



Rob interviewing Denise Duncanson

Rob: Denise Duncanson, you've been in Brittany for some time now, I understand.

Denise: Yes I've been here for, umm 30 years,yeah, I can say thirty years because my eldest daughter was born here and when I arrived I was, I think 3 months pregnant with her, so it's very easy for me to remember how long I've been here.

Rob: Ok, and what brought you here to Brittany in the first place?

Denise: Oh, That's a long story.

Rob: I mean I can hear your Scots accent...is there something Celtic in the attraction of Brittany?

Denise: No... No, I suppose I, kind of, in some ways arrived here a bit by accident... But it's not so much really why I arrived here but it was more, like once I was here it just felt really right and I always felt very very much at home and I think that's where you have absolutely reason about the whole Celtic connection thing .. because I never really felt very far from home, strangely enough here.

Rob: Did you have a contact with France beforehand? I mean did you speak French?

Denise: No, no no, I didn't speak French at all no, no. I had done my O levels and Highers, with German as my foreign language which my German teacher, I still have the school bulletin which says that Denise has no aptitude for languages.

Rob: You've since proved them wrong I guess, haven't you.

Denise: Well I still make lots of, lots of mistakes that people like to laugh at sometimes. My children love to correct me but that's ok.

Rob: You've been here sometime. You've actually got a professional life here, haven't you?

Denise: Yes I do, I'm a therapist, I work with trauma and with stress management and I've now been doing that for 12, more than 12 years yeh and I'm now teaching.

Rob: Do you have French and English clients or just English clients or?

Denise: I have mostly French clients and I have occasional English speaking clients.

Rob: Because that demands a certain level of language

- Denise: Yeh, It's funny because I don't actually ever really think about it. It just flows naturally. People often ask me err how I switch in my head and I don't switch. I'm immersed, I write my shopping lists in French to myself, and things like that. I haven't trouble with a switch actually.
- Rob: Ok, you dream in French I guess?
- Denise: Ahh, now that's an interesting question. I don't know. Now that's a really interesting philosophical question, isn't it. If I dream of my French family do I dream in French? If I dream of my past and my childhood and Scotland, do I dream in English? Now there's an interesting question.
- Rob: You say you teach.. so do you teach therapy? What do you teach?
- Denise: Yes, I support other therapists in their studying and I supervise other therapists.
- Rob: So you are working with other therapists. I understand you go up to Paris and elsewhere in France.
- Denise: My practice is in Lannion in Brittany, but when I'm working with other therapists in training I work in Paris and Lyon and Nantes, but I also work at a distance all over the world, in French and English by Zoom or WhatsApp or Skype or whatever.
- Rob: You're also very involved in your community aren't you? You're part of the Conseil Municipal de Kergrist-Moëlou. How an earth did you get involved with that?
- Denise: Aah, because they asked me and I didn't know really how to say no! I have lived in Kergrist-Moëlou for umm 26 years, I think. I lived in Lanrivain when I first arrived and then I arrived in Kergrist about 26 years ago, and I was always very involved when I was in Kergrist, when my children were young at the school, involved in local community actions. Making crêpes at Kermesses as one does. I suppose the answer really to your question is ... When they asked me, the team that was getting together to present themselves at the elections
- Rob: The last elections isn't it?
- Denise: Yes the last elections, yes.
- Rob: In 2020.
- Denise: Yes, I was asked a long time ago, but my children were very young and I just didn't think it was appropriate. When I was asked this time, err, my first reaction was to say to everyone, hhh I have a busy professional life, I'm just not available and then I slept on it and I said, Look - you have a lot of political ... with a small p, I have to say,



convictions, convictions about climate, and the environment and human issues. You have a chance to not just sit in your chair at the dining table or shout at the TV, here you have a real opportunity to be an actionaire in this and to take action and to do something, and so I said yes ... I suppose I said yes also, not really thinking that I would necessarily be elected.

Rob: And you have a particular responsibility. You're an adjoint for what particular area?

Denise: No, no, being an adjoint is a very time consuming post and I don't like to do anything half measures...if I commit I commit and so I'm a very active member of the council but I am not available to be an adjoint.

Rob: Would you say that you were the first port of call for anglophones in the commune? Do people come to you first of all if they have an issue or...?

Denise: I don't think that that was why I was asked to join. I think I was asked to join because of my other interests, let's say. It's something that I have always been very clear about, I have to say, is that I don't see myself as being the talking brit in anyway what so ever. I am a member of the council and I am not representative of any part of the community. I am representative of all of the community.

Rob: It must bring back something back to you as well.

Denise: It goes to this notion which is very strong and a value, a value which is a very important value for me which is about sharing and being in a community and so that obviously is a two way thing when you like to be part of a community it means that you give your energy to the community but then it feeds that feeling of being part of something and being useful and sharing... and err and those things which.. so obviously it nourishes that value for me where it's important for me to be part of something which is bigger than just being someone in their own individual needs.

Rob: My next question is for people who are listening to this and thinking how could they be involved. What kind of advice would you give to people who want to take part in the place they live in, in Brittany?

Denise: Well you don't have to speak very good French to be part of your village life that's really something very important to understand. In Kergrist-Moëlou I very, very much encourage all village members to come and just say hey I'd like to do something... what can I do. There are always things that in every village, no matter which village you live in, there are always things to do, there are always manual things, or looking after an elderly neighbour or going for some shopping. If you don't come and put your hand in the air and say I'd like to do something, people are not necessarily going to come and look for you, or ask you to do something, but there's always,always stuff that you can do in your local community.



Rob: And maybe that's something which is very clear, very much more easy to discover in Central Brittany, than it may be in the UK.

Denise: Something that has always stuck in my memory, before I was a therapist I used to be an estate agent and I used to do a lot of interviews for the press, at one time. One of those interviews I did say that living in Brittany, was kind of like living in Britain but 50 years ago, in terms of community life and village life and it's something that I've seen being quoted from me all over the place and it still rings very true. I think it's very true. I think that here there's a very good strong notion of solidarity and...

Rob: You said something very important there about not necessarily being able to speak very good French to take part in what's going on, because a lot of people find that as the biggest hurdle to cross.

Denise: Perhaps it's Denise the therapist that's talking now rather than Denise the councillor, but it's like the language barrier it's a limiting belief. It's a limit that we put on ourselves, but if you can pass that limit and invent it differently then you quickly learn that you don't have to be word perfect or speak really good French, if you can just string together a few words and you come with your heart open and whole-heartedly want to share in something, then it will all work out.

Rob: That's a great way to end. Denise Duncanson, thank you ever so much for your time this afternoon.

Denise: You're welcome.