A photograph of a room with a red table, a vase of yellow flowers, a window with a view of a garden, and a mirror on the wall. The room is dimly lit, with light coming from the window on the right. The wall is green, and there is a dark wooden bench or headboard behind the table. A mirror is mounted on the wall, reflecting part of the room. The window has a wooden frame and a view of a garden with pink flowers. The overall mood is quiet and contemplative.

# Unstuck in Provence

The courage to start over

CAROLYN TATE

# Unstuck in Provence

The courage to start over

**CAROLYN TATE**

# *Dedications*

To my mother Joy, who taught me courage.

To my son Billy, who was courageous enough  
to take the journey with me.

# About Carolyn

Carolyn Tate is a businesswoman, mother, author, speaker and intrepid traveller. Apart from this book, she's written two marketing books – *Small Business Big Brand* and *Marketing your Small Business for Dummies*.

In 2010, she sold her house in Sydney, gave away most of her belongings, put her flagging business on hold, ended a highly unsatisfactory love affair and escaped with her 12-year-old son Billy, for an extended sojourn in the south of France. This is where she wrote the first draft of this book.

After returning to live in Melbourne with Billy in 2011, Carolyn worked with a women's not-for-profit for 12 months before reinventing her business from the ground up. Now she works with people she loves, on projects she loves, writing books, travelling, blogging, speaking and helping her clients reinvent their business too.

Carolyn passionately advocates for massive gender realignment and true equality for women everywhere, which is ultimately the real reason this book had to see the light of day.

To find out more about the book and Carolyn visit [unstuckinprovence.com](http://unstuckinprovence.com) and [carolyntate.co](http://carolyntate.co)

# *Thank you*

There are simply too many beautiful people to thank for supporting me in getting this book out into the public domain. There are all the wonderful, beautiful friends we made in France that feature in the book, and the many friends and family members back home who have given me the courage to publish it. You all know who you are.

In particular, I'd like to thank Billy's father, his step-mum, my mother, Joy, my sisters, Angela and Dianne, my friends Grace, Julie and Anna, my editor, Lucy, and my publisher, Julie.

Then finally, of course, there's Billy. This book was only made possible because of his courage to join me on the journey and his willingness to have his story told. I thank him for being so adept at scrutinising all parts of the book that featured him and offering his insightful edits. I also thank him for his wit, wisdom and love, as always.

# Introduction – About this book

“Our lives begin to end the day that we become silent about things that matter.” – *Martin Luther King Jr*

When we first went to live in Aix en Provence, I had another book in my head and a brilliant plan to write it there. It was *Real Women*, a book featuring the stories of nine extraordinary women who'd overcome major adversities in their lives.

Each of these women had deeply inspired me, and in their own way, were the catalyst for me to muster up enough courage to get unstuck from my own adversities.

Being an author of business books and never having written a book about the lives of women, I was frankly quite unprepared for how difficult the task would be. However, I did know it was going to be a highly emotional and intimate experience, and one that would require a great deal of compassion and creativity.

So with that in mind, I decided to accompany my writing with *The Artist's Way* – a book by Julia Cameron designed to unlock the latent creativity and talent in every person, whether that's writing, drawing, painting, singing, dancing or whatever. The 'morning pages' are the key to this program – three pages of freehand journalling to be done every single morning upon waking, with no filtering and no judgement.

For many years I'd tried to instil the discipline of meditation in my daily life with no success. My morning pages became my meditation.

At night I'd pose myself a question as I went to sleep, and then awake the next morning to discover the answer in my morning pages.

Even when I woke up feeling churlish, depressed or lonely, I'd still be looking forward to writing them.

The first two weeks of following *The Artist's Way* were filled with self-doubt about my ability to write *Real Women*. I'd been seriously procrastinating – which is easy when you've just arrived to live in a new country – and I couldn't seem to get my head or, more importantly, my heart, into it.

So one night in bed, just before I flicked off the light switch to go to sleep, I posed myself that all-important question – *Should I be writing Real Women or should I be writing a book about my own journey?*

And the morning pages answered clearly. *Write about your own journey and this time in France. Capture this experience while you're having it. It's essential for your healing and eventually it will help other women too.*

And so here you are now, not reading *Real Women* but *Unstuck in Provence*, my personal diary on how I got unstuck from a life that wasn't serving me and created a whole new life with my beautiful son Billy.

