

3 RUE BENOUVILLE
75116 PARIS
FRANCE

The



Rue Benouville Diaries

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

ISSUE N° 06
SEPTEMBRE 2026

Bonjour!

In my last issue, I shared how Dame Olivia de Havilland celebrated my 31st birthday.

She had a gift for spotting opportunities to create beauty for others—including me—and make them feel seen and known. After several months of watching her, I was beginning to understand that small gestures, when done right, are never small at all.

An excerpt from the *My Year with Dame Olivia* manuscript shows more:

“Oh, they’re just too somber,” Dame Olivia lamented as she examined the blooms. “I had envisioned something more *gai* and cheery.”

The bouquet she had ordered was intended for the Turners, friends from the U.S. arriving in Paris later that day, as a welcoming gift at their hotel.

Looking at the flowers, I understood her assessment. Their muted colors, sitting in a dark brown basket, looked rather sad.

“Laura, could you please find a happier, brighter bouquet?” Naturally, I was pleased to and headed out the door bound for Au Nom de la Rose—a delightful *fleuriste* around the corner on Avenue Victor Hugo.



How many people would think to have flowers waiting at a hotel to welcome their friends? I wondered. And, more than that, who would bother to replace them if they weren't exactly right?

Almost no one, I surmised.



But Olivia was not like most people.

When I reached the florist, I stepped inside and gazed at the beauty surrounding me.

And then I saw it: a striking arrangement of red, light pink, and fuchsia roses. It conveyed exactly what she intended: *Bienvenue à Paris!* Welcome to Paris!

I purchased them and returned to 3 Rue Benouville, hoping to receive Olivia's blessing. "They're perfect!" she exclaimed, inhaling their scent. "Now, off you go!"

With no time to waste, I hurried out the door, and whisked the *gai* bouquet to Hôtel Stendhal off the Place Vendôme. I imagined her friends' delight upon discovering Olivia's thoughtfulness.

I'm not sure where the somber bouquet ended up. Likely in the trash can. But that was of no concern to Dame Olivia. She had achieved her vision. And for her, time, energy, and even expense were worthy investments to honor the people she cared about.

I followed her example.

Later that year, when my mother arrived in Paris, I left a nosegay of roses and a handwritten note waiting for her at her hotel. She told me it had made her feel instantly welcomed.

It struck me that before meeting Olivia, I had given gifts when tradition dictated: birthdays, Christmas, Mother's Day, graduations. But celebrating someone "just because" was new territory. The unexpectedness of an extra, undefinable charm communicated something more. It said:

"You matter just because you exist. And you're worth celebrating at any time."

That was Olivia's philosophy on loving others well. And before long, it became my own.

My Year with Dame Olivia Book Update

I continue to work with my literary agent, Mary Elizabeth, adding to and polishing my manuscript. One of our goals is to bring more of my day-to-day Parisian life beyond 3 Rue Benouville onto the page. To revisit 2003-05, I am taking a deep dive into the journals that I kept during my time in France. After my workday ended with Olivia, I would head to one of my favorite cafés in the 16th arrondissement, settle into a table with my journal and a *café crème*, and capture the day while it was still fresh. What a gift it is to relive that time in my

life—to have those memories preserved in my own words, to be rediscovered over twenty years later. And I look forward to sharing them with you.



As I've often told people over the past three years, writing a book is without question a marathon—not a sprint! Thank you for reading and, most of all, for cheering me on.

À la prochaine,

Gemma

P.S. Is there an aspect of Dame Olivia you'd especially like to hear about or something about my journey you'd like to know? If so, simply hit reply and share your thoughts. I'd love to hear from you! And, as always, feel free to forward this installment to a friend!

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!