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Come in...and be captivated...

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Cathy Marie Buchanan; photo by Nigel Dickson

Walking down a cobblestone street in Belle Époque Paris, you wrap your shawl more tightly around yourself as the chill sets in, reaching past your skin to your innermost thoughts. Plagued by the struggles of merely surviving, it is of no concern to you that the ghosts of Zola and Degas slowly stride past with penetrating stares that would presume to harness your secrets if they could...

Sitting with tired hands folded in your lap after a long day's work as a seamstress, you watch the hope on your child's face as your husband comes in the door of your quaint home and see that hope fade as he does

not pick up the child but instead, takes to the stairs, preoccupied with holding back the tide of the future that threatens to destroy a natural wonder and his essence along with it...

Author Cathy Marie Buchanan creates characters that you can simultaneously lose and find yourself in. Whether the latter portion of the 1800s, the early portion of the 1900s, Paris or Canada, she places you within the fictitious consciousness of her protagonists outside the confines of time and space. Family dynamics and stripped down emotional truths are portrayed in such a way as to make you believe the characters' plights with emotional acuity. Whether or not you can directly relate to their particular set of circumstances, you feel as though you are standing not outside of them looking in but inside looking out at the environment she has created. Long after the stories end, you feel as though you knew these people once, some time ago and think of them still, concerned with whatever became of them.

We examine history from a personalized perspective with Buchanan who brings key historical personalities to new life and asks the question of 'What if?'

*Buchanan is the New York Times best-selling author of The Painted Girls and The Day the Falls Stood Still. Her most recent novel, The Painted Girls was selected as a People Magazine pick and a book "People Are Talking About" by Vogue. Prior to her novels, her stories appeared in some of Canada's most highly regarded literary journals: *The Antigonish Review*, *The Dalhousie Review*, *Descant*, *The New Quarterly* and *Quarry*. Cathy has been awarded grants by both the Ontario Arts Council and the Toronto Arts Council.*

Interview with Cathy Marie Buchanan by Nicole M. Bouchard

1) You use history as a canvas of sorts to paint stories of figures that are so vivid, the reader first feels as though they have walked inside the heavy footsteps of these characters, with them along the same gray streets, contemplating the same circumstances. Once the book has come to a close, the reader then feels certain that they have known these figures as close acquaintances, years ago, few details about them dulled by time. In personalizing history through your multi-layered characters for a higher understanding of the past by contemporary readers, you skillfully tackle a significant task.

In the Author's Note for *The Day the Falls Stood Still*, you discuss aspects of a historical personality that were not reflected in the character inspired by him. You noted that your "...riverman would not have lauded the daring. The Niagara was not a river to be mocked." Similarly, as you explain a fictitious crossing of paths in the Author's Note for *The Painted Girls* you state that the "...fateful day when Antoinette met Abadie behind the Paris Opéra...is nothing more than imagination and ink." In the evolution of your characters and their life stories, what is your process when it comes to the distinguishing point where history ends and the creative facility enters to bring them off the page as remarkable persons all their own?

The process was quite different for each novel. When I first put fingertips to keyboard to write The Day the Falls Stood Still, I intended to stick to the known facts of real life riverman William "Red" Hill. Once I got writing, though, I found the riverman I was setting on the page was not the sort of man to share "Red" Hill's penchant for daredevilery. My fictional riverman's reverence for the Niagara River ran too high for that. It was an easy decision to depart from historical fact and create a character merely inspired by his real life counterpart. In The Painted Girls, I adhere quite closely to the known facts of the Van Goethem sisters' lives. The facts, however, are scant, which I believe appealed to me as it left lots of room for imagination. As I wrote, there were certain real life events (e.g., Marie's admission to the Paris Opéra Ballet dance school, the exhibition of Little Dancer Aged Fourteen, her dismissal from the school, Antoinette's arrest for stealing 700 francs) that I incorporated into the fictionalized account of their lives. The events acted almost as signposts, guiding me in writing the story.