In the cold light of day, my own story seems insignificant compared to the stories of the millions of women around the world suffering under far worse conditions than I'll ever endure.

## INTRODUCTION

I believe that the most pervasive and systematic human rights abuse occurring right now in the world is female genocide and gender inequality.

One in three women are subject to physical or sexual abuse in their lifetime.

Every week in Australia, one woman is killed by her partner.

Women account for 70% of the world's population living in absolute poverty on less than \$1 a day.

One million women in the USA will be raped in the next 12 months.

In Australia, women earn 82c for every \$1 a man earns. Globally women earn half of what men earn.

Only 4.5% of the Fortune 500 CEO positions are held by women.

An estimated four million women and girls are bought and sold worldwide each year, either into marriage, prostitution or slavery.

Clearly, over the last 2000 years, men have created a patriarchal system designed to benefit men. This system is the cause of the current level of insanity we now find our world in.

Sanity will only be restored through massive gender realignment and true equality, with the feminine traits of love, wisdom, compassion and humanity at the forefront of this revolution. The time for equality is now.

But this is not a women's issue. It's a human issue – one that can only be resolved in an inclusive way by women *and* men.

And the revolution must start with us women not being willing to accept this situation. It starts with each one of us releasing ourselves from our own personal bonds of slavery, in order to create lives of meaning and so that we can be of service to other women.

## UNSTUCK IN PROVENCE

For every copy of *Unstuck in Provence* that's sold, I'll be donating 10% of net profits to The Hunger Project, a not-for-profit that puts women in developing countries at the centre of the process of bringing about equality in their community, and thereby solving their own hunger and poverty.

I hope my story resonates with you and inspires you to get unstuck – to shake off or wriggle out of the thing that may be preventing you from being the woman you were destined to be – because together we have much work to do!

3

Our New Home

Aix en Provence!

Wednesday | September

AIX-EN-PROVENCE

“Why not make a daily pleasure out of a daily necessity.”  
– Peter Mayle

Today’s the day we leave for Aix-en-Provence, our new home.

The next four months mean the world to me – a gift to myself to interrupt the old habits that no longer serve me, and an opportunity to form some new, and pleasurable daily habits. It’s about creating the space to heal, to explore my creativity, to write, to enjoy all this gorgeous country has to offer, to make new friends and to set my intention for the future. I can’t wait to get to Aix and get started!

We’re safely on board the TGV with only a three-hour journey ahead of us. I open up my *Lonely Planet* and read up on it for what seems like the hundredth time: ‘Aix-en-Provence is to Provence what the Left Bank is to Paris: a pocket of bohemian chic with an edgy student crowd. Aix is packed with bars, cafés, affordable restaurants and a wicked nightlife.’ Sounds damn fine to me!

Aix has a population of 140,000 and is located in Bouches-du-Rhône, one of eight departments in the Provence-Alpes-Cote d’Azur region. The region is one of 22 mainland regions in France and borders Italy. It’s about 650 kilometres

## OUR NEW HOME

south of Paris and just 25 kilometres inland from Marseille, the second biggest city in France. There are over 30,000 students in this city who attend the few large universities and numerous language schools. Aix is famous for being the home of Paul Cézanne, and its incredible food, flower, antique and collectible and jewellery markets.

I'm still comfortable I've made the right choice, despite not doing as much research as I would've liked. How can one be certain of anything anyhow? I know it'll be what we make of it.

We arrive at the Aix TGV station, me in a simple summer dress, Billy in a T-shirt and shorts. The sun is shining brilliantly and the sky is a deep blue that reminds me wistfully of home. The air is clear and the colours are somehow brighter and more vivid than in Paris. It's 28 degrees according to our friendly taxi driver, who happens to speak impeccable English.

I squeeze Billy's hand as we enter the city and circle the famous Rotunda fountain. Three noble women stand atop the fountain overlooking the city. Beneath them six chubby cupids sit atop six graceful swans spouting water from their beaks, while a pride of majestic lions takes guard.

