



Rob interviewing William de May

WILLIAM

Let's say for some weeks I think that's already more of a month things are quite stable. It was not too good in December, the figures went up very quickly, but now they are down and they are staying down but not at the really bottom line. It's a bit too much, but it's quite stable, and if you compare to other countries where they were very loose and very easy-going in beginning of December, we were quite tight but now we are still at the same level and other countries now are really tight with closings at 6 o'clock or at 8 o'clock and here, let's say, everything hasn't changed. Schools are open, the shops are open.

ROBERT

Can you go to the restaurants?

WILLIAM

The restaurants are closed, for a long time now and all the cultural and sports, that's all closed. The shops are open. The restaurants is all take-away. Yes, that's it.

ROBERT

Actually it sounds like you've quite a bit of freedom anyhow.

WILLIAM

Well, we can go wherever we want. Sometimes we have to wear masks. In most of the cities it's really necessary. You have to wear your mask, but you can walk, you can bike, you can drive, you can go wherever you want – even abroad, which is now a big problem. People coming in bring the disease with them, the new Covid and it's not controlled enough. There was just one elderly home I think 4 people dead, 220 infected – let's say that's 10% of all the infections they have daily in Belgium. So it's really a big, big explosion.

ROBERT

Tell us a little bit about yourself William, because we've never met before and you're far away in Belgium – in which town are you?

WILLIAM

I'm living in Leuven – the oldest university city in Belgium. It's a dutch-speaking part of Belgium.



ROBERT

And what's CONFINEMENT in Dutch?

WILLIAM

Confinement, well we use normally the lockdown, the English words.

ROBERT

I can see behind you that you're a great reader.

WILLIAM

What you see behind are the books of the grandchildren

ROBERT

You have your grandchildren with you do you?

WILLIAM

Well we live in a bubble, so every family can have one person as an extra and in our case it's a grandchild we have in our bubble – that's the only one. She often is here and sleeps here with us and then she goes back to the mama and the papa and we wave.

ROBERT

What do you do in life? Are you still working?

WILLIAM

Normally I'm retired, but I still have a little agency in lighting, from London. The company Vaughan Lighting. It's a very traditional company that I represented for many years.

ROBERT

And has your activity been restricted?

WILLIAM

Yes, yes but honestly it's something you can manage, you can do a lot by phone and on the internet. It works with websites, you can send the pictures, you can see the stock. Everything goes very easy with a computer.

ROBERT

We've heard lots of very unhappy stories about people who have really suffered and have been very ill. I hope no-one around you has been ill?

WILLIAM

No, in our family we have no casualties. Our daughter is working as a nurse in the Covid department, so she has seen a lot. Well the situation is not too bad now in Belgium, but like it's now for one year, everyone gets very tired. She is working in the biggest hospital, the biggest hospital in Leuven is the biggest hospital in Belgium. I think 12,000 people are working there or something I think, so really big.

ROBERT

We're trying to think of something more up-beat if possible of what we might have gained from having our life changed by confinement, by lockdown. What kind of things have you been able to do, that maybe you didn't do before?

WILLIAM

Well, honestly, we are the lucky b*****, we don't lose money, we don't work so we have our pension coming in. We have a lot of time, we can walk, we have everything we need. I have a lovely wife, that means we are very happy together and we spend our time together. We read more, we look a bit more at television, one or two glasses more! It's always fun, it's always nice and she makes good food and, for us personally, the only thing that is hard is the contact with your friends and family, but we live day-by-day and say okay we can't do it now but later it will come back. We try to be very happy with what we have.

ROBERT

Is there anything that you have done that you've never done before, that you've done in the last year?

WILLIAM

What I've done – and I think it was 50 or 60 years ago I've done it – is we made a jigsaw puzzle. That's something really I never did for a very, very long time. With the children yes, but not...

ROBERT

Do you recommend it as a good way to pass the time?

WILLIAM

You do whatever you like, and if you do it together, we play games together and we made a jigsaw puzzle, and we read and we try to do some things that are just time-passing.

ROBERT

And do you think you're going to be doing jigsaws once this is all over, which we hope isn't going to be too long?

WILLIAM

No, I don't think so. We still prefer to be a bit busy. We have a house, we are lucky as well. We have a house at the coast, so we often are at the seaside, so we can split our time between a flat in Leuven and a house at the seaside. Been there quite a time because you're much more on your own and you have the beaches, fantastic beaches so you walk there and at the end we are quite healthy. But now, once the confinement will be down again, or out again, we work also for Oxfam. I'm working for the big accounts, if I can say, the big companies – so we try to sell them coffee – we try to sell them baskets so they can give them at the end of year to their personnel – things like that. We like to be good-hearted and make sure that the people who work very hard for the grain of coffee or the chocolate bean, that they also earn a bit of money, instead of starving because they don't get a fair price.

ROBERT

You're talking about Fair Trade aren't you?

WILLIAM

Yes Fair Trade yes.

ROBERT

That works well in Belgium?

WILLIAM

Well, it works. It never works enough. As we are here in a university city, we find a lot of companies and a lot of schools that are open for the idea of Fair Trade.

ROBERT

William de May – thanks ever so much for talking to us today. I wish you all the very best in Belgium. Our best wishes from Brittany.



WILLIAM

Thank you, I will go back to Brittany once it's possible. I need to visit Marilyn.

ROBERT

She'll be counting on you.

WILLIAM

We'll see, this year or next year.

ROBERT

I'll tell her.

WILLIAM

Okay.