

S2E05 Foreword: April in Paris

Guest: April Pett

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[00:00:04] **Alison Innes:** [00:00:04] the podcast where we traveled the globe through the magic of audio. I'm your host, Alison NS. And each episode, I bring you a conversation with one of our researchers from Brock university, faculty of humanities. Today's episode though is a little bit different from our youth. Instead of interviewing a researcher today, I'm going to be talking with one of our graduates, April pet graduated from our French program in 2007 and has gone on to build up a successful to her company in Paris, France, her company, April in Paris tours offers private walking and her tours of the city of lights.

[00:00:38] Listen on to learn more about April story. So welcome April.

[00:00:45] **April Pett:** [00:00:45] Hello.

[00:00:46] **Alison Innes:** [00:00:46] I'm very glad to be talking with you. We have corresponded a few times and it's nice to, it's nice to finally, finally catch up and meet you virtually all the way from France.

[00:00:58] **April Pett:** [00:00:58] Yes. Yes. Well, thanks.

[00:01:00] [00:01:00] **Alison Innes:** [00:01:00] I was wondering if to start with, you would like to introduce yourself.

[00:01:04] Tell us a little bit about yourself and what it is that you do

[00:01:07] **April Pett:** [00:01:07] in France. Sure. Well, first of all, thank you so much for reaching out and inviting me to come along to the podcast today. Um, so my name is April pet and I am from. Ontario, which is right next to Brock. Um, and I studied at Brock university. I gradually graduated in the year 2007 with a bachelor's in modern languages and French and Italian.

[00:01:37] Um, and since my graduation, I have found myself over here in France. So, um, it's been seven and a half years that I've lived over here in Paris. And, um, here I am putting my, uh, you know, language skills to good use and I have a tour company

[00:01:57] **Alison Innes:** [00:01:57] here. Excellent. Well, I have so many questions for you. I'll start at [00:02:00] the very beginning.

[00:02:00] Um, so how, how, or why did you become interested in studying French?

[00:02:05] **April Pett:** [00:02:05] Well, um, my family is Italian and my great grandparents moved to Thorold, uh, back in the fifties. And so growing up with the Italian heritage, um, you know, I studied Italian right off the bat pretty much since I could ever speak. And then,

um, throughout my elementary school education, It was mandatory to learn French and just languages became my grand passion.

[00:02:33] As I grew older. Um, I continued the language studies all through my high school career. And then when deciding which path to pursue, when I'm going into my post-secondary education. You know, I thought that, that their language and culture, that was all my great passion. So, um, that's the path that I took and setting languages kind of came naturally to me, just with the influence of my, [00:03:00] my no-no and my no-no, my mom, and, um, the big Italian community in Thorold.

[00:03:06] So studying French. Came, it was pretty much next to nothing. And I really in joy learning about the history and the culture, the language, and then had an opportunity to go to Quebec a few times as I was growing up. Um, and so I, yeah, I just kind of wiped with it from there. So how do

[00:03:28] **Alison Innes:** [00:03:28] you go from, from studying French in Niagara to.

[00:03:32] Building eight, your own tour company in Paris. That's a pretty big leap across the pond.

[00:03:40] **April Pett:** [00:03:40] I get this question a lot, actually. Um, well, during my third year of studies at Brock, I had an opportunity through the language program. Uh, the Italian program to, to be precise, to, to go to Italy for a three week course and study Italian art Renaissance.

[00:04:00] [00:03:59] Um, and then at that same very moment, I found out about a study abroad program. France offered through Brock. And, um, I guess that's when you can say my love affair with France began. Um, I had been to Paris once before, when I was graduating from high school and I really loved the city itself. And then by coming abroad again for such a lengthy, uh, amount of time, During my third year of university, I was overseas for a total of 14 months.

[00:04:34] You know, I really got to the op I really had the opportunity to, um, immerse myself in the French culture, eat lots of that delicious cheese, uh, learn more about the history and the language. Um, And, you know, to be honest, it wasn't my goal to move back to France. After my studies, I did travel a little bit, um, [00:05:00] for a few months.