We proceed down Cours Mirabeau, the main strip, where plane trees arch elegantly across the cobbled road to meet each other, their branches not quite touching. This strip is home to the most historical, elegant and gold-gilded restaurants in Aix, like Les Deux Garçons where Cézanne and Picasso would hang out for coffee and aperitifs.

The driver delivers us to 18 Rue Cardinale. We heave the bags out of the car, ring the buzzer for our landlady and haul the bags up the stairs to the apartment that's to be our home for the first four weeks of our trip.

We're greeted warmly by Laura, an attractive young French woman who shows us into the apartment. It's truly oh-so-French, with its solid old provincial furniture, big French windows, mirror above the marble mantle, a mix of abstract and portrait paintings and objects d'art, and a bookshelf full of the classics. There are two bedrooms – one with a writing desk for me – and a small kitchen, a bathroom with a bath and a large living/dining area. It's not posh or pretentious. It's rustic and full of character and it's perfect.

Laura pours us homemade lemonade and gives us instructions in a curious mix of French and English on how to use the various machines around the place. She's about to take her leave, when Billy pounces on her. "Don't forget the internet."

She gets Billy wired up and leaves us to it. We eagerly explore the apartment and bounce happily on our beds grinning at each other. If this is home, we're hooked!



## OUR NEW HOME

Thursday 2 September  
Aix

“You know, somebody actually complimented me on my driving today. They left a little note on my window that said ‘Parking Fine’.” – *Tommy Cooper*

Today we’re visiting Billy’s school, the International Bilingual School of Provence, which is over 10 kilometres away in a village called Luynes. If Billy’s scared about the prospect of a new school, I’m absolutely petrified at the prospect of having to drive him there. In France, people drive on the opposite side of the road in cars with steering wheels on the other side of the dashboard and with manual gearshifts. I haven’t driven a manual car since I was 16, when I first learnt to drive our family’s FJ Holden.

Laura very kindly helps me negotiate the rental of a little baby blue three-door hatchback and shows me how to access the car park, a 10-minute walk from the apartment.

I take a deep breath as Billy fires up the Tom Tom. “Good start,” I mumble as we kangaroo-hop out of the car park.

Just to reiterate, I’m petrified about driving in this country.

We enter the traffic. I’m driving with a concentration I’ve not had since I went for my license in that FJ Holden. Within five minutes I’ve had two gentle toots and no near col-

lisions and within 15 minutes my heart palpitations and heavy breathing have slowed considerably.

“Mum, you’re doing great,” says Billy.

“Thanks, mate, I’m feeling okay now,” I smile back.

After getting lost three times and resetting the Tom Tom more than once, we pull up in the gravel car park at the entrance of the IBS of Provence. The school is nestled amongst beautiful green rolling fields, creeks and ancient farmhouses. The main building of the school looks like what might’ve been an old farmhouse and is surrounded by tennis courts, a pool and a beautiful vine-covered courtyard.

We’re greeted by the Head of Middle School, who’s a lovely woman and makes us feel very welcome. Billy seems pretty happy about a few things. Firstly, that there’ll be girls at the school. Secondly, that he doesn’t have to wear a uniform. Thirdly, that he gets to do two hours of sport a day. On the other hand, he’s not so happy at the prospect of 1½ hours of homework a day.

He leaves feeling a little less nervous – until he gets into the car with his mother again, that is. But we drive straight home and it’s thankfully uneventful. A mid-afternoon wine – something I rarely indulge in – is a welcome relaxant after the stress of driving. I’m amazed that something so simple and seemingly insignificant, something usually so second nature, has given me such a sense of both fear and accomplishment.



## OUR NEW HOME

Friday 3 September  
AIX

“When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.” –  
*Buddhist Proverb*

The church bells of the nearby Saint-Jean-de-Malte gently bring me into a blissful state of consciousness. It’s 9am and I’ve slept for over 10 hours. I lay here, listening to the bells, the chatter of people in the street below and the space between the sounds – the silence.

