

Transcript

Episode Title: “Purchasing a Home in Paris” with Maya Dorsey of La Vie Locale

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MAYA [00:00:00] There's also been phases where I'm like: "What am I doing here? Why am I so far away from my family?" That, I think is important to acknowledge as well, because I think sometimes people see that I'm living abroad, they may see my photos on Instagram and living my best life. I definitely am happy here. But there's also a lot of struggles and things that you know, I have to deal with that. You just have to figure out how to adapt to that people don't often take into account

CHRISTINE [00:00:33] Hey, everyone, welcome back to *Flourish In The Foreign*, the podcast that elevates and affirms the voices and stories of Black women living and thriving abroad while exploring living abroad as a pathway to wellness. I'm your host Christine Job, a Black American woman currently based in Spain. I am not only a podcaster, but I'm also a business strategist that helps Black women and women of color leverage their talents and expertise into viable and sustainable businesses that allow them to be professionally fulfilled, financially abundant while pursuing thriving lives abroad. If you're interested in leveraging your talents, and your expertise into a business that will financially support you abroad, definitely grab my Build A Business Abroad guide which is free on the website. For those of you who are still on your Moving Abroad journey, I do have a resource called Moving Abroad With Intention. It is an almost 50-page guide full of thought provoking journal prompts to get you really clear and confident in your Move Abroad Strategy. I really find it to be the foundation of any moving abroad gameplan that you come up with because truly, to go abroad and cultivate a life well-lived, you have to know who you are and what you want and what you consider a life well-lived abroad to be. So you can also grab that on the website www.flourishintheforeign.com/resources. It is the final week to sign up for the Moving Abroad With Intention course with yours truly, it is a five-week course covering everything from who you are and crafting your own unique vision of a life well-lived abroad to country selection, money management, getting a job abroad, and of course, how to settle into your community once you arrive and how to prepare for repatriation. Again, this is the last week to sign up for this course. It is going to be such an amazing time. I'm really excited to chat with the cohort. Now the course is going to be online lesson plans but also live sessions. There's also a specific community crafted specifically for the Moving Abroad With Intention cohort. So you guys will have your own group to get to know each other. And there is the bonus week of Building A Business Abroad where I am going to walk the cohort from idea to sales, and really chat with them about their business ideas. If this sounds like something that is interesting to you, please join the cohort. I already have such an amazing group of people who are so eager and so ready to really bet on themselves and take their own dream seriously. So, if you want to be in a community for a vision-led people, people who are determined to go abroad in a manner that is sustainable, and is based on them thriving abroad, not struggling abroad,

definitely joined the course today. And I have a very special offer for all of you amazing listeners. If you use the link in the description of this episode to sign up, you will get \$100 off the regular price of the course. So join us today. It's going to be so so much fun. All right, on to the next episode.

CHRISTINE [00:04:22] So today's guest is Maya Dorsey of La Vie en Local, based in Paris and she has not only a wonderful blog, but also an amazing YouTube channel about all things living in Paris. I really enjoyed this interview with Maya which we did several several months ago. In fact, when we recorded it, she was pregnant and due at any moment, and the day after we recorded she had her lovely baby. So you're going to hear her experiences from moving from the States to Spain and to Paris. But what I find really interesting about this interview, which I don't think we've touched on too much in past interviews, is we talk about her experience purchasing property in Paris, thinking about her retirement as an American who lives abroad, and even applying for French nationality among so many amazing things. But I will let her tell you all about it.

MAYA [00:05:28] My name is Maya Dorsey, I am currently located in Paris, France, and I am 33 years old. So, I'm originally from Los Angeles, California. And I left LA actually when I was 18, to go to University. And then I've pretty much lived in other places ever since basically, growing up in Los Angeles kind of inherently exposed me to different cultures, just because it's very diverse. And I've always been in schools where it's been very diverse, I remember being in second grade. And we used to have these cultural days where we would have presentations by the kids, we would dress up in traditional clothing from your culture and bring food. I was excited about these days. But I also had internal struggles and not really knowing what to present. Black Americans, what should I present, whereas other classmates, their parents were directly from India or Mexico or Japan, and they would have kimonos or different things and bring really into conditions I would always come home and be a mom, what do we make. And it would always be funny what we would end up making, I don't even remember, maybe like apple pies or some sort of soul food or something like that. So, I think that has impacted just my appreciation for different cultures. And then also my dad, he's always instilled in us this seed of exploration and wants to see things around Los Angeles, he also used to always take us on little excursions in and around California and to national parks and forests. I think that's kind of planted a seed in me to want to explore things outside of my normal setting. But I never traveled abroad with my family up until high school and we went to the Caribbean for the first time, to Jamaica, and we went to Mexico. But beyond that, I'd never been anywhere outside of the US. It wasn't until actually, I got to college, which kind of really jump-started my desire to want to explore living abroad just because I ended up meeting some foreign exchange students. And then I also was able to meet other people that studied abroad. And I was like, oh, this could be something interesting that I would want to do.

CHRISTINE [00:07:50] I asked Maya to tell me about her University experience. And if she had the opportunity to study abroad,

