



JONNI'S CITY by Jonni L. Walker Paris Artist Paints Atlantans and More

All my friends know what a Francophile I am, so when Diana Reynolds – who knew I was making a trip to France – called and invited me to meet her friend Mary Villon de Benveniste, an American artist who lives in Paris, of course, I jumped at the opportunity. Little did I know I would make a new friend and be off on a glamorous adventure that would make my Paris sojourn so special.

Mary was married to a Frenchman and is now widowed, but still lives in Paris with her two children, William and Mary-Isabelle. She was a delight – we found we have many interests in common. Mary comes to Atlanta often to do portraits commissions, often of children, including one of Oliver, Diana's son (pictured).

While in Atlanta, she received an invitation to visit the former President George Bush and Barbara Bush in Kennebunkport, Maine to paint their portraits.

Fast-forward to France: Mary called me in Aix-en-Provence, where I was taking classes to brush up on my French (I was going to school for two weeks and then going on to Paris), and said she wanted to give a small cocktail party for me at her Paris apartment. On the night of the party, Mary picked us up at our hotel (“us” meaning my friend Maizie Hale, who was joining me for a week), and we were whisked away to a grand old Paris apartment with lofty ceilings and huge roaring fireplaces. It had turned a bit chilly, but Mary insisted that we go out on the balcony to pour the champagne- and was it worth it! We drank a toast to the Arc de Triomphe... It was so close it looked as if we could reach out and touch it. That, and some fascinating people certainly made our first night in Paris memorable. We also got to preview the George and Barbara Bush portrait, which the Bushes used as their Christmas card. It is scheduled to hang in the George Bush Library in Texas A & M University.

On our last day in Paris, a friend of Mary's drove us all around the outskirts of Paris, Versailles, Malmaison, St. Cloud and St. Germain-en-Laye, and gave us a running commentary on French history. Mary will be back in Atlanta for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation black-tie fundraiser on March 23. You too, or your children, can have a portrait painted by the artist who painted a president. Mary has donated to the live auction that night. For more information call Mebane Pulliam, 404-420-5996.