Now that we’re here, settled happily and comfortably in our new home, my Higher Power has seen fit to bestow this sweet moment upon me, to gently coax me back into the spiritual practices I’ve been neglecting. I’m fully aware I’ve been running on adrenalin for the last four months and that I’ve forgotten how to stop the useless mind chatter and dwell in the present moment.

I think back to six years ago – another one of those defining moments in life. I’d asked Dad and his wife Edna if they’d take Billy and me on a tour to visit all the towns we’d lived in when I was growing up. As we pulled up at the front of our old homes and the schools I’d attended, we were reliving the happy (and some not so happy) occasions of my childhood. I was in the back seat on the long journey to our next town

and Billy was fast asleep. I opened Eckhart Tolle's *The Power of Now*. He teaches that our mode of consciousness can be transformed and that the key to becoming free of the egoic mind and all its unhappy consequences is to become deeply conscious of the present moment – The Now. In that single moment, I was ready to be taught and my teacher appeared. The irony didn't escape me that I was discovering the power of 'now' on a trip dedicated to digging up my past.

And now in my bed in this beautiful apartment, all these years later, my Higher Power is reminding me to exist wholly in this present moment. She's giving me permission to stop running and doing and planning and thinking about the past and what might happen in the future and everything I've had to do to get us to France. She's giving me permission to just be here right now. What seems like an hour passes as I lay there observing my breath and the contents of my room and listening to the sounds outside my door.

I'm awakened from my blissful state by Billy's complaining that he's hot and hungry. So after we're both fed and watered, we head out to the nearest swimming pool to cool off. We dive in and swim a few laps before stretching out on our backs in the magnificent, welcoming sun of Provence. Divine.



## OUR NEW HOME

Saturday 4 September  
AIX

“One of the very nicest things about life is the way we must regularly stop what we are doing and devote our attention to eating.” – *Luciano Pavarotti*

Food shopping in Sydney had always been a chore. Each weekend I'd prepare a list, drive to the shopping centre, fill a trolley with goods from the supermarket, stock up at the butcher, the gourmet deli and the fruit and vegetable store, drive home and unload it all. A week later I'd clean out the fridge and throw out half the perished produce I'd intended to cook but hadn't and start the process all over again. I'd unconsciously become stuck in a wasteful consumption cycle.

Today I start a whole new approach to shopping and eating. I'll walk to the markets every day and only buy what we'll eat that day. And there'll be zero wastage.

We follow our noses down Rue d' Italie towards Place des Precheurs (Preachers' Place). The sight of the farmers markets bursting with people and noise and smells, and the bountiful, beautiful, just-picked produce of regional Provence is heart-warming indeed.

I'm grinning stupidly as we make our way around the stalls buying the familiar fruit and vegetables, and then on to the less familiar – the many varieties of cheeses and olives,

the spices and herbs, tapenades, olive oils, honeys, lavender products, many varieties of mushrooms, cured meats and salamis, nougats and sweets, baguettes and breads of every description. We carefully avoid the van selling cheval (horse) products – for now, anyway.

And the best part? Billy is relishing this shopping experience, too, as he taste tests his way around the stalls and helps make our buying decisions.

Our bag is filled with glorious fresh produce for petit déjeuner (breakfast) and déjeuner (lunch) and dîner (dinner). There's not one packaged item and for the first time in years I'm totally inspired to cook again.

After buying our produce from the friendly and patient stallholders we stop at the most exquisite patisserie to buy what will become Billy's absolute favourite – a mini citron meringue pie. We find a cosy café for une café and a chocolat chaud. Billy indulges in his pie and I indulge in a spot of people-watching. I can't believe how at home I feel. J'adore Aix en Provence!



## OUR NEW HOME

Sunday 5 September  
Aix

“What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters, compared to what lies within us.”  
– *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

It's 8am and today I start to untap my latent creativity with the support of *The Artist's Way*. I'm feeling a bit daunted and a million questions come to mind. What if I get halfway through it and abandon it? What if it doesn't help me write my book? What if it brings up emotional stuff I can't deal with? What if my creative vein is completely blocked and unable to be tapped? What if, what if, what if...