MAYA [00:07:58] So, I actually went to the University of Wisconsin-Madison, completely different from Los Angeles. It was not on my radar like, okay, I'm from LA and I definitely going to go want to go to Madison, Wisconsin, I actually got a full-ride scholarship with this really awesome program called Posse Foundation, POSSE, it's an organization that promotes diversity on college campuses. So essentially, different cities that have a Posse Foundation, so I was a part of the Los Angeles one. They have one in Chicago, New York, and DC. It's really expanded since I was involved in it. So, they send a cohort of 10 to 12 students. So, there's a very intense selection process. And in the end, I think when I did it, there were maybe 3000. And in the end, they chose 12 people for a cohort to go to the University of Wisconsin, of which they have different partner schools. So, the five schools that I had a choice of were between University of Wisconsin, Madison, the University of Michigan, Claremont McKenna, and Dickinson, and I don't remember the other one. So, you kind of rate them in order of preference, but if not, you're not necessarily going to get your first or second choice. So, I actually didn't get my first choice, which was the University of Michigan. I got my second choice, which was UW Madison, and I went there. And I knew that I wanted to get out of Los Angeles. I think that by the end of high school, I wanted a change of scenery. I want to see something new, but I didn't exactly know where I want it to go. I didn't have any dream school that I wanted to go to. I just knew I wanted to go away. So, getting awarded the posse scholarship was pretty awesome. Just because I also found out very early. I found out in November, when typically, you hear back from colleges, maybe in the Spring so I knew where I was going. So, I did five years there. And through Posse, you can actually have the opportunity to study abroad as well. There were a few people in the Posse program that I knew, from different cities from Chicago, and New York who actually studied abroad. And a really good friend. He basically spent most of his time abroad instead of actually on the UW Madison campus. So, I remember there was one semester where he was actually there. And we spent a lot of time together because I wanted to hear about his experiences and things like that. He's very social. And he used to organize these Friday night dinners where he would invite other people that had either studied abroad or other foreign exchange students. So, I would go to these dinners, I would love them. Because it would be such cool conversations about people's cultures or their experiences studying abroad. It really sparked the desire to want to contribute to these conversations and have my own experiences. So, I started looking into study abroad programs. I think it was my junior year. and I found one, it was a summer program, I was like, okay, maybe I should start with something that's short, before doing a semester or something more long term. So, I found a program that was in the Dominican Republic and a little town called Jarabacoa. I've always been interested in health, and I was studying Psychology at the time. But I was interested in Public Health. One of my goals was to improve my Spanish. So, it was actually a very specific program that was dedicated to public health and nutrition in the Caribbean. And so, I said, okay, this would be perfect. I applied, I got in, and I spent a summer there studying abroad, it was more of a research-driven program. So, in the three months that I was there, we had to design and conduct a research program, or projects related to a public health issue, and the Dominican Republic of which I chose adolescent, and reproductive health.

CHRISTINE [00:11:58] So, after studying abroad in the Dominican Republic, I asked Maya to tell me what she decided to do next.

MAYA [00:12:06] After studying abroad, I had one more year left. So, I completed that year. And I was trying to figure out what I wanted to do next. So, I was studying Psychology, which I knew that I didn't want to be a therapist, but I wanted to at least have the skills of Psychology that could be useful in different settings. So, with that, I ended up doing a summer internship the summer after I graduated in New York at a nonprofit that was dedicated to HIV prevention and education, which was kind of in line with what I was kind of observing when I was in Jarabacoa, in Dominican Republic. So that kind of sparked my interest in wanting to be more hands-on because like I said, in the Dominican Republic, it was research so, we were doing more observation and highlighting what issues were, but in three months, you don't have the capacity to actually impact change. So, I said, okay, I wanted to work for a nonprofit that's actually doing the work on the ground. So, I was able to do an internship program in New York, the summer after I graduated, and I ended up getting hired to work there after. So, New York is a great place to maybe start my career and get experience. And then, after about a year, I was like, Okay, I don't in New York, I had the opportunity to work with a lot of Spanish speaking clients, or patients, which I just, I realized I didn't have the language skills in the professional setting, that I would have wanted to be able to better serve the Spanish speaking community. So, I was okay, maybe I want to go abroad again, and really improve my Spanish so that I can really be able to communicate in a more, I guess, well rounded way. So, like a general conversation, which was no problem. But you know, to be able to speak in different capacities professionally as well. It may have just been my environment in New York, that I just wasn't feeling. I'm from Los Angeles, I'm a pretty chill person, and I think that I just was not connecting with the city. I enjoyed my time in New York. But I would classify my period of time in New York as a struggle. I was struggling as far as socially, I was okay. I had family there, I had friends, actually a lot of friends from college that ended up moving to New York. So, in that sense, it was fine. It was just the day-to-day rat race of the grind. Also, I wasn't earning a lot of money either. And a lot of my friends that were working in New York, they were working in finance or banking, so I couldn't really keep up with them when we would go out. So, I was just exhausted. I was also working two jobs at the time just so I could pay for my monthly expenses, but also have money to do other things. But I was like, this isn't going to be sustainable. I can't continue living like this. Either I need to make more money at my full-time job, or I need to find another solution. So, I just I was over feeling. I needed to problem solve and find solutions and kind of make it work. And I wasn't also convinced that New York was the city for me. So, I was okay, let's explore something else. Take this break. So, I was like, I also do want to go back to school, and maybe do my Master's in Public Health. So, there were a lot of questions I was starting to ask myself after graduating, which were like, "Okay, do you want to go abroad again, and improve your language skills? Do you want to go back to school? What do you want to do?"

CHRISTINE [00:15:47] So Maya is struggling in New York, and thinking about what she wants to do next, if she wants to go abroad, if she wants to go to Graduate School, if she wants to improve her Spanish skills. And so, I asked her, what did she decide to do?

MAYA [00:16:03] So, I decided that I was at a point where I was tired of being in the US, and I wanted a break. So, I said, okay, why don't you look into the possibility to work abroad in some

capacity. And so, I started looking at different programs and different opportunities. And I ended up finding something in Spain, where I could teach English, I never had a desire to really move to Europe. I was more interested in Latin America. And so, I ended up finding a position in Spain and the (Spanish word, inaudible), small little town to teach English at a private English school. And I applied and got accepted. And I was like, okay, I think I'm going to do this. So, I said, okay, I'll do this for a year. And then we'll see what happens after that, to take a little bit of a kind of a gap year to stop working to explore my interest in improving my Spanish but also being in a setting where I can be abroad, and explore and travel within Europe, and then also kind of figure out what I wanted to do. As far as a school after taking a break, I found this program, it's called ASIC, it's a network where you basically sign up. So, I signed up when I was in college, and I still had access to the network after. And so, you have access to this very large database where you are able to do different exchange programs or work programs for different amounts of time. It could be for a semester abroad, or it could be my situation after school for a year. And so, I just kind of went through the database to see what opportunities were available. I found some stuff in Colombia or Venezuela or different places like that. But I actually got bytes from the language learning school and (inaudible, Spanish word) within the timeline that I was looking to leave. So, I interviewed with the school. It was a private, after-school kind of program for kids that would go there after school to learn English. And it was perfect too because basically, I worked from, I would say, four to like eight, every day. So, after the afternoon break after siesta. So, I had time to explore and do anything else I wanted to do during the day. And then I would work in the afternoon, and then have the evenings to myself. So, it worked really well with what I was trying to do. Because I mean, teaching English was something that I wanted to do to be able to get experience abroad but it wasn't the career path that I wanted to really invest in either. So that worked out really nicely.

