

ELAINE INTERVIEWING GEORGE HOWARD

ELAINE

So George, to start, we are going to go backwards a little bit to when you came to Brittany.

GEORGE

Hi Elaine, yes I came to Brittany in 2002, the summer of, Tony and I decided we were going to have a new adventure and moved from our home in London, and I knew the area – we knew the area – from previous holidays we'd had here.

ELAINE

And so when you arrived, you had to set up, obviously, your separate businesses. How did that work out?

GEORGE

Well I already had my business set up. I didn't set up as an auto-entrepreneur really until 2000..and quite late, 2011.... or 2010 in fact because I was still working online for British companies and paying my tax through the HMRC over there. Well for the first few years, to be quite honest – two and a half years – we spent renovating the house and after that the money started to go down so Tony, being a structural engineer decided "what could I do?" and he started to do roofing and set up umm – in fact he set up a limited company over here and did that for three and a half years. It got very difficult because it was a limited company and the tax returns – doing the accounts each year proved very taxing – yes good word! After they produced the year-end accounts for him, all the stress of getting all the paperwork sorted, we decided that he couldn't cope stress-wise because he wasn't having any cash – everything was going on the charges and it wasn't like a conventional salaried job... because roofing is done in one big project and you have all your goods delivered in big palettes and then when it comes to getting paid for your job you are chasing somebody for a large amount of money. So, three and half years of that was enough, and so we put that to bed.

ELAINE

To experience!

GEORGE

Down to experience! And then Tony decided he would have to find another job, and then a job came up in the UK for about eighteen months, so we all moved there for about eighteen months which was terrible because we wanted to be back here – but we did it and then we came back to Brittany and picked up where we left off – and Tony decided he had to re-train in something because that hadn't worked. Unfortunately he spent a whole year trying to get onto one training course, but eventually he did and he spent eight months doing the training course and re-trained as a French electrician. So that's Tony – that's what he does now. He worked for six and half years in Loudeac and then set up on his own as an auto-entrepreneur, which he has been doing for about three years now.

ELAINE

Of course you've been very much involved with AIKB.

GEORGE

Yes, being here in – well we came here in 2002 and the association was set up in 2003 and, right at the beginning, Marilyn and Georges, who was with us then, had the building, the pavilion where it... the headquarters today as I call it the HQ. I do remember us actually moving in there and I remember moving furniture around downstairs, it was that early on actually when we took over the building which was fantastic. Since then, yes I joined the Board right at the beginning and got involved with the association in lots of ways. Over the years I've been producing all the posters and artwork for, not only the HQ itself, but the various spin-off groups that are under the umbrella of the AIKB, like the theatre group, the photography group – so being a graphic designer, that's my skill I can offer the association and something I wanted to do to help out.

ELAINE

And voice-overs... for the radio... and transcriptions.

GEORGE

Yes a few transcriptions and voice-overs too maybe! and yes I've met so many lovely people through the association and it's proved very challenging over the years to maintain a good and balanced Board of members there, but it's come through and I can't believe it's seventeen years – I can't believe that, I just can't believe it.

ELAINE

And it's still rolling on!

GEORGE

And it's still rolling on! It is.

ELAINE

And then, of course, Millie came on the scene.

GEORGE

Yes, that was interesting. Yes, since we've come to Brittany Tony and I wanted to have children and eventually, in 2006, Millie was born in Pontivy Hospital, which was absolutely fantastic – and there's not a lot I don't know about pregnancy in French!

ELAINE

I gather it's very well organised...



GEORGE

Oh it is – yes it was wonderful.

ELAINE

You get looked after very well.

GEORGE

Yes, looked after very well – yes it was wonderful. So we had the third member of our family and that was wonderful.

ELAINE

And she, of course, has followed right through the educational system, hasn't she – well up to the point now of going to lycée?

GEORGE

Yes that's right – I might add that's she also been on the Board of the AIKB for several years! Under duress! She's been to so many AIKB meetings, when she was little. So yes she's been through the whole school system. She started at Laniscat primary school which is excellent and, right from the age of three and a half I think, she started there and so, in fact, she did eight years at Laniscat – so quite a long time. Yes we were all involved with the primary school which was fantastic. We made lots of French friends over the years in Laniscat and Millie then went in 2000...and, where are we now... 21....2017 she went into collège, which is secondary school at Mur-de-Bretagne to Paul Eluard and started her studying for the 'Brevet' which is the exam you take before the Baccalaureat.

ELAINE

And so she'll be off to lycée?

GEORGE

So she took that, yes, in June this year and she's got her certificate now and will start lycée in September.

ELAINE

And what's she going to be studying?

GEORGE

She's going to do what is known as a Baccalaureat STMG – or a general Bac – Tech..nol..ogique.... as my French is so good! Technologique Baccalaureat, and from that she will do an STMG – which is Science, Technology, Management and Gestion – yes that's right, which is management and leadership – it's a business studies Baccalaureat.

ELAINE

But she's bi-lingual isn't she?

GEORGE

Very much so.

ELAINE

I mean, the world is her oyster...

GEORGE

Yes.

ELAINE

In terms of getting further employment after that...

GEORGE

Yes.

ELAINE

So, a wonderful opportunity, either in France or in any French-speaking country or England even.

GEORGE

That's right. And I've often said to friends that if there is one really big important thing we've got out of our time here, we've invested the time for Millie's benefit, so she's got more opportunities in the future. It's been worth every minute because just to see her speaking – or hear her speaking – French to her friends in such a natural way, as well as speaking English, to her family and friends at home, it's just wonderful! ...and it's going to really help her in the future.

ELAINE

She can make phone calls for you...

GEORGE

...and lots of things like that, yes! She hasn't done that quite yet, but.... she manages to avoid... but I'm sure we'll be calling on her a bit more in the future!

ELAINE

Excellent – well I know she'll have great success there... Now you're moving, not out of France, but let's say down the road a bit, to Charente-Maritime?

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GEORGE

Yes, that's right, we've... a very sudden decision last summer. We've decided it's time to have a new chapter in our lives and we're currently house-hunting further south and, not going back to the UK, we decided to stay put which we're very happy about – and the timing is excellent because Millie is going to change institution – she's going to start lycée. So it works out. We've actually decided to go to La Rochelle because that's where we found that we really loved it down there, and the area, and so she will go to school there as well.

ELAINE

But I believe you've got sea-faring routes – which is why you're attracted to that particular area?

GEORGE

Ooh yes. Yes it is, it's my father's fault, being that he was a marine painter and a sailor all his life. But La Rochelle has a marina of over 3,500 yachts down there. So I have a feeling it's something to do with him... us going there, but yes I can't wait to go down and be back in the nautical world.

ELAINE

Exactly – the call of the sea!

Well, we wish you – because you've done a lot for the radio – you've done voice-overs, you've done transcriptions, and the website... and hopefully that will continue a bit.... we wish you the very best of luck on this new adventure.

GEORGE

Thank you Elaine – it's been lovely talking to you – and we'll keep in touch for sure.

ELAINE

Absolutely!