So to avoid having to get started on my own creativity, we explore the cultural creativity of Aix instead. We walk along Cours Mirabeau and visit the Musée Granet to see the Alechinsky exhibition and get a sneak preview of the life of Paul Cézanne. We stop to listen to the soulful singing of an organ grinder and give him a few gold coins. Then we chance upon an authentic Provençale parade backed by drums and tin whistles. We lick our lemon and mango gelati while we wander around the streets marvelling at the statues, sculptures and fountains on every corner, and we pause outside the cathédrale to listen to the pure voices of the choir.

There's a feeling of *joie de vivre*, a general air of happiness and contentment that permeates Aix and awakens every one of my senses on this bright and sunny Sunday.

Now we're home. We pack Billy's bag for school, lay out his best shorts and T-shirt for the morning and eat a delicious platter of cheeses, olives, foie gras and crunchy baguettes dripping in olive oil from the local region.

Billy has a couple of hours to himself while I retreat to my room and tentatively open *The Artist's Way*.

*Many of us wish we were more creative. Many of us sense we are more creative, but are unable to effectively tap that creativity. Our dreams elude us. Our lives feel somehow flat. Often we have great ideas, wonderful dreams, but are unable to actualise them for ourselves. Sometimes we have specific creative longings we would love to fulfil – learning to play the piano, painting, taking an acting class, or writing, or sometimes our goal is more diffuse. We hunger for what might be called creative living – an expanded sense of creativity in our business lives, in sharing with our children, our spouse or friends.*

After reading the story of the author Julia Cameron's creative and spiritual journey, and the basic principles of the program, I sign a contract to commit myself to this program.

*I, Carolyn Tate, understand that I am undertaking an intensive, guided encounter with my own creativity. I commit myself to the 12-week duration of the course.*

*I, Carolyn Tate, commit to weekly reading, daily morning pages, a weekly artist date and the fulfilment of each week's tasks.*

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*I, Carolyn Tate, further understand that this course will raise issues and emotions for me to deal with.*

*I, Carolyn Tate, commit myself to excellent self-care – adequate sleep, diet, exercise and pampering, for the duration of the course.*

*Signed Carolyn Tate, 5 September 2010.*

There's no backing out now. While I've signed many contracts in the course of life and business, I've never signed a contract with myself. Somehow I feel this is going to be the most meaningful contract I've ever made. My body is vibrating with anticipation, for tomorrow I start my morning pages – three full freehand pages of writing to be done every single morning on waking, no judgement and no filtering.



Monday 6 September

Aix

**“Education is what remains after one has forgotten everything he learned in school.” – *Albert Einstein***

The alarm buzzes annoyingly just out of arm's reach. It's only 6am, the earliest I've woken in days and I'm grumpy.

I open my clean white journal and write:

*These morning pages are a drag and it's only day one...*

Brilliant start. I'm writing down any bit of rubbish that comes to mind. After 30 minutes I've produced three pages of pure mindless drivel. It's not the way I usually write so it's going to take some getting used to. I snap my journal shut and get up to run the bath for Billy.

I forget myself and concentrate on him. He'd been up most of the night worried and anxious about his first day at school. And now I'm as anxious as he is as he takes a bath, dresses in his self-selected uniform and tries to swallow breakfast. He's not saying much and neither am I.

We arrive at school (with no thanks to the Tom Tom again) and hide the little baby blue between a couple of enormous and expensive-looking four-wheel drives. With some trepidation we head into the school courtyard and stand bewildered within the gathering crowd of students and parents. The kids seem very cool and fashionable and I'm wondering why Billy had insisted on wearing his daggy surf shorts on the first day. He's looking at me scornfully, as if to say, 'Why am I wearing this? What are we doing here? Why are you doing this to me?'

We're waiting for Billy's grade, 4ème (Grade 8), to be called when we're told they're staggering the start times. His class doesn't start until 10.30am and we're two hours early.

"Didn't you read the email and timetable we sent out?" asks an incredulous teacher.

Obviously not.

We drive into Luynes and find a café where Billy fully deserves the two hot chocolates he consumes.