CHRISTINE [00:18:57] So as many of you know, I have been living in Spain for the past five years in La Rioja and in Barcelona. I've been too (Spanish word, inaudible), but I haven't lived there. So, I was super curious to learn more about Maya's experience living in (inaudible, Spanish word).

MAYA [00:19:16] When I got to Spain, I thought about Barcelona or Madrid or something like that. It sounds like what is this little town? How is it going to be? And so, the people, they're just super, super warm and welcoming. And I just had a really great time. And I also had a chance to travel a lot, just because I did have a lot of free time. And you know, with the school situation, there were a lot of holidays as well. So, I had to give them the opportunity to travel within Europe. So, I was okay, at the end of this year. What do you want to do? Do you want to stay in Spain and continue teaching English? I knew that wasn't something that I wanted to do just because this was in 2011? So, there was a really big recession. The opportunity to maybe find work and something else wasn't really an option. I looked at grad school programs in Spain, of which there was one that was really interesting that I wanted to do, but didn't have the actual certificate to prove my language skills. I had improved my Spanish, so I was there. But it wasn't taking Spanish classes, I didn't take any sort of exam that said, okay, you have this level, which I needed to apply for the program. So, by the time they had found the school and looked into applying, it was too late to get all of that paperwork. So, I said, okay, let me figure out if I could

potentially look for programs in Europe. So, my partner, he was French, who I met in New York, before moving abroad. He actually had the idea like, why don't you look into other programs in Europe, to go back to school at the time, I was applying to schools in the US just as a backup, because I was like, I don't know what I'm going to do after this year. So, apply to schools in the States and see what program you get into. And then I also was like, okay, let me look into programs in Europe. So, I found a few, and one of the requirements for me was that I would need to be English, if it were outside of Spain, just because I didn't speak another language where I would feel comfortable, or wouldn't have the capacity to do another program, and in a different country, that wasn't English. So that kind of narrowed down the possibilities. I found a program in Paris that was in English, a public health program, which I applied to, and I got into and that was the deciding factor. Okay, this is what I'm going to do next. So, everything kind of just fell into place.

CHRISTINE [00:21:42] So, Maya has decided to leave Spain and to attend graduate school in Paris. And so, I wanted to know, what was the preparation like for that kind of move? And what did she feel like when she left Spain, and finally landed in France.

MAYA [00:22:00] So, leaving for Paris, I had come back to the US from Spain. And I spent the summer in Los Angeles to spend time with my family and work a little bit just doing random things to save money for moving abroad. I think I was there from maybe June to August. So, I have three months there. And then I needed to apply for my visa, figure out what I was going to do with all my stuff, and then kind of leave. So, I remember kind of maybe waiting until the last minute to do that, and I remember I applied for my visa and had to expedite it as well because I waited too long to do that, and I got it two weeks before I was supposed to leave. So, it was a little bit of a rush, and then I had stuff still in New York, I had stuff in LA, so I was okay, I need to go to New York and consolidate my things, give a bunch of stuff away, and I was able to leave a few boxes at an almshouse that lived in Harlem. So, I did that. And then I went back home, I packed up my stuff, and left stuff in my parent's garage, and then I left... to leave for Paris. And I remember just, I think, up until that period, you're just in the rush of getting ready, and not really processing what you're doing. So, it wasn't until I got to the airport when I was like, okay, this is really happening. I was excited, but I also was exhausted from all the weeks of preparation and just kind of being on the go-go-go. So, I slept pretty much my whole flight. And then I land. So, my boyfriend. As I mentioned to his friend, she wasn't living in Paris, he was living in a town two hours away, and Liam, he planned to pick me up from the airport. My flight was delayed, very delayed. They got a layover somewhere, I don't remember. But it was delayed. We were supposed to have a whole day where we could hang out and see each other before I had to leave to start school. And basically, I arrived super late in the evening in Paris. And I had to meet with my program, maybe five hours later, because we were doing an orientation outside of Paris and a little town called Ren. So, we literally had maybe five hours from the time that I landed until I had to meet up with my school to go off to run for a one-week orientation. So, I just remember being exhausted, excited, and then "Thinking what am I doing?" I have this phase, even when I went to Spain, I do all the things to get to where I need to go, and then I have these moments of processing. "What am I doing?" So, there's no time for fear or

doubt to kind of kick in. I just kind of keep going and then in the end I'm already in the country and then I'm questioning, "What am I doing? This is real."

CHRISTINE [00:25:02] So Maya is in Paris to attend graduate school. And this is her first time living in France, and so I want to know what her first couple of years living in France was like.

MAYA [00:25:14] One of the biggest challenges for me was that I just was not really prepared for my move. So, as I mentioned, I kind of decided I was going to move to school, but I didn't think through all of the things that I probably should have, which I totally encourage people to do now. So, what do I mean by that? So, for example, savings, I had spent three months before moving to this kind of work and saving, but it wasn't enough. So, I anticipated that I would easily be able to find a side job because I had a student visa, which allows you to work part-time. So, I thought, I would easily be able to find a job that would cover my living expenses. But forgot I was living in Paris, which is super expensive, compared to (inaudible, Spanish town) where it had come from where it was really cheap. And I just financially was not prepared. And then I also didn't anticipate how intense the program was. So, I just thought that I would have a little bit more free time to really do things outside of school in which I didn't have the time to do so because I always had so much homework. And I did end up finding a part-time job, babysitting and teaching English. So, between school and work, I didn't really have time to do anything, I wanted to be taking French lessons and things like that, of which I didn't have the time to do so I would say my first year was really, really difficult, just because I also needed to get settled. So, all of the things outside of school that I needed to do: find an apartment, get a bank account, just you know, get settled, I was completely a fish out of water. I realized that even though I understood Spanish that didn't make it easier to understand French, I didn't understand anything. So, I would characterize my two years of school as being intense and being kind of in a bubble of school and this English-speaking bubble as well, just because everything that I was doing was in English and I didn't really have time to, you know, meet people outside of school. But I did make an effort to at least work which exposed me to the French language. So, the first year I was teaching English and babysitting. And then the second year I was working at a restaurant because I was like if I potentially want to live here after I need to acquire language skills, just to be able to get around and also potentially for work as well.

CHRISTINE [00:27:45] Attending school, particularly graduate school abroad, is a very popular way to live and work abroad. And so, I asked Maya to tell us more about her master's program.

