

ANNE TRAGER

MEET THE AMERICAN EXPAT PUBLISHER LIVING IN FRANCE AND CONVERTING READERS ONE WORD AT A TIME.

BY CAROLYNE KAUSER-ABBOTT

Anne Trager readily admits to being a lifelong Francophile. She says her life might have taken a different turn if her parents had not included the ‘e’ at the end of her first name. Growing up near Ohio’s Black River, in quiet Elyria, was probably as spiritually distinct from the lights of Paris as one might imagine. Anne’s teenage dreams were vignettes of France, and her days rounded out with French lessons. *Gourmet Magazine’s* photo-filled pages fueled Trager’s fascination with the art of cooking. It was 1985, when she left Ohio to train as a chef and perfect her language skills, that Anne confirmed Paris “was still the place to go for fine cuisine.”

Committed foodies recognize that honing your cooking skills in Paris is like being in the birthplace of a religion. To acquire the age-old techniques, Anne tells me that she worked in restaurants, bakeries and chocolate shops. Although she was game to experiment with this foreign cuisine, Anne drew the line on her first visit to the Paris wholesale market, *Marché International de Rungis*, where “a plate of hot tripe sausage with a glass of white wine for breakfast” was too extreme.

With a solid base of cooking skills, Anne had the opportunity to work as a private chef. Catering led to some glamorous travel destinations, including a Greek island, a fabulous estate in Provence, and a ranch in Colorado. However, despite the ability to sharpen her cookery techniques, the reality of working in these locales was like being “cut off from the real world – a kind of French *Upstairs, Downstairs*.”

Anne is a daughter of a linguist, thus a deep-rooted love of languages is in her DNA. Freelance work in translation and interpreting allowed her to fill some of her off-duty hours. This pull of languages was strong enough for Anne to complete a degree at the Sorbonne in Chinese language and civilization. Over time, her translation contracts for European publishers grew, as did the work in marketing and communications.

Anne and her husband both work from home, but finding a house that could accommodate two offices and a young

daughter proved outrageously expensive in Paris. By 2008, it was time to relocate from the French capital, and the family decided on the former 5th-century Visigoth capital of Toulouse. This southwest city successfully blends two UNESCO World Heritage sites with the modern-day activities associated with being the capital of France’s aeronautics industry and home to Airbus. In Anne’s opinion, “It is very cosmopolitan, and the people here are particularly open

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and friendly. The weather is not all that wonderful, but you cannot beat the duck confit.”

Toulouse brought with it new surroundings and the start of a publishing house named *Le French Book* (2011) with this motto: “If we love it, we’ll translate it.” Anne describes her company as follows: “*Le French Book* is a crime of passion, combining an irrational love for France with an equally excessive love for mysteries and thrillers. We aim to give readers access to the work of France’s very vibrant and creative writers.”

Focused on delivering existing French books to an English-speaking audience, *Le French Book* published three e-books by the end of 2012. Readers are now able to access 10 titles in multiple formats, including both print and audio. The company’s 2015 goal is to publish one title per month. Anne tells me they plan to “continue the *Winemaker Detective* series, the *Paris Homicide* series and the *Consortium* series,” and more. Next up? In-flight entertainment.

After 25-years, it may be long enough to shake the expat status, but Anne admits she still occasionally craves Grapenuts and, in her words, “I am not sure that you ever really

feel like a local when you have not grown up in a particular culture, at least not in France.” Anne still recalls some of her first moments in the country with a sense of humor that may not have been there at the time. She prided herself as fluent in French, yet in her first few days in France she had a conversation with a group that she simply could not understand; they were from Quebec. Then there was the time she asked for directions in the town of Blois in the Loire Valley, confusing the word *guerre* (war) with *gare* (train station); she is sure the old lady is still talking about that day.

Anne says she has gone through all the phases as an expat, including an initial infatuation with everything that France has to offer. She admits to having suffered the odd flash of frustration with the renowned French bureaucracy, and a fascination that even after a three-hour meal your tablemates could still be talking about food. Over the years, Anne confirms there were moments of wanting to leave, yet at the same time recognizing the privilege of being part of two cultures.

Her advice to anyone trying to immerse in a new locale: “Try to speak the language because people will appreciate the effort, and never forget that cultural differences run very deep. Laughing and not taking yourself too seriously go a long way to overcoming those differences.”

Now at peace with being a long-term expat, Anne feels she is making efforts to bridge the cultural divide with *Le French Book*. ■

For more information on Anne’s translating services, visit www.lefrenchbook.com.



IMAGE COURTESY OF ANNE TRAGER