[00:05:00] And then I settled down back in Niagara and had a good job and had a boyfriend and then three and a half years passed. And I thought, okay, I'm not ready for this. And I decided to go live in Australia. And so I was in Australia for two years, but there I'd lost all this French. I spent all those years fine tuning.

[00:05:21] And so that was when I decided to come back to France. And, uh, the main reason for that was to improve my French skills because I was a little bit rusty upon my arrival. And once I arrived in Paris, I started working with an American tour company coming from Niagara. I always worked in tourism. Uh, during my university career and, uh, I've been lucky and fortunate enough to, to have traveled around the world.

[00:05:51] So after a year of working with this tourism company, you know, I thought, okay, time to do something a little bit more significant. [00:06:00] I was turning 30, so it was a milestone birthday. And that's when I decided to. Use all of these passions and launch April impairs tours, the name of my company.

[00:06:11] **Alison Innes:** [00:06:11] It's a wonderful

[00:06:12] **April Pett:** [00:06:12] name.

[00:06:14] **Alison Innes:** [00:06:14] So what are some of those challenges in setting up your own business in a foreign country? I think the idea of being an entrepreneur at home is daunting enough. Um, let alone adding language and culture and, um, bureaucracy of a, another country. That's unfamiliar to the mix. Let's not

[00:06:34] **April Pett:** [00:06:34] talk about the

[00:06:39] other countries, but in France you must be prepared to do a lot of paperwork. Um, of course there's always a language barrier as well. And you know, when I first arrived and I, um, was still improving, you know, and when I launched the company yeah. Still in the stages of, of, of [00:07:00] improving my language skills.

[00:07:01] And I may not have had all the technical terms, um, to, to go and meet partners and set up the website and copywriting the names, et cetera. Um, so really, um, what I had. Prepared for myself was a little introduction, fine tuned that speech when going out to, uh, meet people who I thought would be, you know, a key, uh, player in, in developing my business.

[00:07:34] And I always recommend wearing a smile. Did

[00:07:37] **Alison Innes:** [00:07:37] you, um, partner with anybody in France or did you just like, this was just you, your thing. Yeah,

[00:07:45] **April Pett:** [00:07:45] no. Um, so I do have partners across, uh, across the city. I have, uh, such as restaurant workers, uh, from , um, you know, finding [00:08:00] those people was relatively easy. If N if I could say that, because, you know, they, they.

[00:08:07] We're very excited to see a foreigner come to them and wanting to develop a business in, in their home country or even their hometown. Uh, you know, so, um, and one other challenge that I came across when beginning. This journey was well, I had the knowledge of the history and, and the culture and the food, et cetera.

[00:08:33] But when it came down to developing a website in graphic design and social media, I had no idea what so ever, how to do these tasks to really develop the company. And so once people. Started hearing about this new project that I was working on, whether it was, is through word of mouth or through, um, you know, my [00:09:00] personal Facebook, I was really surprised.

[00:09:03] And it was very heartwarming that people from all over the world that I've met through my travels were reaching out to say, oh, April, you know, I, um, I can do this for you.

I'd be happy to make your logo. Oh, I can help you make your website. I'm a social media guru. Let me help you and assist you and get going with that.

[00:09:24] So, uh, you know, those, that was one of the huge challenges to get to know all of this background work that you have to put into developing a company. Um, and so, you know, I'm so. So grateful for all these people who kind of reached out to lend a helping hand. So while on a worldwide spectrum, these aren't partners per se, but, um, people really came together and, uh, really wanted to help.

[00:09:54] So I'm so happy about that forever.

[00:09:56] **Alison Innes:** [00:09:56] Grateful. That's wonderful. And so how, how big is your company [00:10:00] now? I noticed on your website, you offer a lot of package to

[00:10:03] **April Pett:** [00:10:03] hers. Offer, uh, I believe it's 24 tours on my website now. Um, I'm currently in burgundy, Frances and, uh, locked down. And so I'm developing, um, tours here in burgundy, which is one of the biggest wine regions in France.