MAYA [00:27:57] The program that I did was an international Master's in Public Health. So, it was a French School of Public Health. However, they had a partnership with Columbia University, at the time in New York. So, we had classes that were taught by French professors, as well as professors that would fly over from Columbia. So, I thought it was a really good happy medium of having French professors and then also getting sort of US education in France at the European French price. So, it was a two-year program. It's called EHESP. So, it is called (inaudible French word), which means basically, French School of Public Health. So, I did that program, you have the choice of just doing one year, two years, but I said, I'm going to do a master's I preferred to do for two years to have time to really get acclimated to Paris. And I don't

feel you can squeeze everything you need to know until one year, so I did the two-year programs, or at least knew. For my own sanity, I needed to be in one place for at least two consecutive years. And so as far as differences, education-wise, I think that I obviously had a better connection with the professors from the US just because it was a learning style that I was used to. And then for the classes that were taught by French professors, I think also too, there was a little bit of a language barrier because the program wasn't English. So, some professors spoke English, but it was really difficult trying to understand the kind of technical, public health, things taught by somebody that it's not their native language. So that was a little bit of a challenge and then also to just the format in general the program was something that I didn't anticipate. It was very intense. So, we had what they call modules. We had one week of a certain module, so let's say health promotion for one week. So, you learn a lot of information in one week. And then we had one week off where we were supposed to prepare assignments that we have been assigned in the week previously. So, it was weird having a really intense week of learning a lot of information on a specific topic. And then not having a week of classes in which you were supposed to be studying, some people were just living it up and visiting pairs and things like that. So, I think I was having a hard time adjusting to learning a lot of information that is short, about a time and then being tested on that.

CHRISTINE [00:30:40] As I said before, attending grad school abroad is a very popular way to live abroad and to launch a career abroad, as you guys have probably known if you've listened to the podcast for some time. And so, I asked Maya to give you all some advice about applying, funding and attending grad school in France.

MAYA [00:31:01] So, I am a huge advocate for exploring higher education, grad school, Ph.D. abroad in France, or wherever you may be interested in doing so. I mean, as an American, after completing my undergrad, especially since I had a scholarship, I was like, I do not want to incur a lot of debt to go back to school. So, when I was looking at programs in the US, I was wondering how am I going to pay for this? And I didn't have a very good answer. I was it's to go out alone, basically, that was my option. And at the time, I was not feeling the interest rates of the loans. And I just didn't think this was going to be sustainable for the lifestyle that I wanted to live. I did want to go to school, but I didn't want to incur debt. And I also wanted to still be able to do things that would bring me joy. So, traveling, working on projects, personal projects, things like that. So, one of the biggest things that I loved about doing grad school abroad was just the affordability. So, there's a website in France, (if you're looking at programs in France) called campus France. And that's basically the direct hub where you can find all the different programs that are available for higher education in France. So, you could find different actual graduate programs, if you wanted to do a graduate program, you can find Ph.D. programs, and you can also find a short-term learning program. So let's say you want to be, let's say you're interested in cooking, or you potentially want to do a culinary class, but something that's a little bit more structured, they have these culinary classes, or maybe writing immersions, different things that so I encourage people to that maybe don't want to invest in doing an actual graduate program, but want to enhance a skill in a different setting outside of the US to explore those things and campus France is the website where you would kind of go-to research those things. And it's also an opportunity to explore funding options, too, because it's a website where you have the

information for programs, and then funding and then just resources of how to move abroad and the different, just different things about living in France. So that is a very good resource if you're thinking about going to school, I used it to find my program, I use it to find funding options as well. I would definitely encourage people if you're thinking about going to school, it's a very good investment in your education. And you don't have to pay American prices for it just to give you a frame of reference. So, for example, the program that I did was for your program. The first year, I think it was 4800 euros, and then the second year, the tuition went up a little bit, I think it was 5200. So compared to a program in the US that would have cost me I think the cheapest program that I was looking at was 20k per year,

CHRISTINE [00:34:14] I asked Maya to describe to me her life after she attended grad school.

MAYA [00:34:18] Once I finished school, it was a crucial moment for me because I basically needed to find a job where I would have to leave because I exceeded my options of being able to be there as a student, I completed my two-year program. So, it's like now what do I do? And at the time, then I would say the main options of being able to stay in France were either to be in school, on a student visa, or to work so and to find work. Normally that meant being sponsored by a company that would be willing to, you know, pay for your visa and sponsor you to stay there. Now there are so many other visa options of being a freelancer or working for a startup or having a creative passport, whereas when I finished school, I had basically very few options. So, I ended up finding a loophole and finding out that there was a visa. It's called APS, which is basically a visa that allows you to stay in the country for one additional year after completing your graduate studies to look for work. So, I applied for that and I said, okay, I have this buffer of one year of work, of which I need to find a job and a company that would sponsor my visa. In my second year of my master's, we had to do basically a thesis of which I ended up choosing to go to Australia. So, I spent six months in Australia working at a nonprofit, that uses football to help with health promotion for refugees there. I really enjoyed the work I was doing there. But I knew that I didn't want to stay in Australia after so strategically, it probably wasn't the best idea for me to go so far away. Where else would I have the opportunity to go to Australia, I had funding through my school to do research there and to work there. So that's okay, that's great. But once I got back, I was like, okay, what do I do now? I just came back from Australia, and I need to find a job. So, I was actually quite lucky, because, through the funding that I had, I was doing research. And I was able to continue my research once I got back to work on publishing articles about what I was working on there. So, from July to December, after graduating, I had a job through, it's a French Public Health Research Chair. And so, I was supposed to work on completing the research that I was doing to write articles and present my research at different symposiums and conferences. So, I did that up until December and then I ended up finding a job in February. So, I finished school in 2014 July and finished the research contract in December 2014 and then in February of 2015, I got my first official job at a research unit in Paris. I think that coming out of school, I realized research was kind of the most practical way that I could get work just because in research and public health, you do a lot of work in English because you're trying to share the information that you've researched or learn with international audiences. So, all the publications are in English. So, I ended up finding work through my network, my program, the director of the program was like, "Oh, this research unit is actually

looking for people, you should apply.” I applied, and I got the job. So, in France, you have two different types of contracts: a CVD contract, which is like a short-term contract, which I had for one year. And then there's the other type of contract is a CDI contract, which is this indefinite contract that everybody wants to have because you have a lot of job security. As a foreigner, I think a lot of companies kind of (inaudible) on giving you short-term contracts to kind of see what you can bring to the company before being willing to give you a long-term contract. And also, just in the domain of research, you rely on funding based on the research projects that you have. So, the project that I was working on was an e-health project. I was in charge of basically implementing this EU-funded project that was on innovative depression treatments using mobile applications. So that was for one year, there was funding for my contract, and then I needed to find something else. But I was able to at least find work which helped me to be able to apply for a visa to be able to stay.

