



Marrying in France

Elaine So Jackie thank you very much for agreeing to talk about your marriage to Loïc two years ago?

Jackie Yes two years ago last July.

Elaine Because we are very interested in finding out all the different procedures that you have to go through here. So when you and Loïc first decided to get married, what was the first step that you had to take?

Jackie First thing you have to do is to go and see the Maire and tell him that you intend to get married uh, then you come up with a mutually convenient date.

Elaine So that was the first point you actually have to do, go to the Maire.

Jackie And then because I am an étrangere, the Mairie's secretary had to do all their research first. Then a week later they came back with a long list of legal requirements on *my* part. As far as Loïc was concerned it was simply a matter of showing his 'carte d'identité' and when we first mooted the idea of getting married we were under the impression that we still had to have blood tests to check that we weren't er blood relations but, in fact, it had been dropped that by the government. They don't do that anymore, you can marry your cousin now, or your brother, but they might notice in the village though, there's actually a village of three hundred something residents.

Elaine So there were extra sort of as it were paperwork, legalities that were on your part and that was quite a lot

Jackie Yeah, there was quite a lot and in fact it turned out to be quite expensive, all your paperwork all the proof of your birth, previous marriages, previous divorces has to be translated by somebody who is 'agrée' a person who is an official translator. Everything has to be sent to them registered post, that's quite expensive, so it actually added up quite a lot. I don't actually think the marriage at the Mairie cost us anything. The main thing that you have to do as a foreigner is so prove that a) you are able to be married, because you're not married in another country and you have to prove that you are a suitable person to marry a French person, which sounds a bit weird to us, but there's this thing called a 'certificate de

cotume'; which when you read it, it says: this is a certificate from your Embassy to say that you can be married. I rang them and asked them what do I do about this and they rang me back, having left a message saying; this is what you do and basically I sent them a photocopy of my passport which was stamped by the Mairie to say that it was an official copy, and then within about four or five days they er sent back this letter in French saying that as far as they are concerned there were no outstanding debt, marriages, police cases; and so that says you can go ahead and er start the process of applying to be married in France and they won't even look at it until you have got that er certificate.

Elaine So how long did it take for all that to be sorted out?

Jackie About, about three weeks by the time I had got to grips with it and got my head around the fact that I had to contact the Embassy which actually for me was one of the worst things actually thinking 'oh golly I have got to ask for something in particular I don't what the name of it is in English, I don't want to sound like a dumpty, I need a 'certificate de coutume' and I don't know what it is called in English, and I'm English', because I you know that just sounds a bit ridiculous doesn't it? But, yeah, the 'certificate de coutume' is what the French call it and they knew exactly what it was at the Embassy so they're obviously used to providing these things. So that came back and that was fine. You also, I have been married previously and therefore divorced and I had to provide copies of my birth certificate, my marriage certificate, *my parents' marriage certificate*, my first marriage certificate and the decree from the courts that decreed the divorce and then everything that you have that is not in French has to be translated and so then everything was okay apart from one of my witnesses, my son, I needed to have his..., a copy of his birth certificate and that had to be translated. This was only realised after I had said my *témoign*, my witness was going to be English and we then moved the date of the marriage because he, it was the weekend before he turned eighteen and it had to be the weekend after he was eighteen, luckily nothing had been printed; and up until the week before the marriage you can change everything, you can change the names of your witnesses, everything, but, about four days before, you sign everything beforehand, everything you sign, the witnesses have to sign, so obviously so Christopher had had to, I'd had to send the papers to the UK, he'd had to sign them and had to come back. Everyone had to sign everything beforehand and then on the Tuesday before we were married on the Saturday that had to be sent off to the Préfecture and you couldn't change anything after that.

Elaine That's written in blood then...

Jackie It was written in blood apart from yet we weren't married but was absolutely determined from there, because you have to be married in the Mairie, you can't be married anywhere else, you are not

officially married until you are married in the Mairie.

Elaine So everybody has to have that civil ceremony even if they are going to be married in a church...

Jackie Even if they are going to be married in a church. Nowadays people get married in a church and then often are married the same, straight afterwards. There was a wedding this year in St Guen where they were all married in the Mairie and then the bride and groom walked in pouring rain followed by their close friends and family down to the church and er that was lovely, it was really nice to see that. But my mother and father-in-law have been married sixty five years this year, er, I asked them about it er not very long ago and they were married on a Thursday in the Mairie, and it was just them and their parents, six of them went, and then they were married in the church on the Saturday two days later. I felt relaxed enough or familiar enough with them to say, 'when you were married in the Mairie in 1948 erm what happened next that night did you have dinner together, and then did you sleep together that night'? And they went 'huhhh! Oh no, not at all, no it couldn't, no we couldn't coucher before we had been to the church'. So that's a quite a sweet little story about the olden days.

Elaine So how did the exchanges of vows differ from those in in England?

Jackie The official part is that they have to have repeat lots of things, and they have to say Jacqueline Harvey, which is my maiden name, is marrying Loïc Bertho this day, blah, blah blah, and then they say in front of these witnesses, and they give the names and addresses of the witnesses, position in the civil code, so I am a divorced person, I am not a spinster, born to this man and this woman, naming my parents and where they lived er, the same for Loïc, and our birth dates but the vows were just do you promise to be a good man and wife? Do you promise to take part in the community? Do you promise to do good by this man and do good by this woman? And do you accept them in marriage? I didn't feel it was over officially it was just a lovely relaxed moment.

Elaine A good happy atmosphere..

Jackie: Yeah it was great

Elaine Surrounded by lots of friends, so is there, finally, any one piece of advice you would give to a couple who were perhaps planning to get married here?

Jackie Leave plenty of time for getting all the paperwork sorted. Enjoy the cultural differences, if you are marrying a French person, it's a completely different culture, and it hits me every week of my life being married to a Frenchman, but it's such a positive thing and to do I feel like my horizons have been widened by the whole experience of sharing the four years with er a Frenchman. The

wedding was an amazing culture shock to me because, there is nothing the same as in the UK really,.... nothing.