

**Meet the people behind the Alliance Française de Reno.
We couldn't be here without them!**

**PORTRAIT DU MOIS
Mars 2024**



**An interview with
Erin Edgington
Founding Board Member**

***Her journey with the French language and culture is
absorbing, inspirational and unusual.***

1. When, where, and how did you fall in love with the French language?

I first encountered French in my mother's old, paperback copy of War and Peace, which I couldn't figure out at the age of 10 or 11 for many reasons, among them the fact that I couldn't read the parts of the text that hadn't been translated into English from French. I found a French dictionary somewhere in my grandmother's house and tried to decode the passages word by word but – hélas – I was stumped. When I wasn't snooping around her bookshelves, I also spent quite a lot of time watching old movies with my grandmother. Sabrina was a particular favorite of mine, and so, by the time I began studying French formally a couple of years later in middle school, I already had plenty of notions of going off to pursue my own glamorous adventures on the continent.

2. What elements of the French culture appeal to you the most?

If my affinity for Sabrina didn't already give it away, French cuisine has always been a major selling point for me. More generally, though, I've always been very interested in the finer things in life, so I'm drawn to France as the capital of luxury. I'm also a dix-neuviémiste and, of course, Paris was the capital of the nineteenth century. My first book, which focused on poetry written about and on folding fans, allowed me to bring together some of my favorite finer things and to think about the interconnections between literature, art, and fashion – another favorite French thing.

3. How would you encourage someone to study and speak French?

This is a question that I ponder constantly in my professional life and one that I've thought a lot about over the years. I typically offer a combination of reasons to study French. Very practically, I tell prospective students that French is one of the most commonly spoken languages in the world; that it's one of the fastest growing languages in the world; and that there is at least one major French/Francophone company doing business in all 50 states. (And, for the skeptics, there's plenty more to say, like French is the language of diplomacy, the United Nations, the International Olympic Committee, etc., etc.) Less practically – but equally importantly! – I present French language skills in terms of access to some of the world's greatest works of art across literature, theater, opera, and cinema, to say nothing of some of the most significant philosophical and scientific works of the modern era.

4. What are the most memorable experiences you've had in France or in a French environment?

*Contrary to my childhood vision, and strangely given my profession, **I've never been to France**. Shortly after graduate school, though, I accepted a visiting position at Queen's University Belfast to teach French. Not only did my students have the most adorable accents – think Derry Girls – but the very notion of beginning language learners was very new and experimental at that storied institution. My colleagues were delighted (if a little shocked) to learn that the vast majority of American college students were so-called ab initio learners and that I was happy and well prepared to teach such students. It was quite memorable for me to share my knowledge of French in that unlikeliest of contexts!*

Merci Erin!
Thank you!