[00:10:21] And so, um, I do work with several contractors in licensed guides in Paris at this point. Work with, I'd say five licensed guides who are class a guides who are authorized to enter the grand museums of Paris. Like the loop, for example, um, I also work with, um, a few artists and a chocolate here in the pastry chef.

[00:10:54] And then I have a few, uh, private chefs. Just in case you need to be picked up [00:11:00] or brought to the airport or train station, wherever

[00:11:03] **Alison Innes:** [00:11:03] you need to go. Really. You are making me hungry with all this talk about chocolate and, uh, and pastries. Um, it sounds really delightful now. Well, as, as we record this, we've kind of just crossed the boundary into year two of, uh, of COVID life.

[00:11:19] And so that must be, that must be really challenging. Um, you mentioned that you're in burgundy. Um, at the moment, I, I can imagine worse places to be locked down and, uh, you're not sitting the idols. So how. How has the pandemic been affecting your tourism business? Well,

[00:11:39] **April Pett:** [00:11:39] um, as of March 20, 20 tourism in Paris really came to a standstill in 2019, 20 million people came to Paris and last year it seems like maybe 20 people in total, just due to due to the pandemic.

[00:11:55] Um, so when. Pandemic, [00:12:00] uh, began, you know, all of the tours that I had lined up for 2020, which was really gearing up to be my most successful year ever everybody had to cancel their plans. Their flights were canceled, everything was canceled. Um, I've been lucky enough though that, um, most of my clients. Have said, you know, April, once this is over, we are coming back to Paris, we're coming for you.

[00:12:29] So that's really kept my spirits high. Um, I did come back to Canada for most of 2020, to be honest, that, to spend the time with my family in such a difficult scenario and

with no work, it just seems like the right thing to do, uh, for, for myself. Um, but yeah. Um, in the late fall, I came up with the idea to launch virtual tours.

[00:12:57] And so even though we [00:13:00] have been in lockdown for the most part of the year, um, how I have developed these virtual Experiences is via zoom. And I offer a presentation with photos and videos in live commentary. And so, so that's really kept me busy over the past few months. And in the meantime, With, with the downtime.

[00:13:24] Anyway, it's also given me the opportunity to develop new ideas. So once the borders do open and the tourists do come back to Paris, I do have a new, a few new tours, um, up my sleeve to

[00:13:38] **Alison Innes:** [00:13:38] offer. Excellent. Excellent. Well, I'm sure many of our listeners are looking forward to that. Busily adding, adding, adding some of your tours to their, to their post pandemic wishlist.

[00:13:49] And we'll have a link to your website as well in our show notes. So that you're easy for E easy for folks to find if they are interested in learning more. Um, so. [00:14:00] Um, I just want to come back to your time at Brock. You mentioned that you had visited Paris, um, but it seems like it was a really an exchange, um, opportunity in, in the south of France that really perked, perked your interest.

[00:14:15] And I was wondering if you have any. If, if maybe there were any key moments or, um, particular memories, um, that, that you have from, from your time working on your French

[00:14:27] **April Pett:** [00:14:27] degree? Well, just the dream of going to, you know, attending Brock, uh, from, from day one, my. As I mentioned, my hometown is thorough to Ontario, which is just next door to Brock.

[00:14:40] My mom works across the street from Brock university. So even as a little girl and going to visit my mom at her work, seeing the tower, that Brock tower, it was always a dream to attend Brock, you know, and that, as I grew older, I always wondered what I stepped foot into the [00:15:00] library or be part of the swim team because I used to.

[00:15:03] As a child go swimming, do my swimming lessons at Brock. Um, so really just the first days of my career was really a dream come true, walking through those holes and stepping foot into the classroom, seeing a few familiar faces and, um, just getting to know my fellow students and the professors, um, So that was my number one, you know, dream come true.

[00:15:32] And then, um, when this opportunity to study abroad camp came about, um, it was at that moment that my grandma had suggested my nowness, excuse me, suggested that I obtained my Italian citizenship. And so that was, um, You know, a blessing. It's one of the best things that I could have possibly done in my life, because that gives me the chance [00:16:00] to live in Europe, live in Paris, work in Paris without really any boundaries, but this all came together really quickly.