In both novels, I worked very hard to create characters who were entirely plausible given their historical settings, regardless of how closely they reflect their real life counterparts.

2) Concerning the roles of women, both novels demonstrate the "a man is not a plan" euphemism. Female characters often find themselves in situations where they are suddenly struggling to independently sustain themselves whether by loss or by associations with weak or unscrupulous

men. Women from each of the novels (Antoinette, Bess and her mother) remedy their situations by taking up a needle and thread. Though these time periods offered this as one of the few options for a female profession, was their chosen occupation intended to be symbolic of their need to ‘mend’ the fabric of their lives, to give them form and structure, trying to put the pieces back together? Do you believe that the general message of autonomy, even within a positive relationship, is a timeless one needing to be heard by modern generations of women?

I love the idea of the symbolism behind the seamstress profession, but in truth I chose the profession for Antoinette, Bess and her mother because it was one of the few professions open to women of the novels’ time periods and because it is a profession I know. As a teenager, I sewed most of my clothes and designed plenty of them. In fact, I beaded my own wedding gown, an experience that informed the musings of the character Bess as she tackles the same on behalf of Miss O’Leary in the pages of The Day the Falls Stood Still. Certainly the message about maintaining autonomy is a timeless one. Always the unexpected can happen but more importantly women must be careful to maintain a sense of self.

3) On the topic of faith, your stories show protagonists beginning with religion (indoctrinated by education) as an integral part of their lives. They then lose their faith through hardship and subsequent disillusionment but at their climactic darkest hour, come back to some semblance of peace with it, though not as it was before. Antoinette (*The Painted Girls*) and Bess (*The Day the Falls Stood Still*) both come to a level of comfort that allows for belief in something more without asking them to forget what they’ve endured. It seems to be a prevalent theme as more and more people today are questioning or turning from organized religion in the wake of world/personal tragedies, grief or doubt. What are your thoughts on striking a balance between the faith of our roots and our own individual spirituality born as a result of our experiences?

The religion of our roots is, in most instances, thrust upon us as children, ideas we seldom question until maturity. I think true spirituality comes once we’ve questioned those early beliefs and had them shaped by our experience. We then choose to make a renewed commitment to those beliefs or to adopt some more personally meaningful variant.

4) In *The Day the Falls Stood Still*, was Tom's fate a metaphoric commentary on what can sometimes happen to nature when pitted against man's insatiable quest for progress (and or greed)?

I've heard this interpretation many times and while I like it and can see how readers might come to this conclusion, it is not what I intended. In my mind, Tom does not lose his ability to read the river once it has been altered by the development of hydroelectricity. He understands that the odds are stacked against him when he goes into the whirlpool. He says "Believe in me, Bess" because he knows that in order for her not to sink into despair should he not emerge from the whirlpool, she needs to be able to believe in him in much the way he did Fergus. Tom could feel Fergus's presence, feel his love though he was long gone.

5) In *The Painted Girls*, I found there to be an interesting juxtaposition between the luminary figures of Émile Zola and Edgar Degas and their acquiescence to some of the limiting beliefs of their time. Your novel highlights and examines an important contradiction; these brilliantly creative, innovative personalities, men ahead of their time and daring in their arts, both bought into narrow, supposedly "scientific" thinking that condemned people of certain circumstances or actual physical features to fates of ruin or crime.

Discussing Zola and the stage version of *L'Assommoir*, the article on page 45 states:

Zola claims serious scientific aims in writing the story. He calls it a naturalist novel, literature of our scientific age, a novel of observation, a work of truth, the first novel of the common people that does not lie about their authentic smell. He has conducted an experiment, he insists, by placing into a certain milieu a young laundress of a certain temperament. From there, the story advances according to the rules of science rather than his own fanciful whims. It turns out the way it must, given the twin forces of heredity and environment, their authority in determining the young laundress's fate.

The work depicting the laundress's downward spiral after a glimpse of hope and success would appear to be a detrimental message to the common class

of the time, inspiring negative self-fulfilling prophecies, telling them to aspire to no better.

