



Pontivy Escape Game - Karen Heath

Rob: So I am with Karen Heath, in the Escape Game, Pontivy. We're in a room at the minute - it's a games room and I can see lots of playing cards around me, so, Karen, who's idea was it?

Karen: It was my idea for a game in Pontivy, but the idea of such games came about in about 2009. It used to exist on computers where people played and clicked and went into rooms and solved puzzles, open padlocks and then somebody had an idea to make this a real, live game where people can come and play as a family, or as colleagues, or just for fun with their friends.

Rob: I can see a padlock behind your left shoulder there...

Karen: Yes.

Rob: So how does one actually go about cracking that code? Do you just, by experiment?

Karen: No, there are clues all round the room. They could be puzzles, they could be colour codes, they could be combining two pieces of information, and you have to work out what the code may be and then open the padlock. You may find inside a key, or another clue, or...

Rob: Just looking around this room again there are lots of references here to, I think is that Alice in Wonderland?

Karen: It is, so the theme at the moment is Alice in Wonderland and I change the theme here every six months. Pontivy isn't a huge town so it needs a change every six months.

Rob: Is that because you want people to come back again when you have changed the theme?

Karen: Exactly, and they do, which is good.

Rob: Yeah, very good.

Karen: I tend to choose themes which don't have anything to scare young children and I do games from 10 years and upwards. There are lots of other games which are perhaps more adult in which you are handcuffed and in a prison and then you have to escape. But here I choose themes which are good for children as well.

Rob: Right. When you say all ages, what's, how old has been the oldest customer you have had? The oldest gamer?

Karen: Oh, the oldest gamer must be late 80s I think.

Rob: Good God. And how did ...



Karen: It came with the family so there was the grandchildren, the parents and the grandparents all came together.

Rob: And how did she, or he cope?

Karen: Actually it was a couple. They were both in their 80s I think. And they did, actually they did very well. They were a little apprehensive when they arrived, that was clear. Um, the family was trying to say there is nothing to frighten you, it is just fun and when they came out there were smiles over their faces. It was beautiful to see, they really, really enjoyed it.

Rob: Now you are an English teacher as well?

Karen: I am.

Rob: So is this as well as being entertainment is there anything educational in it?

Karen: No, I think this game you have to use the education you already have, and use the knowledge you have built up over the years how to solve puzzles, how to mix two items to get a result, and that kind of thing.

Rob: But presumably the people who come here are largely French, are they? French kids?

Karen: Mostly the French. Not necessarily French children. I think most of the groups I have are in their 20s, 30s, 40s.

Rob: But could you make this educational, if you had some of the clues, for example, in English?

Karen: Er, we could. I have another friend who teaches at Lycee in town here in Pontivy and we thought perhaps together we could make an educational afternoon with her students, so we will work on that sometime next year.

Rob: What is your particular background?

Karen: Um, I used to work as a project manager in a bank. Four hundred resources and budgets of 300 million so it's a different life here in France. I decided that the rat race, as my mother used to call it, it was time to leave that and do something different.

Rob: So how much did you plough into this business? 200 million?

Karen: Oh no. Nowhere near that amount, a little less, yes.

Rob: Okay Karen, thank you very much.