom, *Demystifying the French I*, was Federation Alliance Françaises' best attended national event ever—500 people registered—so they have asked us to return for a follow-up. I'll send you the announcement when I get it. If you'd like to see the August 28 panel discussion, here's the [link](#).

I never thought I'd like it, but I do, and I am happy and willing and VERY available to Zoom with book clubs, Alliance Française, and any other legal group, enterprise, organization, or gang. I have plenty of time, and as all writers will tell you, there's nothing we do better than finding pleasant things to do instead of writing.

If you haven't reviewed the book on Amazon or Goodreads, please consider doing so, as those reviews are critical for the book's success and my mental health. 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