Degas and his belief in the theory of physical features hinting at moral depravity, that “the typical criminal is savagely ugly: monstrum in fronte, monstrum in animo” (page 11), went so far as to be included at the sixth exposition of 1881 through his pastel entitled *Criminal Physiognomies* shown along with *Little Dancer Aged Fourteen* of Marie van Goethem. In your Author’s Note, you wonder that by including her image with those of convicted criminals, “Was he hinting at the future criminality of the girl in the vitrine?.. How might such perceptions have affected the life of his teenage model?”

If Zola and Degas were generally forward-thinkers stepping into new territory with their mediums and had access to some of the more compassionate philosophies of the Victorian Age (themes reflected in works sympathetic to common classes such as the social commentary in Dickens’ novels), why do you think they chose to hold with some of the more limiting, ignorant beliefs of the time that could potentially inflict damage to certain sets of people? As Dickens said, in opposition to the importance of appearances and station, “Virtue shows quite as well in rags and patches as she does in purple and fine linen.” If creative individuals shape an age and give it a voice, what responsibilities do you feel they are naturally imbued with?

I think it is because Degas and Zola were forward thinking that they looked to the burgeoning field of science to inform their art and broke with the longstanding traditions in their artistic domains. Through the lens of the 21st century, the idea of certain facial features marking a person as having a tendency toward crime seems ignorant but in 1880s Paris it would have seemed highly erudite. While I do think it was heartless of Degas to make and show a sculpture that would surely have been detrimental to the model, it is certainly not the first instance of an artist of great genius putting the pursuit of his art above all else. I believe it is the responsibility of an artist to adhere to his convictions. In this, both Degas and Zola succeeded, even if today some of their convictions appear wrong-headed.

6) For the benefit of our readers who are also writers, talk to us about the trajectory of your writing career from starting out with short fiction appearing in highly regarded literary journals, applying for and receiving grants to having a debut novel become a best-seller.

Often asked if I grew up wanting to be a writer, I answer with a definitive 'no'. I spent my teenage years disgracing myself in high school English, often getting upwards of 20 percent deducted for spelling mistakes on exams. When it came time to head off to university, one of the criteria I used for selecting courses was not having to write—that is, spell—a single thing. I graduated with a BSc (Honours Biochemistry) and then an MBA, both from Western University, and spent the bulk of my non-writing work life at IBM, at first in finance and then in technical sales.

Though there is little evidence of it in my educational and early work life choices, my creative leanings were apparent throughout my teenage years, in both my burgeoning abilities as a seamstress and in my serious pursuit of classical ballet. While at IBM, I satisfied my creative side by enrolling in a string of continuing education courses, always something with an artistic bent, and eventually hit upon creative writing. I kept up the regimen of full-time work by day and a writing class or bit of crammed-in scribbling in the evening for four years, all the while longing for more time to write than existed in the tiny gap between scrubbing my three young children clean and falling into bed myself.

After having a handful of stories published in literary fiction magazines and being awarded a writing grant on the merit of the stories, I left my corporate position to take a serious stab at writing. Within a week of sending out The Day the Falls Stood Still to publishers, I received the wonderful news that it would be published in Canada, the U.S., the U.K., and Italy. (In case I've made this sound easier than it was, I will point out that I spent four years writing the novel, including two and a half years of rewriting.) More good news came shortly before the book hit the shelves. The Day the Falls Stood Still would be showcased in the U.S. as a Barnes & Noble Recommends selection, a designation awarded to only four or five books each

year. With such a weighty endorsement, the novel debuted on The New York Times bestseller list, which surely set the stage for The Painted Girls achieving the same. Yes, I feel truly blessed.



Jane Webster; photo by Robyn Lea

Dear Readers,

After a long and dreary winter, what better way to greet spring than with author Jane Webster and her beautiful books celebrating food, life and joie de vivre? At my French Table and its companion volume French Ties are two gorgeous volumes that contain the enchanting story of Jane Webster's serendipitous search for and restoration of a French chateau.

