

Is it done yet?

As I take a final climb up Les terrasses du pech de Foix and look out over this magical little city, I am filled with a flurry of mixed emotions. Within me are waves of such immense gratitude for the remarkable experiences, a thread of the desire to cling to what now feels comfortable and familiar and a fearless spark of excitement for what lies ahead. Tomorrow morning I pack out of my sweet urban flat that has been my home and refuge for a month. From here I head deeper into the Pyrenees Natural Preserve to be closer to nature. For the next 12 days, I will reside in the tranquil Hameau of Laborie, with its total of 30 inhabitants that I believe include the donkeys and goats. There is no logic to my inspired decision, there never is. I just know I am meant to explore and see what lies just beyond.

These first weeks were to be all about writing, and that mission has been accomplished. Every morning starting at dawn I have written for as long as I can stand to hear my own words rattle in my head. On some grey drizzling days I fell so deep into my work that it was well into the afternoon before I took notice. And then there were the days of crisp sunlight unique to mountain areas that played through the front windows taunting me to come out for a walk along the glistening Ariege. There were times when my writing flowed like a stream and other times I felt a struggle and strain to articulate what is oh so clear in my head. Nevertheless, the writing got done.

But what is considered done in a writers world? I've come to learn a new definition of done since I have written books. There is my first done – the explosive download from my head into some organized fashion. Then there is the next done – done enough to share it with my team of trusted critiques who with compassion patiently proof my mixed metaphors and tangled tenses, politely point out sections of utter nonsense, and

kindly ask me to get the heck out of the way of what needs to be said. This is the done where I have arrived. The next part is less writing and more crafting. And when I have integrated all of the suggestions, the entire manuscript of 18 chapters will go back to my trusted friend and editor Tim Owens whom I simultaneously love and hate. And when I am ready to quit, he is able to push me to write in a way I never thought possible. Tim will give it the final eagle eye before it gets passed along to Christine Terrell. Christine is the masterful designer who makes my books come alive with images and diagrams, and she's also a dear friend. She no doubt will have some say about how the chapters flow and what needs to be called out and highlighted to aid the reader's experience. And then, only then, does it goes to the publisher.

So many stages of done! Sometimes the process feels like an endless set of flight connections which at any time can go awry, leaving you stranded in an airport terminal from hell for who knows how long? That's why I am such a fan of direct flights! Unfortunately, I have yet to discover the direct flight to book publishing.

I intentionally chose Foix, a more urban setting, to reside without a car and write my book. I so enjoy the ease of having my daily needs met on foot and the way it connects me with the community. To pop into the organic shop every few days for fresh veggies, walk to de papeterie for a new writing pad or pens, or simply stroll past the charming storefronts each afternoon to clear my head is a simple way to live. When I wanted to leave town, which was rare, I had at my disposal a remarkable bus system and a train that traveled from Toulouse to the Spanish border every 1-2 hours daily. Did I mention one of the stops is a short 5-minute walk to the thermal baths of Aix-les Thermes?

While I was spot on about living without a car, I erroneously thought this urban setting would allow me to live the life of a hermit. Remaining anonymous for my month-long stay in Foix

has been far from the truth. This is a curious population, and although I am an introvert, I crave one-to-one connections and learning people's stories. So while my writing has happened, I also created a small community here for myself that is nothing short of remarkable.

I can hardly wait to see what surprises await me in Laborie. Maybe this is where the hermit lifestyle will take shape, or then again maybe not. Because I will now have a car I plan to explore a wider area with a particular interest in the Saturday market of St. Girons and the village of La Bastide-de-Serou that is nestled halfway from between Laborie and Foix. I will be checking in again next week to let you know how I'm getting along with the goats and donkeys, and anyone else I happen to meet.

Be sure to follow me **@LaurenHubele** on Instagram for a daily feed of photos from **#30daysofwriting** in the Pyrenees.

Aubergine and Champignon Curry

So here is how this came to be. I'm a day away from switching houses and still hanging out in my fridge are two shiny aubergine and a bag full of fresh mushrooms. Funny enough they are sharing the shelf space with half a can of coconut milk. I don't know if you see a curry in the works but I sure did. Add to that combination of ingredients the fact that it's the coldest day yet in Foix, with a grey relentless drizzle and snow dusting the mountaintops. Something warm and fragrant sounds heavenly. So let's do this.

Ingredients

- 1 large or 2 medium aubergine (eggplant), cut into 1" cubes, lightly salted and left to drain in a colander
- 1 medium sized onion, peeled and finely diced
- 12 whole champignon (mushrooms) wiped clean with a cloth and cut into quarters
- 1 cup of frozen peas, thawed on the counter
- Coconut oil
- A can of coconut milk
- 1 tsp cumin
- 1 tsp coriander
- 2 tsp of curcumin
- A nub of ginger finely grated
- Pinches of cayenne to taste
- Salt to taste

Prepare

In a deep skillet heat a few teaspoons of oil, toss in the onions and all the spices but the ginger. Saute on medium until onion is tender and spices are fragrant. Add aubergine, mixing well with spices. Consider putting the lid on and lowering the heat to let them cook through, they will be tender and begin to lose their shape. Remove from pan and set aside. In the same skillet add a bit more oil and saute mushrooms, lower heat, cover until they have cooked through. Add coconut milk, grated ginger, and spiced aubergine mixture simmering for a few minutes to blend the flavors. Add salt to taste.

Serve with basmati rice steamed with a cinnamon stick.

Enjoy!

Note: Please feel free to ad-lib on these spices. I used what

I had acquired during my stay but you could certainly go more traditional with curry leaves and a chopped fresh pepper.