CHRISTINE [00:39:10] One of my favorite questions to ask my guest because it varies from person to person so wildly is when they felt settled in their new country. It is such a touchy and sensitive subject usually filled with hilarious stories of really getting acclimated to a new city, a new country, a new region, perhaps even a new language. And so, I asked Maya when did she feel truly settled in her life in Paris?

MAYA [00:39:42] I think a turning point for me was actually finding work and sorting things with my visa was super stressful not knowing if you can stay in that not being in your hands. So even once I got my work contract, I ended up having to do a little niggling because originally, the company was willing to sponsor my visa. At first, they said, yes, we'll sponsor your visa, and then there are some rules about how much you have to earn as a foreigner, for them to be able to sponsor your visa. So that's when things started getting tricky just because the funding that we had for the research project they calculated based on that. So, they weren't able to meet the amount that the visa office required you to pay someone that was foreign. So, it was getting a little complicated and this is stressing me out. Let me see if there's another way I can get a different visa so I don't have to go through all this extra stress of trying to negotiate the salary with the company. So, since my partner is French, we actually decided to apply for a different visa, it's called “V Prevail Familiar”, which is a visa for families. So, either you're married, or there's something called packs, which is kind of a civil union. So, we actually were PACs. And so, we were able to apply for this “V Prevail Familiar”, which I did at the very last minute. So we went through that route, which ended up giving me a lot more flexibility visa wise, because I didn't have to rely on a company sponsoring my visa, and I didn't have to rely on all the other loopholes of having to earn X amount of euros and things like that. So, I think that was really a turning point for me knowing, okay, I have a little bit more flexibility, I can work in whatever setting that I wanted as well, and kind of just has more freedom to do what I wanted visa-wise. And then I would say just among the years, the more that I was developing community, learning the language, getting my groundings, I felt more comfortable. I've had a lot of little wins along the way. It may sound like a little thing. For example, just two days ago, I had to go renew my visa, I was in and out in 15 minutes, and I had no problems and that was a win-win. There have also been phases where I'm like, “What am I doing here? Why am I so far away from my family?” That I think is important to acknowledge as well, because sometimes people see that

I'm living abroad, they may see my photos on Instagram and living my best life, I definitely am happy here but there's also a lot of struggles and things that you know, I have to deal with that. You just have to figure out how to adapt to or decide to leave the kind of thing that people don't often take into account. So, there have been times and I think a lot of those times have revolved around work. So being on short-term contracts doesn't give you any sort of stability. So, after getting my first job, after a year, I had to find something else because funding ran out. So just kind of this ongoing cycle of always having to think about what's next and applying to jobs and also to just that in itself is kind of emotionally draining because you know you have skills but also, you're in a country where you're taking opportunities away from French people. So even when you're applying to jobs, we need to advocate what you can bring to these positions as to why they should hire someone that is foreign versus somebody that is, you know, a native of the country. It's been phases of feeling comfortable, feeling uncomfortable, and just kind of working through those.

CHRISTINE [00:43:51] Hey, I hope that you are enjoying this episode of *Flourish in the Foreign*, and if you are please consider supporting the podcast by either becoming a Patreon subscriber at patreon.com/flourishforeign tipping the podcast via cash app at dollar sign flourish foreign, buy me a coffee at buymeacoffee.com/flourishforeign or purchasing a piece of production equipment via our Amazon wish list at flourishintheforeign.com/support I also want to invite you all to check out the plethora of resources that I've compiled for you all at the website www.flourishintheforeign.com/resources. You will find a book list to help you get to stay and thrive abroad as well as the Build a Business Abroad guides in Moving Abroad with Intention guide. All right. Let's continue the show.

CHRISTINE [00:44:55] Purchasing property is such a milestone in anyone's life. Regardless of where they live, but probably especially if it's in a country that is not your home country. And so, I asked Maya to walk us through the process of purchasing a home in Paris.

MAYA [00:45:13] Last year, I officially got the keys to my apartment. I bought it with my boyfriend, now fiancé. It was a project that we had been thinking about for, I would say, a couple of years, we just didn't really know what exactly what to do at first, we wanted to buy something where we would rent it to more of an investment property where we would still rent an apartment, but it would be an apartment that we would buy and rent out to people on Airbnb or something like that. But we couldn't figure out if that would be worth it. And also, with the different laws changing with Airbnb, we're like, if we're going to stay in Paris, we might as well invest in something that we can live in. So, we started looking at properties in Paris, and then realized things in Paris are super, super expensive. And our goal was to have something bigger than what we had at the time. So, we were in a 35-meter square apartment, which is about 350 square feet. And we wanted something bigger. Also, I was kind of getting to this point where I was feeling a little suffocated being directly in the city, and I wanted to have more space and maybe be a little bit outside of the city. So, I was comfortable with exploring suburbs that were just right outside of Paris, I didn't want to be too far from where I had to take it. It's called the RER train, which is a commuter train, to get in and out of Paris, but something that was still accessible by Metro. So, we ended up finding a neighborhood, which is very up and coming.

