



French By Heart: An American Family's Adventures in La Belle France

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Can a family of five from deep in the heart of Dixie find happiness smack dab in the middle of France?

French By Heart is the story of an all-American family pulling up stakes and finding a new home in Clermont-Ferrand, a city four hours south of Paris known more for its smoke-spitting factories and car dealerships than for its location in the Auvergne, the lush heartland of France dotted with crumbling castles and sunflower fields. The Ramseys are not jet-setters; they're a regular family with big-hearted and rambunctious kids. Quickly their lives go from covered-dish suppers to smoky dinner parties with heated polemics, from being surrounded by Southern hospitality to receiving funny looks if the children play in the yard without shoes.

A charming tale with world-class characters, *French By Heart* reads like letters from your funniest friend. More than just a slice of life in France, it's a heartwarming account of a family coming of age and learning what "home sweet home" really means.

French By Heart: An American Family's Adventures in La Belle France Details

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Lynn says

I picked up this book thinking it would confirm my romantic views of life in the French countryside. It did and it didn't. And I loved it. I like that Rebecca Ramsey is honest and doesn't try to sugarcoat anything. Life as an expat isn't everything it's cracked up to be. I would make a comment about Hemingway but since I haven't read any of his stuff yet it would only be gossip and I gave up gossip for Lent. :]

Each chapter stands on its own as a brief and insightful essay. It's a great style for me since I usually only have brief snatches of time to read during the school day.

Ramsey's writing style is quite nice. She has a way with details that really helps you insert yourself into the setting. And what more can I ask from a book that's goal is to detail life in France?

I found this book very entertaining, enlightening, and also realistic. Yes, Ramsey supports my previous views of "la belle France" but she also reminded me that nothing is perfect and life in France is full of flaws, just like life in America.

Pam G says

Fun family travelogue. Pleasant and quick read.

Sara says

My inner francophile is happy!

Judy says

Living abroad is a bucket list item for me and this book tugs at the heart. Yes I very much enjoyed this novel as it was from a Mom's perspective, drawing away from a how to/Tavel guide persona. However, for me it lacked the French countryside feels, as the author focused on family interactions.. Overall, still a happy and relaxing book you can relish..

Erin says

This is a sweet, if somewhat unsubstantial, book about a family who moves from South Carolina to central France. Becky and Todd Ramsey take advantage of a corporate relocation and settle their three young children in Clermont-Ferrand, an industrial town several hours south of Paris. The book tells tales of their

four years in this region. There are many fish out of water experiences (Becky doesn't understand the local banks and the local schools, she bungles French expressions and is scandalized by the nudity on TV), but the heart of this story lies closer to home. The Ramseys rent a house next to a nosy retiree, the ever-present Madame Mallet. Soon, Madame Mallet is spying on them, engaging them in conversation every time they step out their front door and handing out helpful tips on everything from child rearing to gardening. Laughter and tears follow.

While this book doesn't offer the kind of soul-searching narrative found in other books of its kind (the magnificent "Paris to the Moon" comes to mind), it offers up sweet and charming anecdotes that string together nicely. The reader doesn't get a real sense of how France changed the Ramseys, or challenged any of their preconceived ideas about quality of life. However, the author does manage to convey her great love for the little things- a particular furniture shop, a French circus poster, and above all, her quirky neighbors. In the end, it is the friendship with Madame Mallet that forms the heart of this book and leaves the reader feeling emotional at its conclusion. This is a worthwhile read, but not the best of this genre.

Kim says

I have to agree with Amplotkin about this book. I really, really wanted to love this book. It's about what I've always dreamed of - going to live in France, or Italy or best of all, England. It's one of my favorite genres and I really liked most of the characters a lot. The husband is a bit of a cipher, but everyone is likable and interesting. So why didn't I like it more? I just never got a true 'French' feel from the book. There didn't seem to be any true viewpoint. They could have been living almost anywhere. And there was WAY too much of the neighbor lady.

Mom says

I enjoyed reading this book. It was well written. It was very informative without being a how-to book. Rebecca Ramsey tells her story in a very laid-back, easy style. Some of the people were very annoying and actually I wouldn't have lasted for four years if I was in that situation. My pet peeve with this book is actually a personal flaw in that I like everything in chronological order and this book was all over the place.

J.E. Raley says

Decent read. Made me yearn for France and the culture of the areas. Fingers crossed for a trip to Europe to explore this area and who knows? Maybe one day we'll move to France to get immersed in this lovely, completely different place.

Susan White-Riggs says

This was ok, another typical story of an American family who moves to Paris, or in this case Clermont-Ferrand, France and their adventures.

Daniel says

I was hoping for more. It seems almost the entire book is about Ramsey's spéciale neighbor, Madame Mallet. Ramsey seemed too preoccupied with this lady and what she thought of her. There's all of France to enjoy, and she keeps going on about her neighbor? Disappointing.

Harriett says

I absolutely LOVED this little memoir!

Cathy Klein says

When I was at the library, they had a whole display about France and different books about it. I noticed that this one was about a family and their decision to move to France for several years with three young children, an aging cat, the piano and all.

The book was written in small chapters based on different experiences they had while they were there and it didn't disappoint. They moved to a part of France that was not necessarily a popular part of France, but they were immersed in the culture and made the unlikelyst of friends along the way.

It was a great read for anyone thinking about living abroad or simply just dreaming about it.

Dianne says

The author and her family (husband, 9 yr. old daughter, 7 yr. old son, infant son, and cat) packed up and moved to France for four years when her husband accepted a transfer with his company. They started out in an apartment, then found a house where they could settle down and start their new lives as foreigners trying their best to fit in.

I loved hearing all the details of their daily lives as they adjusted to a new culture. Everything they had taken for granted in their previous lives became a challenge: buying groceries, getting cheques from a bank, enrolling the kids in school, getting acquainted with neighbours - it all becomes one daunting adventure after another. Some of it is funny, some endearing, but all of it is good story-telling. She held my interest from start to finish and left me wanting more at the end of every story.

Complicating the Ramseys' lives is Madame Mallet, a meddling older neighbour who has an opinion on everything the Ramseys do and who never passes up an opportunity to tell them what that opinion is. She's irritating, hard to put up with and drives them almost to distraction at times, but she couldn't be more perfect for this story if she had been especially created for the role. I hope this book gets made into a movie just so I can watch Madame Mallet in action. She is priceless!

If you like the "We-Moved-To-A-New-Country" genre of books, or if you're like me and will read just about anything set in France, you'll probably enjoy this. Add it to your tbr for one of those times you want something quick and not too serious. I hope it'll be as much fun for you as it was for me.

Melissa says

As much as I enjoy reading just about any book set in France, this one didn't hold my attention. I was also bothered by the author's lack of timeline continuity. Recognizing that she was recounting true stories I still felt she could have done so without jumping from one timeframe to another then back.

John says

I almost returned this one to the library unread thinking "A Baptist mother of three from South Carolina's life as a French expat ... I'm not so sure." Well, I was wrong! Ramsey is actually a good writer, and often quite funny! Keeping my eye out on more from her.