[00:16:08] And I was in my second year of exams. Driving back and forth to Toronto during that pressing time and to sign all of the final documentations to get that shiny new passport in my hand, um, you know, th those are stressful memories. I wouldn't change it for the world now. Um, and with that shiny passport, along with my suitcase, Along with several of my classmates setting off to Italy and then to France.

[00:16:41] Um, and then of course throwing, uh, the hat in the air, celebrating graduation with my diploma

[00:16:49] **Alison Innes:** [00:16:49] as well. Yes. Um, so you are. Well-experienced in learning languages and exploring new cultures. So, [00:17:00] um, for me, for some of our listeners or maybe potential students, um, or people thinking that they'd like to pick up a new, a new language, which seems to be a bit of a, a hobby, um, during the pandemic people wanting to brush up on, on language skills.

[00:17:16] Um, what, what advice do you have about, about learning a second, third, fourth, whatever, um, language. Go for it.

[00:17:25] **April Pett:** [00:17:25] You know, you don't have anything to lose and having a, a second language, um, is really a blessing. You know, it gives us the ability to communicate with other people. Um, these days, the world is a very small place and well, before the pandemic, people were traveling more, more than ever.

[00:17:49] And I imagine. Going to come back eventually, you know? Um, so having a second language, it will definitely open up a whole new world [00:18:00] and it will allow you to also learn about different languages and cultures, and really give you a better, um, appreciation for new traditions and religions. It's in history.

[00:18:13] And just from my experience, uh, being able to interact with locals is, is really a special feeling. So it really will boost your confidence as well. So without any hesitation, you know, download that app, sign up for that online course. I think it's such a great thing to have is the second or third or fourth language, like you say.

[00:18:41] **Alison Innes:** [00:18:41] And I find it interesting that you've you've, um, gone from one tourist tourism, rich place to another tourism rich place. I wasn't even thinking about that before we had talked, but, um, how has having experience working with tourism here [00:19:00] in Niagara? Has that, has that helped you and. Are tourists kind of the same the world over, or is there a different sort of tourists that comes to Niagara versus comes to Paris?

[00:19:11] **April Pett:** [00:19:11] Oh, I think, well, first of all, yes, of course, working in the tourism industry and back home, uh, really kind of molded me for, for the experiences. Were to come, you know, back then again, I never thought that I would be moving to Paris, but, um, it really helped boost my confidence with interacting with people.

[00:19:39] Um, you know, when I'm home, I always go for a walk down at Niagara falls and, um, And even when I wasn't working, I would love to promote the local wine wineries and

attractions, even in my own travels. If I heard somebody was going to Canada or [00:20:00] to Niagara, Toronto, et cetera. Um, I think that it's, it's pretty much the same everywhere.

[00:20:07] I mean, the type of tourism may be a bit different, but what I seen with the truth. Back in Thorold. Um, and Niagara in comparison to here in France is everybody is eager to learn and to taste and to see. And one thing that really stands out in my mind is just seeing the amazement in the eyes of the tourists as you.

[00:20:35] I speak about the rich culture in history and point out these fine details and, um, at the buildings and, and your surroundings. So, um, I think that everybody, no matter where they go will have that same excitement building up. Yeah. To see,

[00:20:54] **Alison Innes:** [00:20:54] and to learn now, tourism in Paris was in the news just [00:21:00] last year or just before the pandemic, I guess it was, um, when there was the tragic fire at Notre Dame.

[00:21:08] Um, cathedral in Paris. What was it? Were you in Paris or France or somewhere in France at the time. And what was that moment like to, to experience that?

[00:21:21] **April Pett:** [00:21:21] Yes. Well, um, the two year anniversary is coming up just next week from the fire and I was actually inside notes for them. When the fight or began, I was on a tour with a family from, from the state.

