

Marie-Laure speaking about wearing the traditional Breton costume

Marie-Laure:

This costume is 20 years old and I am very, very proud to wear it for many occasions. I have been wearing it for nearly the whole summer this year, because I have been to Pardons which are Breton feasts. It's religious but there is another part of the Pardon which isn't religious, and people just have fun, and when I go to Pardons I always wear my Breton costume, because it is so beautiful it is such a pleasure and a joy to wear it and I know that I can give joy to people. And, I know that I wear it because I was brought up by my great-grandmother who was born in 1894, so that is why I can feel it in my bones. The costume I wear is from Plouguernevel, from Rostrenen, but more generally it is a costume Le Poher and Le Poher was a part of central Brittany which I would say begins in the east in Plouguernevel and to the west to Collorec. So my costume is very important to me, and I've got three very short stories about the costume which will say much about it.

The first one, it's not true but it's just humoristic, and it shows because it's very interesting which when we're told this about cutting the head, and when you cut the head off something it's dead. It's just like that. It shows how much the Breton craft is important. So, the story, the first one is about a Bigouden woman, and it's beginning to rain. So that woman suddenly, she takes all her skirts up and she covers her coiffe with her skirts and people are astonished, and she says okay, my bottom is 70 years old but my coiffe has been ironed this very morning. So that is the first one.

The second one is really true because it is in a show of Melaine Favennec who is a well-known Breton singer. And, during the show, he tells us about one morning he was coming down the stairs into the kitchen and suddenly he saw an Indian woman in the kitchen. He just couldn't believe it. He was a small kid and what was that Indian woman doing in his kitchen? She was combing her long, long hair down to her waist and suddenly, that woman, she took his grandmother's coiffe, put it on her hair and it was his grandmother. So, that is to say that a long time ago you didn't even know what a woman looked like without her coiffe because she was wearing it all the time.

And, the third one is a very short one. It is about the woman who made this costume for me. She is called Josianne and this year she is 80 years old. She told me that when she was young she was coming back from a show in her Breton costume and she was fed up with wearing her coiffe so she took it off, and her mother opened the door and smacked her into the face. Because, you can take any part of the costume you want but not the coiffe. You had to have something on your hair. So nowadays, I can do as I like and I can wear a coiffe or not, but when you wear it you become another person, because you have to stand very tall with your head like that so you become proud. Proud of the costume, but proud of who you are and you regain dignity.



So, the three stories are about how important the coiffe is. And to make them, of course as Wendy said, each coiffe belongs to a village, a few villages, a region, a part of Brittany, because the costume and the coiffe especially is your identity card. You can tell from the coiffe from far away where a woman comes from, and from the costume, the whole costume, but even only the coiffe, you can tell the age, if she was married, if she was single, and if she was poor. So the wealth, you could read anything you like, anything you needed there from the costume.

Elaine: So it's actually made of?

Marie-Laure: Tulle, tulle. It's cotton tulle.

Elaine: And did women make their own, or was there someone perhaps in their village or community that had that task.

Marie-Laure: Yes, because just like ironing it needs a special skill to do them, so there was a special coiffe maker and costume maker, yes.