There are a lot of development projects. The Paris 2024 Olympics, there's going to be an Olympics really drove me there. So, there are a lot of interesting things happening. So, I said, okay, we said, okay, let's explore this area. And it's also very close to where we were living before we're in the northern part of Paris. And well, Martin, the 18th. And St. Juan is in the north, and it was literally 10 minutes from where we were living before. So, I felt comfortable with that side of the city, and all of the activities and things that we could do were in that area. So I finally decided on a place. And then the location where we wanted to buy decided that we wanted to buy a primary residence. And then we were like, okay, so now what do we need to figure out how to get our coins to actually be able to like, buy something. So, we started saving money and being really strategic with wanting to make this a realistic goal. So, I would say we saved for a good 18 months and worked side hustles. I was doing a lot of work with La Vie Local that was, which was helping me to fund my savings in addition to working. And basically, once you have figured out where you want to live, and you have a solid financial plan, you can, that's when you can actually start looking. So, I think last February, I was working at a startup. And that was a strategic move for me because prior to that I had taken a break from working with contracts, I was doing freelance, I had left my job to work freelance and the banks were like this, this isn't sustainable for us, we need to know that you have a solid job. So, I was okay. I don't really know what I want to do right now as far as public health in France right now. I'm a very creative person as well as I was let me try something a little different. I started working in a startup. It was a photo ... photography related startup because I'm interested in photography. So, I was okay, let me try this for x amount of time. And they were offering me that CDI contract, which is indefinite, which banks like when you're trying to buy something. So, in February, I started that job. I had a trial period for three months. After that trial period was finished. We were able to actively look for something, we found something and an offer got accepted. And so, the biggest difference, I think, from looking for an apartment or buying property in the US, compared to in France is that you find a place you put an offer and then you have once you put the offer you sign this paper is called a (inaudible, French) which is a promise to buy. So, you sign that, and you have three months to get the funding from the bank. Whereas in the US, you get pre-approved, and then you put offers into places. So, we had three months to get funding from the bank, which we were quite lucky in being able to get because we had already talked to our bank about our project and they had seen that we were religiously saving so that was Okay, yeah, sure. We can give you a loan. We have looked at other banks as well, but our bank that we were at gave us the best rate. And the interest rate was really good. We got 1.36% for 25 years, which is awesome. Once you have the funding, normally things are supposed to go a bit quicker, but we had some delays because of vacation and stuff like that. We got our keys, moved in, and then started doing renovations, which we decided we would do ourselves, which we save for, we didn't want to add the renovations that we wanted to do, and to the total amount of the loan, we were like, we'll just save for that and pay for out of pocket. So, we were able to do that. So that was a huge milestone, super, super, super happy about that. And it's been a year since we moved in, we finished all our innovations. And I completely love our place. And I'm so proud of how everything came together. And we definitely got in at a good time investment-wise, because from the time we first started looking until now, even the prices have, I wouldn't say doubled but they've increased from when we first started looking in the neighborhood that we've bought in. So, it's definitely been a good investment.

CHRISTINE [00:51:14] As I mentioned before, Maya and I recorded this interview many, many months ago. And at the time, she was very pregnant and just about to give birth. And she actually did give birth today after our interview. And so, during our interview, I asked her to tell me about her experience being pregnant in Paris, her impressions of the French healthcare system as a public health professional, and also how the Covid 19 pandemic affected her experience.

MAYA [00:51:46] It's been very interesting, I would say, I found out I was pregnant in January, so life was still normal. This was before COVID, I...it was winter. I was feeling all the things I was excited about; I was anxious. I was like, oh, what does this? What does this even look like? I've never been pregnant, period, yet alone pregnant in another country? Where do I start? How do I navigate things? I felt very overwhelmed. And so, the first thing that my doctor did was, you know, figure out what... where do you want to give birth and what provider you want to work with. So, I really like ob-gyn, but where she was affiliated as far as a hospital is not convenient to where I live. So, she was I think he should find another doctor. So, I found a new doctor that basically works at a clinic, a private clinic, near where I live. So that was like one of the big things that I needed to figure out. Once I figured out the admin part, I was just going through all of the new bodily changes, I was super exhausted, I was working still at the time. And I just felt very unlike myself, I just felt like the hormones took over my body. And I was just getting through the days. I know the healthcare system very well here just because of my experience studying public health here. And then I've used the healthcare system, I would say pretty, pretty extensively. For example, last year, I actually had surgery on my hip. So, growing up, I did a lot of sports and ran track and field. And I had the wear and tear issue with my hip that needed to be corrected. And so, I had surgery last March, I basically spent three days at the hospital, and then I was on sick leave at home for one month of which I was on crutches that whole time. So, I actually ended up having a nurse that was coming to my house every day to check on my wound and to give me these shots to help with preventing blood clots. So, I was happy with my experience at the hospital, my surgery went fine. And then I was just impressed by all the services that I got at home, which were practically free, having a nurse come to my house every day to have physical therapy. So, I have never really been afraid of the healthcare system here as far as giving birth, it was just a matter of figuring out what I had to do and how to navigate how to get into the care that I needed. And then keep up with all the prenatal appointments and things like that. So, in general, I'm very happy with the health care system. When I was pregnant. One of the biggest things that I was thinking about in the beginning was Oh, what is healthcare going to cost me but then I forgot to worry. Everything is integrated into the healthcare system and it's covered. So, I have a friend that's actually pregnant in LA right now and we're nine months pregnant, she's due any day now too. And she's a freelancer. And she basically is deciding to have a home birth, and paying basically everything out of pocket, just because she doesn't have, you know, the same sort of health insurance system, as I do here. So, I'm quite thankful for things like that prenatal care here is very well thought out and very comprehensive. So, in the first trimester, you have to actually declare that you're pregnant to the Social Security healthcare system. So, at 14 weeks, your doctor fills out this paper, letting them know you're pregnant. And that's basically so that you have access to all your prenatal visits.

And then in France, and six months, basically, when you're six months pregnant, all of your cares, 100% covered. And I remember getting an mail, basically saying, congratulations, you're pregnant, we're going to be following closely throughout your pregnancy. They gave me a little calendar with all the milestones and things that I needed to remember. So, I was like, super, super happy to receive that I felt like I was taken care of. They know I'm pregnant and have all the resources that I need. So that's been really great. I just think that in general, this year has been full of luck with unknowns. So once March hit, COVID hit, things got a little bit complicated, because I had so many hopes and things that I was looking forward to doing and during my pregnancy that just went out the window. For example, you have these birth preparation classes that are covered through the insurance that you have the National Insurance Program, which are normally done in groups of which for me, that was not the case, I had one on one, birth preparation classes during the time of COVID, just one on one with a midwife through video conference, which was not ideal just because I think for me, I need to see people in person, just language-wise to, I think that it's harder to understand, especially technical information through video. And in general, I've been learning a whole new vocabulary and French related to pregnancy. So that was a bit of a bummer. I just imagine having these experiences. I've seen the movies of going to these groups, prenatal birth preparation classes, or *Lamaze* classes and meeting other pregnant women. But that wasn't the reality for me. And then also I was just really excited to take advantage of the time that wasn't working to go home and visit my family, for them to see me while I was pregnant. So, I'm pregnant, my parents aren't going to be able to come over for the birth, I wasn't able to go over there. Also, we're in the process of figuring it out so how are we going to manage you guys being able to see the baby? What does that look like? Are we going to facetime every day? How are we going to do holidays and things that, so it's just been a lot of adaptation to this new situation with COVID. I'm happy that in France, things are getting a little better. At the beginning of my pregnancy, my partner couldn't come with me to any of my appointment so that was a bummer as well. All of these milestones. At my first sonogram, he wasn't able to come with me, he didn't get to go with me to my monthly prenatal appointments up until maybe six months when things kind of reopened, and he was able to come. So, it's just been, it's been a lot dealing with pregnancy in general and then dealing with the new safety measures because of COVID. I would say it's been lonely, you know, you've been confined, you're not having these interactions with your providers that you would have liked to or meeting other pregnant women. And then also just not being accompanied by your partner to your appointments. It's been it's been really hard actually. But I'm thankful that right now where I'm at, I'm due any day now. At the moment my partner can come, he's able to come to the hospital, he's able to stay there. I've been well taken care of. As far as my providers, I've been able to kind of create a team that's quite holistic. So, I have my ob-gyn. I'm working with a midwife as well. I have been doing acupuncture, I've been doing appointments with an osteopath, which is kind of a, I would say kind of the chiropractor, but not really, they do manipulations of your body. Mine is specialized in pre and postnatal. So, she's been really good and just making sure my hips are balanced and even and making sure my posture is good. Checking the position of the baby just I've been trying to be as holistic with my pregnancy in general and find and providers that kind of align with that as well.

