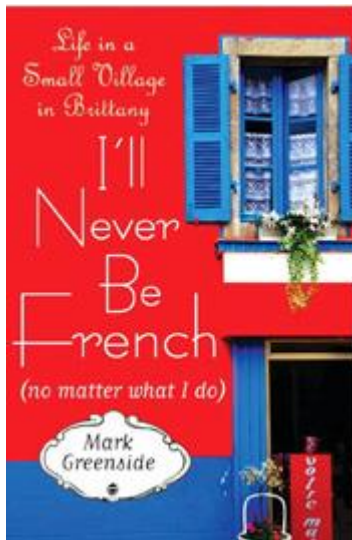


Mark Greenside

Author of *I'll Never Be French, (no matter what I do)*



Volume 1, Number 2, September 2017



Dear Friend,

Thanks for letting me write to you again, or at least not telling me not to. As promised, here's the next newsletter with the latest news.

Donna and I just returned from ten weeks in Europe, one week in Genoa, two weeks in Provence, and seven weeks in Plobien, where I spent the last four editing my new book. It's the last thing I wanted to do.

Every summer, I resist doing U.S. work in France because I have plenty of French work to do—like eating, drinking, and thinking about fixing my front gate. It's my down time, which is my up time, and I don't want to spend it working. It's also France, where little happens as I think it will and nothing electronic is easy—at least for me. I have no reason to believe this will be different—and it isn't.

Halfway through the summer, my editor, a lovely young lady named Marie, sends me an email saying she's leaving the publisher, (*not quite*) *Mastering the Art of French Living* is her last project, and she wants to get started right away.

I write back Bartleby-style, saying, "I prefer not," and for emphasis add, "I have lots of important things to do."

"I understand," she agrees, and attaches the first 70 pages in a Word file, "August 3 is my last day." It's June 30 when I receive this.

For most writers, it would not be a problem: the edits arrive electronically, and I respond electronically—quick and efficient, but not me, and definitely not me in France. I have to see more than a paragraph or two at a time, which is all my laptop screen will show me. I need to read what's before and after the part I'm editing, and I want everything in my hand at once, which means I have to see it on paper, which means I have to print it.

The good news is the edits and comments are in red, and unlike almost everyone I know in France, I have a color printer. The bad news is it takes more than a minute to print a page in color, and there are 300 pages in the book— meaning it will take over five hours to print, but not five hours straight, like overnight while I'm sleeping, because this printer prints 15 - 20 pages at a time, then needs to rest. That's the first problem, and one I'd like to avoid.

I immediately begin searching for a French version of Copymat. There used to be a shop—called Burocop of all things—two miles away in Loscoat, but it closed, probably because nobody could figure out what they did. I ask everyone I know in Plobien and Loscoat, and no one knows of a copy place. I search the internet and yellow pages and unbelievably cannot find anything within twenty miles. I call Gilles and Tatjana, who live in Brest, a city of 400,000 people, thirty miles away, and ask if they know a copy place, and amazingly they do, and even more amazingly, it's open the next day, a Sunday. Gilles says he'll go with me, 'just in case,' because he and I both know there's always a case with me. I go to bed relieved, sleeping the sleep of the fulfilled, until I wake early the next morning thinking about French paper, which is the second problem.

Paper in the U.S. is 8.5 x 11 inches. In France (and most of the rest of the world) it's 8.27 x 11.69 inches, meaning it's longer and narrower, meaning the manuscript will probably reformat when I print it, and the comments I make about line 25 on page 31 will actually be about line 2 on page 32.

I download the file to a flash drive and drive the thirty miles to Brest, where Gilles takes me to an Office Max-size store in the heart of the city.

He's an IT project manager and consultant and fluent in English, French, and Breton. There's nothing, I figure, he can't handle.

We enter the store on a mission. Gilles loads the flash drive on the Office Max computer and opens the file. The first thing I see is the manuscript *has* reformatted, and the page numbers and section breaks have all changed. More problematic, the color of Marie's edits have also changed—from a bright red to an almost impossible to read pale yellow, not that it matters, because when we print ten test pages none of her comments are there. They're gone. The changes she made in the text are there (in pale yellow), but the margin comments, which are the most important, are not. The computer or the printer or both can't read them. Gilles closes the file and goes on-line to access the original Word file, thinking/hoping it will work better than the copy on the flash drive. It doesn't. It's the same: a reformatted manuscript with pale yellow corrections I can barely see, and no visible margin comments—for 65 cents a page.