Webster, a former primary school teacher and café owner in Melbourne, had a dream of opening a cooking school in France. Her approach to running this school is so unique that it blows away the competition of which there is much. Webster, well-aware of that competition, decided to run culinary tours combined with hands-on cooking and most exciting of all, the students, she decided, would spend the week at the chateau itself.

She takes you by the hand on her magical odyssey (fraught with trials, travails and travel) through the most exquisite photographs detailing her quest to find the perfect chateau for her and her family, one that would contain an industrial-sized kitchen and also comfortably house her family and guests- including her students, as she was developing her plan to create a truly unique cooking school experience. You are present as the chateau is first found and then transformed, the town embraces them, the surrounding farm animals become a part of their daily lives and the locals display their seasonal harvests and generously share their techniques and Webster in turn shares them with you, the lucky reader.

On this journey you will also discover the elixir of health at Fécamp Abbey, a glass of Benedictine to be taken at dinner, visit Norman seaside resorts, be taken to the region's finest restaurants, you will look for treasures at the local brocantes (flea markets) and delight in her find of a long sought after place setting. You will also be shown so up close you could reach out and touch them, the artworks of Rouen, dubbed by Victor Hugo as the city of a thousand spires, see children skating in front of Notre Dame and hear the monks chanting at Abbaye du Bec-Hellouin.

Never flowery in her descriptions, the story is written in her own refreshingly down-to-earth style that makes you feel as though you've sat down and had a long talk with a dear friend. She guides you to her outdoor table under the Linden tree, known for its healing properties, and offers you a cup of tea made from the leaves of the Linden. Here, she tells

you tales of her life along with fascinating anecdotes of the house's long and varied history.

Inside, the house beckons as Webster has waxed all of the woods with linseed oil and beeswax prior to your arrival. She has filled the halls, bedrooms and baths with the smells of French lavender and freshly baked tarts emanating from the kitchen. What makes the chateau most special of all, however, is when her four children and little dog are gracing its halls, her husband is out working in the gardens, her father fixing clocks in the barn. When you see the photos of the house lit up at night, surely you can see that it is smiling down from its perch with pride, this being its favorite incarnation.

My only complaint is that, like any good adventure, the books come to an end...but not without the sharing of cooking techniques and ingredients straight from the locals. These sensuous recipes are a lasting gift generously shared by the author from the land where food is life.

Interview with Jane Webster by Denise Bouchard

“Place is more important than strength” Vedic proverb

1) When speaking of your cooking school, you write “...in our first summer at Bosgouet I spent time refining my plan for The French Table. My role would be as impresario. I would play host to the groups of guests who had come to Bosgouet to get a taste of the chateaux life and learn to cook. The groups would stay for a week at a time, and I'd put together an itinerary that would take in the sights of Normandy as well as the region's best markets and restaurants. I wanted a well-reputed chef to run daily hands-on cooking classes, using ingredients that would either come from our potager or from the local markets we visited.”

The notion of the cooking school with its approach that involves an all-encompassing induction to the tastes, sights, ways and traditions of Northern French life sounds like a unique and transformative experience. From the freshness of local markets to the architecture to the philosophies of a well-cooked meal slowly savored amidst family and friends, have any of your students been inspired toward a lifestyle change after the course? Share with us anecdotes about students' revelations, whether some learned more than how to cook in the French tradition, whether some learned a different way to live.

We refer often to "the magic of Bosgouet" as it seems to bring people together with a common love of great seasonal produce and finest wines to accompany... However beyond this common thread of food, Francophilia and a hankering for an immersed experience in the French countryside or la vie en chateau, lies something more. Many people come to The French Table looking for a new direction in their lives. It may be a major change or a simple change in mindset.

