



Simon interviews:

Andrea Oostdijk, writer : <https://floortjezwigtman.nl>

Simon: Andrea

Andrea: Yes

Simon: Thanks for joining us at Spotlight on Brittany. And I would like, if you could maybe tell us a little bit about what you do.

Andrea: Oh, OK. Well. Yeah. Well, in daily life I'm called Andrea Oostdijk. I'm from The Netherlands, south west of Netherlands, Zeeland, the land close to the sea. I am a writer. That's, er writing I use the pen name that's Floortje Zwigman, that's even harder to pronounce for for British people.

Simon: Yeah

Andrea: And French people, by the way

Simon: Yeah

Andrea: Er and I'm a writer. I started er I published my first book in 2001. It was a a book for young adults and I wrote historical er novels for young adults for about 14 years I think, yes.

Simon: What sort of period of history?

Andrea: Well. several, several. Anything that caught my attention.

Simon: OK

Andrea: I started in the Middle Ages and then moved to Romania and at the end of the Middle Ages. The story of the real Dracula.

Simon: The story of what?

Andrea: The story of the real Dracula

Simon: Ah right. The real Dracula

Andrea: Yeah, Blood the impaler

Simon: Yeah



Andrea: Is er a figure that's er really exists. That was a prince at the end of the 15th century.

Simon: Right

Andrea: In the middle of er territorial and religious wars between Christian nations and the the Ottoman Empire.

Simon: Yeah

Andrea: And well he was quite a fascinating figure. Even more fascinating than er than the blood sucking count we know. So um er I wanted to write about him because I was a teacher in the 90s.

Simon: OK

Andrea: And I had a lot of children, refugee children in my class that came from Croatia and Bosnia

Simon: Ah

Andrea: When there was a civil war in those years

Simon: OK, yeah

Andrea: And I wanted to understand a little more about the history of those nations of the Balkans in general. And I found that has quite a fascinating history.

Simon: Yeah

Andrea: Yeah. And we don't know anything about it in Western Europe. And that's strange because it's worse in a way - if if those wars worked out differently we would have lived in a quite different.

Simon: Yeah

Andrea: Er er part of the world. So yeah, we're we're missing out on the on the large part of a European history and that's a pity.

Simon: Yeah, there's a lot of culture there we we don't know about

Andrea: No. No.



- Simon: Pre-existing and pre-dating the European sort of culture
- Andrea: Yes indeed. And a lot of those histories still influencing the daily lives of those people over there. Because those conflicts between Christian and Muslim peoples over there, those are influenced by that history. And you cannot understand that conflict if you don't know anything about it.
- Simon: So you began, 2001 you said you started writing
- Andrea: Yes
- Simon: Historical novels. And then where did that lead you?
- Andrea: Yeah, well. I was unlucky enough to be quite successful early in my career
- Simon: Did you say unlucky enough or lucky enough?
- Andrea: Unlucky enough, because it's it makes you a little spoilt and a little lazy. Whether you want to or not.
- Simon: OK. Spoilt and lazy. OK.
- Andrea: Yeah. I, I, I won some awards for children's novels
- Simon: Did you ?
- Andrea: In Holland
- Simon: Wow
- Andrea: A couple of my books were translated into German, Danish even. Um well then you think you have arrived
- Simon: Yep. yep....
- Andrea: But, but, no never. You're always as good as your last novel.
- Simon: Yeah.
- Andrea: And you have to stay productive and people expect you to stay productive and bring out a new novel every year or two years
- Simon: Yeah, yeah



Andrea: Um. Well that does tend to dry up your creativity. So I'm now working on my first novel for adults

Simon: OK

Andrea: And I've been working on it since 2015

Simon: OK, so, eight years

Andrea: Taking my time

Simon: Yeah, OK yeah. And so you were writing for young adults before, teenagers really.

Andrea: Yes, yes

Simon: Wha, Wha, That was because, what made you decide you wanted actually to write specifically for that age group?

Andrea: OK. Um, what made me decide to do that? It was really a choice for freedom because er Dutch literature is a little restricted to the problematic lives of adults

Simon: OK

Andrea: People in their 40s, people in their 50s

Simon: OK

Andrea: And struggling with religion, relationships, etc. And well, when you introduce for instance a fear that is known in popular culture, that's a vampire, OK there is no way you get, you will get taken seriously. And that is a pity because genres like horror, ghost stories, science fiction they can deal with fascinating subjects, things that are really on the edge of life and death.

