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## A great trade: cancer books for guides to Paris

By Lisa Everitt  
Special to The Denver Post

Every couple of months I get an e-mail from Paris Perfect that reduces me to a miserable little ball. Paris Perfect rents apartments in the Seventh Arrondissement, and I would like to fly there right this minute and stay in one of them. But I can't. C'est dommage.

It took me 29 years and one bad disease to get to Paris. I started taking French my first year of high school and stuck with it for five years, then added German and later took a year of Japanese. I had two things as a girl: a facility with languages and seemingly not a snowball's chance in hell of actually visiting any of these places.

When I got breast cancer in early 2002, someone advised, "Plan the best vacation ever while you're in treatment. It will give you something besides cancer to think about."

Paris, and that's an order

This sounded like such a good idea that I shelved my collection of books about how not to die and went out and bought three books about

Paris. We had no money, I had forgotten almost all the French I had ever learned, and all my hair had fallen out. But the first day I brought the books to a chemo infusion, I found myself in a chair next to a woman who looked so good I assumed she was just starting treatment.

'Oh, no,' she said, laughing. 'I've been at this for years.' She was Stage IV, had lived through two recurrences and came in once a month for a little chemo 'to knock down the bone mets.' Metastases to the bone are supposed to be debilitating and painful, and Stage IV is widely assumed to be the point at which you waste away and die. This lady was leaving the next morning for a three-week backpacking trip - to Norway.

My husband later said that he stopped being afraid of cancer at that moment. 'If that's Stage IV, that's not so bad,' he said.

'You'll like Paris,' she told us. I considered that an order.

So we packed up the kids and went to England - because I had always wanted to spend Christmas in England - and then to Paris by EuroStar. One advantage of being terminally ill is that you can say to your sweetheart, 'I want to go to Paris,' and he makes it happen without mentioning the inconvenient reality of your bank account balance when you have gone most of a year without working. I had a one-in-four chance of being dead in five years, and I wanted to take my children to France.

Comfort for Yankees

One fall afternoon while Web surfing short-term rental listings, I stumbled over paris

perfect.com and immediately decided to stay there, even though other places we had looked at were half the price. The owner, Madelyn



The Eiffel Tower looked close enough to climb from Lisa Everitt's vacation rental. (AP / Francois Mori)

Byrne, is an American married to a Frenchman; she understands what intimidates Americans and runs her business to eliminate all possible objections.

The website is priced in dollars, Paris Perfect takes credit cards, and all correspondence is handled in English. The apartments have good beds, modern showers and security doors. They boast well-equipped kitchens, washer-dryers, TVs that get CNN and entertainment systems that play American DVDs.

And yet, despite playing to American fears and comfort levels, Madelyn and her husband, Philippe Willens, create an environment that enables one to be immersed in Paris. Their apartments are full of nuance and romance, filled with interesting antiques and flea-market finds. They advise their visitors to do the things that Parisians do, from shopping at the Rue Cler street market to wearing slippers in the apartment to keep the noise down.

It started for us when we arrived by cab after a full day of traveling and the children immediately ran to the living-room windows, where the Eiffel Tower, shining with lights, seemed so close you could climb it.

My husband started laughing. 'This will do,' he said.

Images to treasure

So which of the postcards from that week is my favorite? Let's see.

My daughter Sara, then 7, discovering that a big jar of her favorite food, chocolate-hazelnut Nutella spread, is on every crepe stand in Paris.

My son Mark, then 11, pondering the cubist nudes at the Picasso Museum. My mental image of Mark in front of an oversized canvas might as well be subtitled, 'I Don't Get It.'

Our trip to the Picard frozen-

food emporium to buy escargot, which we cooked in the apartment so the kids could try a little without throwing a public fit. Mark ate one and liked it. He still has the shell.

The lady of a certain age who chided me in English, as I looked at a bus route map, "You should ask us for help. We French are not mean. We are nice." So I asked her which bus to take, and she told me, very nicely, and then told my husband that he shouldn't let me boss him around.

The holiday trappings of Paris: the free carousel rides in every arrondissement, the skating rink outside the Hôtel de Ville, the animated Christmas windows in the department stores.

Waiting in line for the Eiffel Tower one night and watching the international collection of college kids checking each other out.

All the people to whom I began speaking in French who answered me, very kindly, in English.

The recurring thought I kept having: I am in PARIS.

Pain au chocolat, anytime, anywhere.

The day that Sara's Hello Kitty sneakers from Target gave up the ghost and we went to DPAM, a children's clothing store recommended by Madelyn as both cute and reasonable. Sara made a beeline to the most beautiful boots in the store, shiny patent and faux ostrich in marron, which is a rich chestnut brown. When your child demonstrates good taste in shoes in Paris, how can you not purchase them?

Trying to buy a pair of pliers when you don't know the French word for "pliers."

The children writing notes to God in Notre Dame. Walking down rainy streets to the sound of church bells.

Having shown the kids the musical "Gigi" before our trip, and warning them that Paris was not exactly like the movie anymore, finding "Gigi" on the television on New Year's Eve. Watching Maurice Chevalier overact in French.

Watching "The Simpsons" in French.

The old man and his West Highland terrier who dined next to us at Brasserie Thoumieux the night before we went home. He told me Sara was beautiful, asked if we were English or American, and then asked (this was late 2002, remember) whether we thought Monsieur Bush really meant to invade Iraq. This allowed my husband, Doug, to use the only French phrase he had insisted I teach him: "I did not vote for him."

The perfect cassoulet at Thoumieux, washed down with Gigondas. The waiter speaking to the old man's dog.

Being able to remind my daughter, when she is a bit older, that a Frenchman once said of her, "Elle est ravissante."

Four years have passed, and I am not dead. We still have the credit card debt, but more important, we'll always have Paris.

*Lisa Everitt is a freelance writer and editor who lives in Arvada.*

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## The details

Paris Perfect ([parisperfect.com](http://parisperfect.com)) offers 20 apartments, most in the Seventh Arrondissement of Paris on the Left Bank of the Seine, an easy walk from the Eiffel Tower, the Champs de Mars, and the Pont de l'Alma and École Militaire Metro stations. The Paris apartments range from the Kir, \$190 per night or \$1,330 per week for a 160-square-foot studio sleeping one or two, to the Gigondas, \$1,290 per night or \$9,030 per week for a five-bedroom, 2,000-square-foot apartment that sleeps as many as nine. Rates are all-inclusive; there are no additional taxes or fees except for phone. Contact Madelyn Byrne and Philippe in London: (011) 44 207 938 2939 or [pariseiffel@yahoo.com](mailto:pariseiffel@yahoo.com).

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