One couple who have now attended three French Tables with me, headed off to a local real estate agent in search of their own slice of French paradise. I've had much feedback from past visitors that they have gone back to their lives in Australia, America, New Zealand, South Africa, UK, Holland...just to name a few and injected a little bit of France into their daily lives. This has included shopping daily as the French do, making a conscious decision to only eat seasonally and locally. Stopping to share an aperitif with family on a nightly basis; not necessarily alcoholic but a deeper ritual that unites a family and opens the channels of communication so important in family life. I'm convinced that people do not arrive at Bosgouet looking for a change, big or small or ready to open up, discuss openly the most raw emotions within... However, it happens again and again. Maybe it's the serenity and purity of The Bosgouet Walk that spins its magic on everyone and brings an honesty and clarity to long conversations made with new friends, or simply being away from the every day hum drum of life in a place so real.

2) Having read *At my French Table* and *French Ties*, I feel as though I've come home in some regard.

My father was stationed in Normandy in WWII at about nineteen years old and he always told us that he wanted to go back there. While in La Madeleine he became very close to the townspeople and was keenly aware of their wartime needs. One of the first families that he came in contact with had the same last name as he did. My father, coming from a traditional French household, had many of the same loves that they did; particularly a love of homemade French food. He missed his mother's cooking and the family missed having good tires for their cars. My father provided and they

in turn invited him for dinners. I think that perhaps the effect that his time there had on our lives was significant, even down to my given middle name.

I listened to these stories with the rapt attention of a fascinated child hearing of far off places. If he was here now I'd hang on his every word and ask endless questions. Many of us can relate to having loved ones shaped by the experiences and travels of their youth, their histories an intricate part of who they are. We often wish we could glimpse back in time to see these formative events. In that vein, as it was Normandy that affected the successive generations of our family, I thought it would be an unusual and interesting exercise to have you fill in the blanks with facts and fiction about that time:

Where is La Madeleine located in Normandy?

La Madeleine is a hamlet situated within the village of Sainte-Marie-du-Mont... A village in North West France, very near to Utah beach.

What might the farmhouse of the family he visited have looked like (structure, décor)?

It may have been a typical Norman farmhouse in the half-timbered Norman style. This style of architecture has a heavy emphasis on wood, both inside and out. The style of farmhouse is often long and low with beautiful thatched roof where perennial bulbs bloom each Springtime. Colomage architecture can be seen throughout the region of Normandy in pretty Norman villages dotted throughout the region. Colomage farm houses often sit on a significant plot of land, positioned beautifully amongst ancient trees and manicured Norman gardens. These beautiful Norman structures are easily identified by their half timbered walls, filled in with local flint stone or mud panels. They are similar in style to the Tudor style of England.

Would he have been in danger leaving the base to get to this family?

The hedgerows so prominent in Normandy would have been both a danger and perhaps a safe haven for your father. These hedge structures have been planted by Norman farmers for

centuries to border their fields. They typically grow to around five foot tall and are often just as thick. They were used during WWII for German forces to hide and sneak up on allied forces. The hedgerows of the Norman countryside caused great distress for the allied forces during the battles on Norman soil during WWII... Your father may have found this natural fortress helpful in his journeys to visit this family or a hindrance as he would not have been able to see beyond the next hedgerow.

What might they have served him for dinner and what would the etiquette and conversation have been like?

A typical Norman meal would have started with an aperitif, perhaps a kir normand (kir topped with local cider), a Pernod or Calvados. A typical Norman meal will commence with an entrée, perhaps a beautiful green salad topped with melted Camembert crouton, the freshest herbs, carefully pan fried lardon with the oil and juices of the lardon serving as a succulent dressing for the salad greens. The "plat" or main course may have been perfectly sautéed milk fed veal from a local farmer, served with a creamy mushroom sauce and homegrown haricot vert from the garden. Your father would then have been offered the compulsory Norman cheese platter. A variety of cheeses would have been offered including Pont-l'Évêque, Livarot and Camembert... I'm sure they would have been all local cheeses being war time. To finish, I imagine dessert may have been a deliciously buttery and flakey Tarte Tatin made with local Norman apples and served with great dollops of the purest crème fraîche!

3) You write so beautifully; like an artist with a brush, you use your pen to paint a picture of a different culture so that we can feel, smell and taste the foods, experience the atmosphere and know the people.