CHRISTINE [01:00:03] Applying for citizenship is a process that is usually very tedious. And the degree to which it's tedious is obviously dependent upon the country in which you are applying for citizenship. And so, I asked Maya to describe her experience applying for French citizenship.

MAYA [01:00:23] I started last year, actually, when I was in the process of moving and it was also when I was in the process of buying an apartment in Paris. But I also forgot to mention that in addition to the apartment that I bought in Paris, a month later, I bought another property in the US with my sister. It's important to, you know, be sustainable living abroad. Part of that, for me, is also maintaining roots in Paris where I live, but also maintaining roots in the US. And I think that one thing that was important for me and something that I've been thinking about in my sustainability journey of being an expat is what does retirement look like? It kind of stresses me out, just because ever since I left New York, I have not been accruing any sort of retirement plan in the US. I have been doing so here, but what will that look like for me? So, I said, maybe investing in property in the US could be a means to having some sort of supplementary income. Since the property that I bought in the US was an investment property not living there, my sister was living there, we were renting out the second room in Austin. So, it's a place that I hadn't seen, but we definitely got a good deal for that. And that was another huge milestone for last year. So yeah, I was dealing with a lot. And so, since I technically live outside of Paris, in a suburb just a little outside, I had submitted all of my paperwork to apply for nationality to the naturalization office in Paris. So, they received my documents. but since I sent it in after he moved officially from Paris, they sent back all of my papers, and all your documents are fine. But now that you live outside of Paris, technically, you need to resubmit all your stuff to the neighborhood where you live, which is (inaudible French town). So now I have to start all over. And so I needed to figure out how the process worked where I live, because in Paris, basically, you have a long list of documents, which was draining, you need to do FBI checks, you need to get a birth certificate that's dated within the last three months, you need to get all these tax information in the US and no, in France, and then there was just a lot of stuff. So basically, I had gotten everything. And in Paris, you submit all of that stuff by mail, when everything needs to be dated, for documents from the US, they have to be valid, the date has to be good for six months from the date that you sent it. And for the French documents, everything had to be valid within the last three months. So, by the time I figured out how things worked, where I lived, it was a bit nice, because instead of mailing all the documents, you just need to get an appointment and you drop everything off. However, I haven't been able to get an appointment since when COVID started. So, everything has been very limited. So, when I went to renew my visa, I said, okay, I'm going to take advantage of being in an actual office to go to the naturalization French nationality office to get all my questions answered. And I went there. And they were like, yeah, right now, because of COVID everything is supersaturated and close. There's nobody actually physically here. You have to get an appointment online, which I've been trying. And basically, he was like, yeah, right now, it's just really, really hard. There are not a lot of appointments. So, I have all my documents, I just am at the point where I need to successfully get an appointment. And so basically, right now, I found out that they put the new appointment online every Monday at 4 pm. So, I go online every Monday at 4 pm. And they're literally taken within minutes. So, I am trying on a daily basis to get an appointment. And then it's just going to be a matter of submitting my documents, which is going to be tricky, because like I was mentioning, they're a

bit time-sensitive. Once I get an appointment, I would submit my documents since I've already submitted them and the Paris office check them, I know that everything's fine. So, after that, it'll just be a matter of having an interview, where they make sure you can see the language that you're aware of French culture and history. I think they're going to ask questions about, I don't know, random French history, things like they would for a green card test or something in the US, and then basically that's it. But the timeframe from what I've been told is that it can take about 12 to 18 months, I don't know what that's going to look with COVID right now, but I have submitted my visa renewal. I have a visa for two years. But my goal is within those two years to have to apply for nationality into habit. So, this will be my final visa renewal. So, crossing fingers.

CHRISTINE [01:05:18] Maya has a popular platform and business called La Vie Locale. And so, I asked her to tell me about how she started it, and what kind of services the business provides.

MAYA [01:05:30] So, in the beginning, I was in school for two years. And in that two years, I was not documenting anything, I was so consumed in school, I didn't have time to explore Paris. After I finished, I was like, Oh, I can breathe, I can explore places working, I have money to like, do things. So, I was okay, I'm going to start sharing my experience here as an ex-pat and my discoveries of Paris because I was, okay, it's been two years, and I really still don't really know the city. And I need to, if I'm going to stay here, I need to have my favorite little cafes or my favorite little spots that I like to go to. And let me share these with other people. So that's kind of how it started. And then it kind of evolved because people were interested in what I had to say, and the information that I was sharing. And people were also interested in how I moved here. So, it kind of transitioned to being helping people that wanted to visit Paris, kind of to discover the city as a local celebrity, like me, the local life. So, my goal was to show what I kind of do here as a local and discover the city as a local versus a tourist. And so yeah, transition to me, or helping other people that wanted to visit Paris. Explore the city like a local. So, I was doing a lot of trip planning and helping them to discover the city through a different lens, you know, outside of the touristic things. And then also right now, where I'm at, is that I think it's important for people that want to move abroad, to have the resources to do so. So, I'm really invested in motivating other people who are thinking about moving abroad too, you know, do so in a strategic way, so that they can live abroad sustainably, I like to say, so, I, I've been able to move abroad and live here long term. But I have so many things that I wish I would have done differently or resources that I like to share with people just so that they can have a more seamless transition abroad. Because I mean, I was able to do it, I don't have any regrets. But if I could just pass on to someone else, some wisdom or information that I've learned along the way to make it more easy, I really enjoy doing that. So that's kind of La Vie Locale in a nutshell as to where we are now. So, I still do the trip planning, and experience creations for individuals and groups that want to come here and discover Paris. I also do the other flipside of encouraging people who want to move to Paris or other places in France to do so and providing them with the resources and services to do so.

