

3 RUE BENOUVILLE
75116 PARIS
FRANCE

The



Rue Benouville Diaries

PARIS. OLIVIA DE HAVILLAND & THE ART OF AN EXTRAORDINARY LIFE

ISSUE N° 01

AVRIL 2026

Bonjour!

I can still picture her now.

She was perched on the edge of a divan—her white hair swept up in a chignon—surrounded by neatly stacked papers and *International Herald Tribune* clippings. Her two Oscars gleamed in a cream cabinet nearby.

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

To explain how a thirty-year-old girl from Nashville ended up in Olivia de Havilland's Parisian boudoir, I have to go back almost fifty years—to a shy five-year-old speaking her first words of French in an elementary school classroom.

What began there took hold. My foreign language studies continued throughout high school, and I first visited Paris as a teenager through my college study-abroad program. I found the City of Light magical and eye-opening and, well, foreign. I was struck by the elegance of the Haussmannian buildings with their luminous limestone façades and small wrought iron balconies, the rich history that surrounded me, and the charm of the *bouquiniste* stalls along the banks of the Seine.

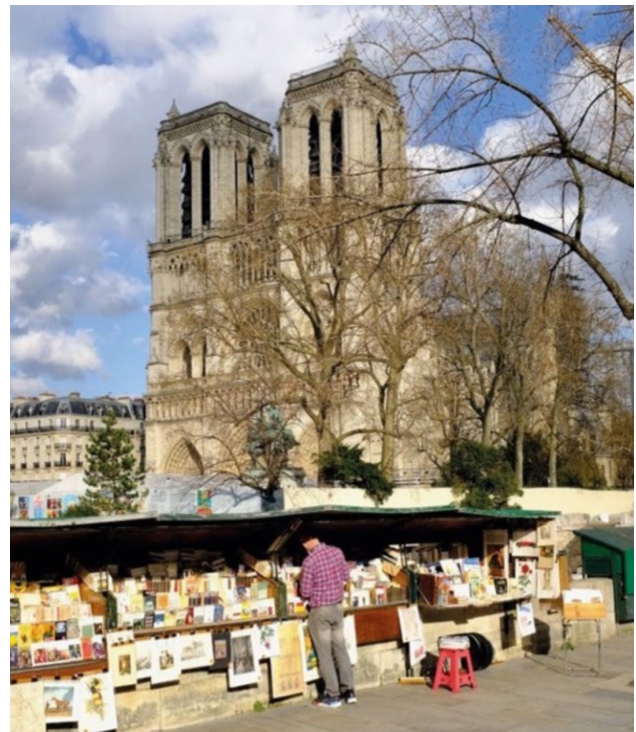


Photo by Jeffrey Iverson/France Today

Somehow, I felt at home *en France*. I knew that I would return. I knew I would live there one day.

In 2003, I did. Following a teaching stint in Normandy, I landed an administrative position at an economic think tank situated on the swank Avenue Montaigne. It began dreamily enough but soon turned toxic due to a tyrannical boss. I stuck it out for a year but then finally resigned—with no job prospects, few friends, dwindling savings, and even more, depleted confidence.

Had moving to Paris been a huge mistake?

About one month into my unemployment, my American roommate, Sarah, announced that she was moving back home to Washington, D.C. She asked if I'd be interested in taking over her job.

The position sounded ideal: part-time, Monday through Friday, 2 – 6 p.m., working as the personal assistant to an aging Hollywood actress who'd retired to Paris. It paid hourly, enough to cover my rent and expenses, and I'd work out of the woman's home, rather than some cold, impersonal office. Most of the duties would be conducted in English, with a little French sprinkled in for things like booking restaurant reservations and making catering arrangements.

I didn't know much about Olivia de Havilland (had she been in *Gone with the Wind*?), but I was intrigued by the few colorful details Sarah shared. Olivia had once tested over a dozen shades of blue before selecting the perfect hue for the walls of an intimate third-floor room. She spoke of her favorite century, the 18th, the way others might gush about their favorite TV show. And most importantly, she was, according to Sarah, "kind and gracious"—qualities I craved after enduring my previous boss.

So, was I interested? *Pourquoi pas?*

I thought the job would consist mostly of typing letters and running errands. I had no idea my Parisian dream was about to take a turn I never could have scripted.

Join me next month for the story of my first meeting with Dame Olivia in the boudoir of her Rue Benouville home.

À la prochaine,

Gemma

P.S. Do you know someone who loves Olivia de Havilland, Paris, or a good behind-the-scenes story? Please share! They can subscribe by clicking the blue button below.

Subscribe to The Rue Benouville Diaries



3002 Bienville Drive | Smyrna, TN 37167 US

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)



Try email & social marketing for free!