When did you find the time to create these gorgeous books and what went into their formation (finding the right photographer, assembly of ideas, etc..)?

I worked on At my French Table over a two year period when we first went to live in France. My writing tends to fit in

between all the other hats I wear and while children were at school or sleeping!

What led you to your decision to share your brave story of transition with the world?

I had always had a hankering to write. Even today I can close my eyes and I am back on my childhood bed, legs crossed with a notebook perched on my lap as I chew on a pencil, contemplating the next line of my poems. I dreamt of one day writing a book and of course to seven-year-old Jane, the ultimate prize would be to be published.

What does your writing space look like at the chateau? What are your culinary muses when you write to create a sensory experience as you enter the writing mode (with a cup of tea and pain du chocolat, fresh regional fruit, etc...)?

My French oak desk sits snugly in the corner of one of the sitting rooms on the main reception level of the chateau. It's a smallish desk with three drawers for all my paraphernalia and a beautiful blue and white china lamp base... Topped with a pleated, clotted cream shade. I love this space as I sit and look out the floor to ceiling French window that flanks my right side. It's an incredibly easy place to sit and wile away the hours. Often accompanying me at my desk is a huge pot of English breakfast tea, my favorite china mug and slices of hot toast smothered in the best Norman butter... Perfect writing partners!!

I've also been known to write a huge amount with a flute of champagne at my side... I've often said "champagne is my writing muse."

4) On the note of serendipity which we often encounter at our publication, do you think that the universe enters in to help us when we begin to move ahead with plans that align with our dreams (our purpose or what we're meant to do)? For example, the chateau you found fits your lifestyle so perfectly in that the school for your children was right near you, your father found a close friend in a neighbor (sharing a love of antiquing), the kitchen

in the basement and every room in the house satisfies the needs not only of your family but your dream of a cooking school.

On a smaller scale, the vintage Villeroy and Boch place setting that you had wanted since you were sixteen was discovered at one of those wonderful flea markets (foire aux puces); by the time your father, daughter and husband told you that they had found the setting, you'd purchased it. On your morning walks, the cows surrounding your neighbor's property entice your darling little dog Peppie to run with them.

It seems as though the universe is saying, 'We love your idea for this life and you've worked so hard and loved it into being so well that we are coming in to help fulfill different facets along the way.'

I'm a huge believer that the universe reaches out to us if we are open to opening our hearts, dreams and desires to her. I often think its all a matter of taking the tiniest first step when it comes to making your dreams a reality. I know it's been said time and time again, however, we all do have one life to live and making the most of our time on this incredible earth and experiencing all she has to offer is all we can ask for. We have always wanted to be good role models to our kids and encourage them to also follow their dreams in whatever direction they may take them... 'No regrets' is the motto of the Webster house and an underlying understanding that we will all make mistakes along the way and it's more important to learn from those mistakes and pick yourself up after the negative ones than to dwell on them... To also realise that some mistakes can take us on the most enchanting, wonderful adventures and this can be frightening but life-changing and exhilarating as well.

5) Doing what you did, going to Normandy from Melbourne with your family and purchasing the chateau to embark on this project, was a major life change and the fact that it was done so as to affect the lives of all around you in such a positive way has been deeply touching and inspirational to me. What personal qualities, strengths, beliefs did you draw upon that gave you a level of comfort that it would all work out for the best? Even when it wasn't certain that the house would come through, even when there were no guarantees of friendships to be had once you got there, even when the

fireplaces were torn from the walls and stolen, you still steadily moved forward.

I was incredibly fortunate to meet and marry Peter who was as passionate...if not more [so] than I was about this whole adventure. I'm a homebody and many times could have fallen into a funk and thought 'Oh it's all too much. Let's just stay in Melbourne and forget this fanciful idea.' [Yet] whenever I ventured into this territory, there he was, my rock, supporting, coaxing, encouraging me out of my comfort zone to move forward and make this dream a reality for our family.