CHRISTINE [01:08:19] All right, it's my favorite part of the interview, where we talk about wellness. So, I asked Maya to describe her definition of wellness, and how her experience living abroad has influenced her definition in the practice of wellness.

MAYA [01:08:40] My background is being a public health professional. I think that for me, well, being wellness versus health is super important. And wellness is a spectrum. For me, it's your own perception of being in good health, and all of the elements that comprise health for you, or things that are important. So, for me, that's having, I would say a balance and perception of my actual health. But then also, as far as wellness goes, there's an element of happiness and peace for me, which has been a big thing. When I was in the US, I struggled a lot with feeling overwhelmed or stressed out just because of quality of life. And one thing that I love about being abroad, that has been a big shift for me, it's just my quality of life in general. And that goes back to the wellness piece. So, for me, it's being balanced, happy and at peace with my health, my actual physical health, my relationships, finances, my professional career, all of those things, and it's a matter of just really being confident in where you are at. So, I think that being abroad has helped me to kind of formulate this idea of wellness. It's not just about being physically healthy, it's about having well-being. It's about being comfortable in the relationships that you have having boundaries, what does that mean for you, being professional in a setting that makes you comfortable. All of those elements are important. Finances as well as important. I remember, my perception of money in the US was very different than it is now here, I am not so consumed with how much I earn. What's important to me is, do I have what I need to be comfortable? Am I happy? Do I have a good quality of life that's more important to me than how much I earn? And so I think living in France has taught me and I think this is what when I started to question. Oh, "do I want to go back to the US?", I always kind of stop and think about my quality of life, it has changed drastically from what my quality of life used to look in the US. I feel I'm very much at peace here. Quality of life here is very good. There's a good work-life balance, people and friends take vacation very seriously, just at a minimum, you have a five to six weeks holiday when you work a normal nine to five job. And people don't play around with that. I actually had a job when I worked at a research unit where I had nine weeks of vacation per year. So, I was like, I don't think I could ever go back to a company where I only had two weeks or something like that in the US. And I just think in general, French people they don't think about it, because it's just second nature. But living in a country where you're in a social system where healthcare is a norm, it's a right for anyone who lives here, even if you're a foreigner, that takes a big stress off of you worrying about having health insurance or being able to get care. I know that, for example, even education is affordable. It's something that everybody has access to. So, I think all of those elements have impacted my wellness, my peace of mind because I don't have these, I guess barriers in my thinking when it comes to different things anymore that I would have. When I think about going back to the US. Sometimes I do want to move back home. But what does that look like? What do I need to be able to do that? And essentially, I think that I need to either have a very comfortable situation where I have enough money to be able to have the health care to pay for my child's education and things like that, that I just split as a norm have already here. So, I think that one of the biggest things that I'm super grateful for living abroad is just my peace of mind. I used to be very anxiety-ridden just because I was always thinking about the next steps, plan A, plan B, financial things, things like that. And I

mean, I'm not going to say I don't have any worries here. But I do have a sense of a safety net, I guess I would say, when it comes to certain things, healthcare, education, that I don't take for granted and that I'm super thankful for, which has just, I bet I think has just contributed to my overall wellness and wellbeing.

CHRISTINE [01:13:34] Thank you so much, Maya, for your patience, and also for just being a wonderful, wonderful guest. If you all want to keep up with Maya, you can via social media.

MAYA [01:13:39] So, on the internet, you can find me on Instagram at lavielocale. And then I have the website, lavielocale.com. And yeah, those are the two main places where you can find me online.

CHRISTINE [01:13:52] Thank you again, Maya, for being a wonderful guest. And if you are wanting to learn more about Maya, check out her show notes page at flourishintheforeign.com/Maya. And again, if you want to join the Moving Abroad With Intention course and get that \$100 off, be quick and sign up right now. There's a link in the description of this episode. And I love, love, love to have you. And if you are interested in launching your own podcast, I highly recommend joining WOC Podcasters Insider's Membership. I've been a member of this membership for a while now. And honestly, I feel that is the reason the podcast has done so well. And the reason the podcast has continued to grow and take on even more exciting opportunities is because of the support and the great advice that I get from WOC Insiders. So, if you're wanting to launch your podcast or just get more serious about your podcast, or perhaps monetize your podcast? Join the WOC Podcasters Insiders' Membership today. And you can do so via the link in the description of this episode or on the website flourishintheforeign.com/resources. It's a great way for you to support this and hear the podcast, at no additional cost to you. If you have not followed the podcast on YouTube or on Instagram. What are you doing, there's a lot of great content on both platforms. On Instagram, I've done many, many, many Instagram lives, some solo and some with past guests that are jam-packed with amazing gems on Moving and Living Abroad. On YouTube, I really have a lot of great conversations with some past guests about what they're up to now and how living abroad really has changed their lives. So, check it out youtube.com/flourishintheforeign and instagram.com/flourishforeign. As always, thanks so much to Zachary Higgs for producing the music of this here's podcast. If you need music for your next creative endeavor, he is definitely your guy. You can find all of his information in the show notes of this episode. And please remember that it's not about getting abroad, it's not about being abroad. It's about thriving abroad. So go abroad and cultivate a life well-lived. See you next time. Bye.

CHRISTINE [01:16:49] On the next episode of *Flourish in the Foreign*:

CLAIRE B. SOARES [01:16:52] I was speaking with someone else. And they were saying to me that those of us who actually live abroad as you've like crossed this different threshold, that you're a very unique person because of the risks that your family feels, that you potentially feel and all the battles of you, leaving the US to come somewhere else that everyone's looking at

you crazy and you may not get a lot of support. But the fact that you're thriving probably means that you have a very strong sense of self and a strong confidence.