



Elizabeth Farrar

Speaking Easy with Elizabeth Farrar

By Whitney Barnes

Photos By Bridget Shaw

Elizabeth Farrar established the Speakeasy Language House, a brightly-lit classroom off her family's Enos Park Airbnb, to promote her three Cs: Communication, Community, and Culture.

Just six months in the creating, she is teaching English, French and Spanish language classes to a few small groups and has big plans for her future world of words.

Her passion for all things foreign began when she took an eye-opening trip to Haiti at the age of 16.

"There were so many remarkable experiences I had with strangers... I think it is fascinating when you can have a reaction and similarities with someone from all the way across the world," Farrar said.

Her love for language encouraged her to major in French at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. She honed her speaking skills in 2003 during a semester abroad in Senegal where she lived with a French-speaking family in Dakar and immersed herself in African culture.

After coming back and earning her degree, she was selected to teach English in Normandy, France. Back in the states she returned to SIU to earn her Master of Arts degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL).

Next, she decided to learn Spanish and took off for San Jose, Costa Rica, where she lived and worked as an English teacher. She made her way north becoming certified to teach in Florida's public schools and began her career teaching French to American students.

Recently, she has moved back home to Springfield, where she is an adjunct faculty member for ELS at the University of Illinois in Springfield.

Despite the joy she finds close to family, Farrar said she misses practicing her language skills and meeting people from across the world.

"Sometimes I feel like my life never happened because I'm right back where I started," Farrar said. "There is this world I have been exposed to that I am not ready to let it disappear, and maybe I have something that I can share with Springfield."

Her homesickness for her multilingual community has encouraged her to create one of her own.

Thankful to her father for providing the space, she has gone about setting up the classroom for French and Spanish classes, hiring another teacher and begun planning events to expand her organization.

"The idea is that this is not an academic setting — this is my creation, my own little world," Farrar said.

Farrar has had to practice in different environments, where people were very friendly and encouraging in Senegal and Latin America, and more judgmental in France. The most important thing to her is that her students feel comfortable practicing speaking their language and enjoy the process, she said.

"I have this alter ego when I teach French. I become this animated French lady to try to get people to relax and just have fun," she said.

She also offers conversational French for high schoolers in the summer and travelers looking to go abroad, and soon she will be taking a small group to Paris.

"It is much more focused on speaking and not writing. I feel like in public schools there

are 25 or 30 people, and kids are embarrassed to talk, or they don't get enough time to talk. For me, I know that it is so much easier to learn when you have a friendly person talking to you," Farrar said.

To reach more people she would like to add Arabic, Chinese, ESL classes and take more people abroad.



The Speakeasy Language House - Airbnb
1007 N. 7th St.

"Speaking a foreign language is so much fun. It is like speaking in code; there is so much to learn," Farrar said.

To expand on these codes in different ways, she would also like to offer more creative language classes.

"One thing I am interested in doing is people who can learn French through songs and song lyrics, and we can sing in French or Spanish. There is a major connection between language and music. I have it set up for four classes where we focus on one singer," said Farrar, who sings in the cover band Liz Fitz.

As her business picks up momentum, Farrar hopes she can branch out to new opportunities, possibly using the space in her family Airbnb called the Grand Guesthouse, to host social events for people of all cultures.

"So much change is happening in the world right now because of globalization and technology like social media. There is

so much more people have in common. I have always been taught that we are more alike than we are different. I have always been from a family that has welcomed international people," she said, mentioning how grateful she is that her parents have allowed her to utilize the space that she helps to maintain.

"The house is often not rented so I would like to extend it for events... In my mind, I'm planning on having more events like a bilingual party. To get in the speakeasy, you have to show that you're fluent in another language, and I would facilitate an activity, people do a couple games, kind of like they do at showers," Farrar said.

Besides teaching language classes, Farrar is also a certified yoga instructor holding classes at Yoga Sevens and Innovate Springfield where she is a part of its collaborative community.

"Little by little is how I can win this race," Farrar jokes about all the organization and work needed to turn her dreams into a reality.

In the end, Farrar said she is just trying to do her part to promote a little more peace and understanding in her community.

"The more we are afraid of our neighbors, the more violence happens. Anxiety stems from fear. I am a person for peace, and I think maybe this has to happen because there is no going back — it is an international world," Farrar said.

You can book classes online or learn more about her language classes and upcoming community events at speakeasylanguagehouse.com or by calling 217-502-4009. The Grand Guesthouse is located at 1007 N. 7th St. Springfield, IL..