Determination plays an enormous role in our lives and a sense of fun and adventure keeps us going when things get tough. We have often talked about why we did what we did and apart from not wanting to live with regret had we not gone ahead with our French plans, we truly wanted to make an impact on the lives of our children. We wanted them to gain the qualities, strengths and beliefs that they could do and be anything they liked in the world. We wanted them to gain and understand another language and culture and become citizens of the world that embraced the differences of any land they might find themselves in. We believe our initial two year stint in France also made them kind, patient people that have great tolerance for those around them. They face difficult situations with a sense of calm and maturity that I could only have dreamt of at the same age... Being thrown into a foreign school with no language skills will do that to you!

6) "A story is not like a road to follow...it's more like a house. You go inside and stay there for a while, wandering back and forth and settling where you like and discovering how the room and corridors relate to each other, how the world outside is altered by being viewed from these windows. And you, the visitor, the reader, are altered as well by being in this enclosed space, whether it is ample and easy or full of crooked turns, or sparsely or opulently furnished. You can go back again and again, and the house, the story, always contains more than you saw the last time. It also has a sturdy sense of itself of being built out of its own necessity, not just to shelter or beguile you"- Alice Munro, award-winning Canadian short-story writer

In the reading of your books, one soon sees that they're far more than lifestyle tomes or simply recipe books; instead, one enters a beautiful story where your home is featured as one of its characters with a personality of its own, an old soul with its own history. The house and the land and the people seem to have embraced all of you, loving you right back. You learned much of the house's history and it truly is a character that has seen much, from the Nazi occupation to the gambling Duchesse and an impressionist painter. What do you think the house, in its current incarnation, would like to say? What might be said of this gorgeous home that just wanted to be loved?

When we first started to inspect chateaux back in 1998 we were told by eccentric English Chatelaines that were in the business of selling these grand old estates that: "You will not find the chateau... The chateau will find you." Of course I immediately fell under this spell and was convinced that indeed the chateau would find us and Pete rolled his eyes with a sly smile and made noises like a witch brewing her latest spell all the while rotating his imaginary ladle in the cast iron pot. Many laughs and taunts later we were no longer laughing... Or should I say Pete was no longer laughing as Bosgouet was indeed calling us to make her our home. The pull to fill this gorgeous old house with laughter, love and family was so incredibly strong and all encompassing. I'd hope Bosgouet sees the Webster Family, her current custodians, as an important part of her history. We saved her from rack and ruin or from becoming a reality TV show. We've filled her with friends and family, strangers and events bringing a wonderful mix of true, old fashioned "home" and a lovely understated commercial side that keeps her ticking along without compromising her soul.

7) Family is what it's all about and yours is a beautiful example with a loving, supportive husband, four beautiful children and a very involved father. I know that you're juggling two big lives and in doing so, you make it look easy, though I know it can't be. Yet as Helen Keller said, "Life is either a daring adventure or nothing." Talk to us about the importance of taking risks, trying radically new/different things to pursue our happiness.

Firstly, thank you so much Denise. Your feedback and understanding of my story has blown me away. You have been so incredibly generous with your thoughts on my books and my

life. Family to me is everything, it's what my first breath each morning is centered on. My husband and my children are my very being and this adventure has taken us as individuals but also as a family to a very special, secure place where we all love to come and gather around a table, talk, eat, share and reflect. I remember my son, aged 17 at the time, coming into the kitchen at Bosgouet a few weeks before Xmas and popping his arm around me, gently leading me to the French windows. The Xmas music was playing in the background, I was baking shortbread and mince tarts in my ideal Xmas world of my own and my adolescent son, with his arm wrapped around me, staring out the window at the softly falling snow says, "There's nothing better than this Mum... Is there?" It's these wonderful moments in life that make all the risks so worth it.

Click the photo above to visit the author's site.
For more information on the cooking school, also check out the Facebook page:
<https://www.facebook.com/pages/The-French-Table-at-Chateau-Bosgouet/119068388251434>

*Here we would like to thank featured past and present authors for permitting us to interview them. It was an honor to be able to discuss the craft of writing with them.

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