

I had a lot of fun teasing the French when I lived in Paris in the 70's. All I had to do was serve four courses instead of seven, make pancakes for lunch, put the salad at the beginning of the meal instead of the end, or – worst transgression of all – dump the meat, potatoes, vegetables and salad all in one plate, American-style, and say, “Voilà!”

It was easy to be a rebel over there, something I'm good at as long as attitude counts more than subversive action. What can I tell you? It was the spirit of the times. (I never burned any bras, but, on the other hand, I didn't wear any either.)

So – back to the playground where I took off my shoes and squatted in the sand alongside my baby son. And slid down the slides after him. The other French mothers were too busy admonishing their offspring not to get water from the Place des Vosges fountains on their leather-trimmed “playclothes” to have my kind of fun. The occasional father would guide his child up the stairs of the slide like this: “First put your right foot on this step, now lift your left foot, now pull yourself up!”

Of course I wore jeans with an embroidered butterfly I had stitched on to cover a hole that was – come to think of it – suggestively positioned on my thigh. Let the françaises prance in their heels and summer dresses. I had scarves in my shoulder-length hair.

Still I looked French enough pushing a baby carriage for one confused American tourist to continue to talk to me in French even after I said, “Listen, you can speak to me in English!”

Other outrages of mine – putting the light on in my darkened apartment before the appointed (?) hour, rinsing dishes with the water running, “insulting” a clove of garlic by not slicing it daintily enough, boorishly putting a container of milk on the kitchen table (instead of a creamer), oh, and picking up my son when he cried instead of letting him “make his lungs.”

Not exactly a march on Washington, but I did my darnedest to stand up for the good ole American way of life!