



## *Obtaining French Citizenship - Jody Phillips*

Elaine: Why did you decide to get French citizenship? Was it prompted by the 'Brexit' decision?

Jody: Funnily enough, it wasn't actually because of the Brexit vote. We started this because we've lived here a long time and well integrated in the community but we thought we needed to go that one extra step to be fully integrated in to the French society and become a citizen.

Elaine: What did you actually have to do in order to obtain this citizenship? What was the process?

Jody: Well, to start with, because I am under 60 I had to take a French language test. I took the test. I waited and I passed. The certificate that you receive for the French test lasts for 2 years so I thought I had two years then to get all of my dossier together .

Elaine: Where did you get the information that told you what pieces of paper you needed?

Jody: It was difficult because I had no idea and I didn't know anybody at the time who had gone through this process so I went on the official government website and you just put in 'naturalization' and it comes up with various helpful information and there's also web sites where you can practise your French on the internet as well. Then I went to my local Prefecture website and on there I had a very helpful PDF file that then gives you the list of the documents that you require. It's very comprehensive, this Prefecture's website and the things that you need - you need your language test certificate; you need birth certificates; marriage certificate; divorce papers. They also, because they're going to be in English, you need those translated into French. When I started the process I had been living here less than ten years so I needed to do a UK Police check which that then needs to be translated. We also had to provide justification for living in France for five years. We did this by bills that we had received from EDF, France Telecom etc, and also our five years' tax returns. Also because we have three children we needed all their school attendance certificates to be provided. We also needed a Timbre Fiscal for 55 Euros which you get from the local Tax Office to hand in your dossier. Also you need to prove that you have enough resources to not be a burden on the state which for my case it would have to be a contract for working and providing three pay slips, but if you're retired you just have to provide ...

Elaine: ...so that you've got a pension coming in from England.

Jody: ...and also you needed a Bordereau de Situation Fiscal which was the hardest thing to find because I didn't know what it was. But you had to go to the Tax

Office and it's to prove that you have... you're up-to-date with paying all your taxes. We had to provide that we did live here so you either provide your rent agreement for your house or your house deeds, or copies. The only thing that you need originals for were the birth certificates which had to be within six months so I had to contact the local Registry Office in the UK where the birth certificates come from and then get them translated quite quickly. You have to do things in stages because it costs a little bit of money to get all these things translated and to get all the documents together.

Elaine: Did you find that the people you met in this process were helpful?

Jody: They were all very, very helpful; they were all very understanding.

Elaine: So once you've got your pieces of paper all together, then you apply for an interview.

Jody: What happens is you do have to ring the Prefecture for a rendezvous. You have to take two copies so you have to take the original and a photocopy with you of everything and a couple of photographs. They go through every single page to make sure you have got everything so the chap that I had to take my dossier checked everything and then he went on to say that I now have an interview and it was questions on France. What the French National Anthem was; I didn't have to sing it - it was OK - and also various questions about culture; historical dates in French history; the structure of the parliament. But I didn't know all the answers and he was quite happy - he then explained what the answer was and 'oh, yes, I do know' - and, yeah, he was very, very nice. But I also had random questions on what was in the newspaper today, or during that week - just to see that I was current with current affairs worldwide, not just in France. So, when I was in the interview I said to the gentleman "so, what happens now" and he said in should take about six months but this is France and it took a little bit longer than that. So I waited and it was, I think it was 18 months later.

Elaine: So what was the actual ceremony like? Did you have to sing "La Marseillaise"?

Jody: We did indeed. There were 55 other people at the ceremony who'd also gained French Nationality. It was packed. There was standing room only because lots of people come with family as well to come and watch. It is a very important day and the first thing you do is, as a group, not on your own, as a group, you sing La Marseillaise and that was great and then there's a presentation at the beginning just to welcome to France and that was lovely and then you get called out by Commune and because I live in a small Commune that begins with a 'C' I was one of the first people to go up and my Mayor came as well and he said a few nice words about me because he obviously knows who I am.

Elaine: What level of French was actually required?

Jody: If you're under 60 you do need to take the test and that needs to be an accredited centre that does the test and it has to be of B1 standard. But if you're over 60 you don't have to supply a certificate for a test. There is a booklet that you can download to help you with the interview which I didn't know at the time and it's called a 'Livre de Citoyen' and that's got all the things that you need to know before you go into interview about the history of France - key dates - and that's helpful. So you do have to have a certain level of French but they're not there to trip you up. They want to help you. They know that you really want to make this step.

Elaine: So what advice, Jody, would you give to other UK residents who would like to go down that path?

Jody: I would say 'have a go' - it's not that daunting really. You just have to be patient.

Elaine: Well, thank you very much Jody. It's been very, very informative.

Jody: Thank you.