I decide to work slowly, at home, printing and editing about fifteen pages a day, and for the first week and one hundred pages it works fine—then I run out of red ink. In the U.S., I'd go to the real Office Max and resume printing with a new cartridge in less than an hour. In France, it takes five days: first, it has to be ordered from god-knows-where; second, it has to be delivered by god-knows who, what, and how; third, it's Friday, the order won't go in until Saturday, and the store is closed Sunday and Monday, so I get it on Tuesday, five days later, which slows me down.

So does this.

The guy from the electric company knocks on the door. I know he is coming, so it's not a surprise. The village is getting new smart meters, which I personally think is dumb, as the old ones work fine, and every new upgrade comes with its downgrade. I can only wonder what this one will be. I shut my computer and open the door. The guy says, "Bonjour," shakes my hand, and goes to work. The first thing he does is turn off the electricity. Fifteen minutes later, after drilling and banging and mumbling a few words

I've never heard before, he turns the electricity back on and checks his work. The meter works fine, and he's happy. My router is out, and I'm not. Eventually, it re-boots itself—and as with most of my experiences in France, nothing works as I planned and everything turns out all right.

The edits are all done, and I'm happy. Now, we're working on the book cover. I'll get the final galleys sometime in November, and the book will be published in May, 2018—in time for summer reading and travel. At Marie's suggestion, I did some re-writing. Below is the new introduction to the chapter on shopping. Please, let me know what you think.

The easiest things to do in the U.S. are often the most complicated in France. Take, for example, showering. For some reason I will never understand, until very recently, most French homes, hotels, B & B's, gites, and chambre d'hotes had no shower curtains or doors.

In the U.S., I step into the shower (tub or stall), close the curtain or door, turn on the water, adjust the temperature, and enter the cascade, luxuriating in total, wrap-around comfort and warmth. In France, I step into the tub and freeze. In the U.S., shower heads are mounted on the wall above my head—exactly where they ought to be. In France, in an effort to keep the room from soaking because there are no shower doors or curtains, shower heads are set lower and are attached to long, slinky, eel-like hoses that have been unwillingly force-wrapped around the bathtub faucet and temperature knobs. Every time I see one of these contraptions I shiver: literally.

I step into the tub and stand there, knowing what I have to do and not wanting to—and knowing what's going to happen next: no matter how I sit (lotus-style, with my legs outstretched, or on my cracking, breaking knees) or which way I face (toward the faucet or away), I'm going to drench the room. I'm going to uncoil the eel and drop it or lose control of it with my soapy, slippery hands and before I can recapture it it's going to jump around like a lunatic frog and soak the room, or I'm not going to drop or lose control of the eel, and I'll spray water on me, over me, and off me, and soak the room. There is simply no way an American can shower like this and not souse the bathroom.

There's also no way to shower like this and not freeze. I sit or kneel in that moment's least of the least uncomfortable positions and spray my left arm, shoulder, chest, face, head, back, while the rest of me goose-bumps, because it's impossible to wet all of my body at once.

Even today, when more and more places do have shower curtains and doors, for another reason I'll never understand, they do not fully close. There's a gap. A planned gap, like if they close 80% of the space it will be enough! And, if by some miracle of planning or error the door or curtain does fully close, it leaks.

That's showering. Then there's shopping. In the U.S., I successfully shop for most things—the more important the item the better shopper I am—and almost never experience buyer's remorse. In the U.S., I'm a shopper par excellence. In France, I'm sub-par, and on really bad days, like the first times I shopped for food, I'm sub-sub-par. In fairness, though, it's not entirely my fault: there's me, and there's French people, language, customs, and rules.

Currently the introduction to each chapter is in italics, as above. What do you think, italics or Roman? Which do you prefer?

I want to thank you for your continued support and interest. You have no idea how much it matters.

Yours Sincerely,
Mark