## OUR NEW HOME

Take two. We're back at the school and Billy is being called up with the other kids to sit in the canteen where each day he'll get served a hot lunch. Oh, the joy of not having to pack daily lunches! For the rest of this year I won't have to clean out mashed up, half-eaten sandwiches or squishy apples from the bottom of his bag, or throw out a completely untouched lunch on the days he decides to play sport instead of eat.

He waves me goodbye with a faint smile and a look of fear as he enters the canteen. I feel sorry for him and just pray his first day will be okay.

I arrive home and twiddle my thumbs over a cup of coffee. It feels strange without Billy. What should I do today?

First, go to a doctor to get rid of the dry, annoying cough I've developed. It isn't really turning into a cold but seems to be getting worse, and I'm a bit worried about it – firstly because I never get sick and secondly because, if it becomes debilitating, I have no-one to look after Billy.

I know I'm being completely neurotic and irrational, which is very unlike me, but that is how I feel and the fact we are fully alone here really hits me.

So in an attempt to self-diagnose I do an online search for my symptoms, which turns up a few drastic possibilities like emphysema, whooping cough, bronchitis or pneumonia.

Then I realise the doctor I've been recommended to see speaks very little English, so I spend an hour writing down what I'm going to tell him and finding the French word for each of the illnesses I'm anxious to eliminate – *emphysème, coqueluche, bronchite et pneumonie*.

I arrive at the clinic to discover a very handsome doctor who speaks far better English than I'll ever speak French. After a thorough examination he laughingly eliminates all of my self-diagnosed illnesses and explains that it's an allergic reaction to the plane trees in Aix. I walk out giggling to myself and feeling a little idiotic but relieved with a script for allergy tablets.

"So, how was it?" I ask with a little trepidation, as Billy jumps in the car with a pretty blank look on his face.

"Okay," he says. "I can't understand a lot of what everyone says. They all speak French all the time. I got zero out of 10 for my French test. But we got to play two hours of sport and the other kids are fairly nice. I met some kids from England, Ireland, Mexico and Italy."

And in the same breath he turns his mind to his stomach.

"Did you get a baguette today? And did you get me a citron meringue pie from the boulangerie? And what are we having for dinner tonight?"

I laugh out loud and outline the evening's menu for him, which turns his blank look into a big grin.



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Carolyn Tate asserts her moral right to be identified as the author of this book.

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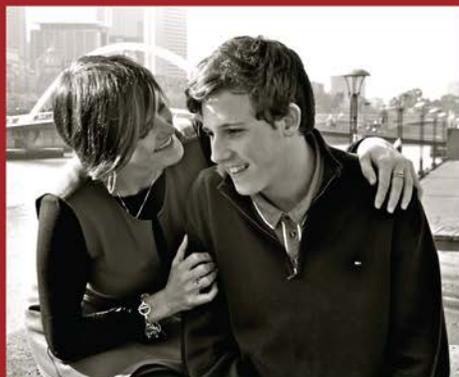
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Disclaimer: This is a memoir and travel diary, and my interpretation of actual events. The names of people have been changed, where required, for privacy reasons.



At the age of 46, after years of single-motherhood and the unbearable feeling that life is going nowhere, Carolyn decides to get radically unstuck.

After selling her home, giving away most of her belongings, putting her flagging business on hold and ending a destruc-

tive love affair, she takes her 12-year-old son Billy, to live in Aix en Provence, France.

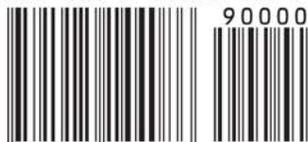
Carolyn's very raw and real daily diary entries reveal how she goes about healing herself and recovering her spirituality, creativity and self-love. The pages also explore her, at times, tense but tender relationship with Billy, a boy on the cusp of becoming a teenager.

If you've ever needed the inspiration or the courage to get unstuck – to shake off whatever it is in your life that's preventing you from being the woman you were destined to be – *Unstuck in Provence* is for you.

### *About Carolyn*

Carolyn is a businesswoman, activist, marketer, author, blogger, speaker and intrepid traveller. She has published two books – *Small Business Big Brand* and *Marketing your Small Business for Dummies*. Follow Carolyn at [carolyntate.co](http://carolyntate.co) and [unstuckinprovence.com](http://unstuckinprovence.com)

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