[00:21:37] And, um, it was one of the most tragic days of my life. Really, you know, we weren't inside when Notre dam burst into flames, but there was a mass going on at the time. And so we stopped. We watched the mass for a few more. Then we exited not heard them, took a few photos, went around back. I [00:22:00] was cherry blossom season.

[00:22:01] Just like now it took a few photos with the cherry blossoms, a photo with the Spire and I, that family must be the last group of people to have a photo with them. The Spire intact, walked right around the front again with an ice cream. And that's when the first wisps of smoke started coming out of the bell towers.

[00:22:23] And. You know, we didn't know what was going on and how we just watched wide-eyed as she became completely engulfed in flames. And it was just absolutely horrifying. You know, I burst into tears. That's one place that I think. You know, almost on the daily when I'm working in. So to, to see, uh, notecards, um, burn like that, it's just, it's still heartbreak when I think about it.

[00:22:51] Um, they are making way though with the renovations of north Hudson and, uh, [00:23:00] originally. You know, the French government was hoping that by the year 2024, when we host the Olympic games in Paris, that the renovations would be complete by that time. I'm not sure if that will happen, if that will come to fruition.

[00:23:14] But, uh, it's, it's a nice school and they're, they're, they're progressing in, in the renovation

[00:23:19] **Alison Innes:** [00:23:19] works. Yeah. I certainly remember where I was. Um, when, when, when I heard, heard the news and it, it was, it was quite stunning to see, um,

to, to see the images and, and I can only imagine and sympathize, but it must've been like to, to have to have been there, um, at that momentous moment in, uh, in, in history for the people of Paris.

[00:23:45] Well, not

[00:23:46] **April Pett:** [00:23:46] Saddam has been, uh, standing tall and proud in the heart of Paris for over 850 years. Um, so she's just getting a little bit of a facelift. She'll be as good as new, hopefully in no time.

[00:24:00] [00:24:00] **Alison Innes:** [00:24:00] I want to end on a sad note and you certainly have given us some oft optimism. And, and I know I, I have seen in the, in the news myself, I've seen some articles about, about the progression of.

[00:24:12] There, but what kinds of things are you looking forward to doing again, or, uh, places that you want to visit? Kind of what's your, your post pandemic, um, dream that, uh, that keeps you going right now.

[00:24:29] **April Pett:** [00:24:29] Well, even after seven and a half years of living in Paris, my bucket list continues to get longer, pretty much every week and pre pandemic.

[00:24:39] You know, I definitely would try to check off an item or two of that bucket list, uh, you know, weekly, but working in tourism. Meeting folks along the way, they'd say, April, have you been here? Have you done this? And so my bucket list would continuously bro, really looking forward to, uh, being able to, you know, [00:25:00] wander again freely to check out some of those attractions and even some of the smaller museums and galleries.

[00:25:07] Um, But what I'm really aching for is a glass of rosé on a terrace.

[00:25:15] **Alison Innes:** [00:25:15] Oh, that sounds lovely. That sounds lovely. And especially on a spring

[00:25:19] **April Pett:** [00:25:19] day, Jerry, the weather's beautiful here, but I think that. Most French people would have that same response that terrace life is, you know, the heart and the soul of French culture.

[00:25:34] And so if you were to talk to any French person, I'm sure, you know, 99% would say the same sitting on a terrace, watching the world go by after all, um, people watching is the national sport here in France.

[00:25:51] **Alison Innes:** [00:25:51] Well, thank you so much for your time. We will let you get back to your, uh, your work had relaxation in Burgundy.

[00:25:58] And, um, [00:26:00] thank you again. It's it's it has been a real pleasure to, uh, to have you on this episode.

[00:26:04] **April Pett:** [00:26:04] Yes. Thank you so much, Alison it's been great chatting with you.

[00:26:14] **Nicole Arnt:** [00:26:14] Thank you so much for listening to forward. Find all of our footnotes links to more information, transcripts and past episodes on our website. Rock u.ca forward slash humanities. We love to hear from our listeners. So please join us on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram at rock humanities, please subscribe and rate us as well on your favorite podcasting app.

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