Simon: Right

Andrea: Um. When, when you look at the history of those genres, like Frankenstein is a fascinating novel about science and frontiers you could cross but maybe shouldn't cross

Simon: Yeah



- Andrea: So, it's it's a pity that at least in Holland writers didn't have the freedom to to play with those genres too. It it has changed in the last couple of years.
- Simon: Right
- Andrea: But it made me decide OK I want to write serious novels but I also want to have the freedom to choose my genres. I write not for adults, I write for young adults.
- Simon: Right. And so now, the new, the novel you're working on for adults or for everyone really I suppose you could say, would it be, I mean, are you able to tell us what its subject matter is?
- Andrea: Yes, it it's a historical novel again and it's set in the Roman Empire and the main character is er is a doctor. It it's a female doctor because when I was researching that age I found out that the majority, no not the majority, that's that's stretching a a a bit, but, ten to twenty per cent of doctors were female and that is a percentage we didn't get to er now until far in the 20th century. So that is looks very emancipated and that was my fascination with it. OK history has a way of confronting you with facts. And the facts in this case is that that the medical profession's looked at as a craft. It was working with your hands and not working with your head as much, or talking or debating. And those things had er highest standing in the Roman Empire.
- Simon: Right
- Andrea: So if you were a doctor, you you worked with your hands. You had you didn't have that highest status so a woman could take that profession too.
- Simon: So I suppose the question is what brought you to Brittany And and when? How how long have you been here? And, yeah, tell us a little bit about that.
- Andrea: OK. Yes, well. I wanted to move from the Netherlands for quite a time, quite some time. And that is not because it's not a comfortable country, it's a very comfortable country. You're you ver very well taken care of. But it's also a very small country. So the countryside of my youth, that freedom and space you had around you, that is just not there anymore. Because the comfortable country is now being completely run over by things that make life even more comfortable, like like highways, like great big warehouses er where packages get sent, um. That is just taking over the countryside. And I was, I, I, I've felt hemmed in really.
- Simon: OK



Andrea: And I did have a plot of land where I grew vegetables just outside the city

Simon: OK

Andrea: And there was still - you had hedgerows, you had meadows

Simon: Yeah

Andrea: You had cows. Er, there was still that space and the peace and quiet, but then I heard, OK, they're building a new housing estate over there, and that was then, was the moment I decided I had enough. Er during Corona we bought a a camper van and started just driving around to see where we end up.

Simon: Yeah

Andrea: And we ended up in Brittany

Simon: Yeah.

Andrea: On a campsite in the middle of a forest, that was populated with ants. You you would say the walking trees from The Lord of The Rings, those those gnarly, great big characters of trees. I was just fascinated with the richness of the nature over here. It's so different from Holland. In Holland nature is tolerated in its designated area and is um mostly for recreation. And here nature is still existing for itself in parts.

Simon: The physical, natural environment is very different from Holland

Andrea: It is completely different

Simon: Yeah

Andrea: Because Holland has open landscape. It's very flat of course but all the hedgerows, all the trees have been taken out. What I found here, is something I lost a long time ago. Because I started writing stories even before I could write I started making up stories as a child, always inspired by my environment. I, I always felt that there were stories just round the corner, that there was something hidden in that tree that tell told the story.

Simon: Yeah

Andrea: That was some kind of mystery. I've lost the beliefs I had as a child but I can still use that because I am very attuned to to the atmosphere of a certain landscape

and over here there's always something hidden, er behind the next hill, behind those trees. There's always something you don't see.

Simon: Yeah

Andrea: And exactly the things that you don't see are the things that make you curious

Simon: Yeah

Andrea: Make you want to know, OK what is the story here?

Simon: Exactly, yeah, yeah

Andrea: And and that is very inspiring to my writing

Simon: Fascinating. So when, I mean I know you you say you're taking your time with the novel. Do you you feel that you're, do you see do you see a date for completion? Or

Andrea: Oh yeah, people ask me that a lot. Well, not really yet because it's, it's it's a developing project

Simon: Right

Andrea: It it changes with me really

Simon: OK

Andrea: Moving to Brittany has changed me and will change me more in the future

Simon: Yeah

Andrea: So that will probably influence the story too

Simon: Right, OK. Well thank you very much Andrea. It's really, really good talking to. Um, do you have a website?

Andrea: Yes

Simon: Or any kind of leaflet we can?

Andrea: Yes, I have a website



Simon: And what do you have on your website? Do you have links to your books? And

Andrea: Yeah. The the different novels, I also write non-fiction for children, that's on there too.

Simon: OK

Andrea: And er

Simon: Great. Thank you very much

Andrea: OK. Thank you.