



Elaine interviews: Maggie on her retirement from AIKB

Elaine: Well Maggie, thank you very much for taking some time out this afternoon to come and talk to us about your time, or your life and times, at AIKB. First of all, to begin at the beginning, as we say, we'll back track a bit to 2007

Maggie: Yep, August 2007, is when I joined.

Elaine: And what was your job description, would you say, if there was one?

Maggie: My job description was employee polyvalante, which basically means, you'll be doing a bit of everything. And that's how it's turned out to be.

Elaine: So you were well prepared in some respects to turn your hand to anything that turned up?

Maggie: Well, I was happy to do exactly that, and I did work alongside the person who was already in post so I was able to have advice and see what was going on and see how he managed or dealt with things as they came along so I did have an insight. I wasn't thrown in completely in at the deep end, so that was good as well.

Elaine: You were well prepared to deal with the three fairs, the Christmas, Easter and the Kermesse?

Maggie: Yes, because in actual fact I came along in the August and of course there was going to be a summer fair, a Kermesse, in the August, I wasn't employed by then but I took part in the preparation, the preparatory meetings, as a lead up to that Kermesse. So I actually got to meet some of the other people that were involved. That was nice, so I could get an idea of what was involved with putting on a summer fair.

Elaine: And what changes have you seen since you started in 2007, like I mean have there been clubs coming and going?

Maggie: Oh yes, various clubs have come along and have ended, but what's good at the moment is there are two new clubs at AIKB, thanks to the enthusiasm of two new board members, one of which is a walking group and the other is a, like a social group, where people can go along and play games and meet other people and have tea and coffee and not be on their own. Which is very important because there are quite a few of our members, quite a few people, that do live here by themselves and feel a bit lonely, and so it was a really good initiative to actually start that group, and it is actually quite well attended.



- Elaine: That's good, that's brilliant, isn't it. Well often it takes a newcomer, somebody new coming in, to start something fresh, really, isn't it .
- Maggie: Well, I think, just to identify that there was a need was the first thing, you know, that was the best idea. Someone noticed that there were people who were having difficulties, perhaps being very lonely and have organised a way of meeting other people, and having fun - because they play games, and they do have fun.
- Elaine: That's brilliant. Excellent.
- Maggie: And the Walking Group. They walk and talk so it's another way of meeting people. All the other groups we've got going. They may have a certain subject, like art or photography or conversation, the French and English conversation, but at the end of the day they're all an opportunity to meet other people, meet other like-minded people.
- Elaine: And it often involves French people, or local people, or other nationalities, doesn't it?
- Maggie: Well, a lot of the time, yes, especially the Conversation Club, Yes. That's where most of our French members get involved. And it's a real exchange of language and culture as well.
- Elain: Well it's what it's all about isn't it, integration, I think, and people getting together and exchanging their ideas?
- Maggie: Yes, so that's one side of integration, and meeting people and understanding the culture of the country that new arrivals have come to, and the other side of my work, most of my work, has been to do with the administrative side of integration. That's been helping people with their tax, their health, applying for a French driving licence, all those sorts of..... setting up a business, getting a Titre de Sejour, so a lot of admin. I've helped a lot of people with integrating into the French system.
- Elaine: Which always involves masses of paperwork, to get your head around, doesn't it?
- Maggie: Well, a lot of paperwork, but a lot of it's now online, it's on the internet, so sometimes, it's been more of a challenge to people who haven't got internet or don't use a computer so we've had to work out ways of how we get around that but, yes, it can be done.



Elaine: Well, things were thrown up, weren't they? What with Covid and Brexit. I think that's thrown up a huge amount of challenges for people to deal with. So, how did actually, to go back to Covid, how did it, and the resulting lockdowns, effect the running of AIKB?

Maggie: Well, I was still able to go to work because people who worked were allowed to travel, as long as they filled their attestation in and said that they were going to work. I had to have a little document signed by Marilyn, who attested that I was actually, did have a job in Gouarec to go to, and so yes, I just carried on coming in to work - didn't see anybody. I could phone people, I could email people and people did phone and people did email, but there were times when the door was locked and it was a lot nicer when we could actually start seeing people again. We had a screen put up, and of course we had to wear masks. And that's when I met new members and I didn't actually know what they looked like, because half of their face was covered with a mask. And of course, mine was too. So, yes, it's been interesting to see what they really look like since the restrictions have ended.

Elaine: So, you've actually, in the time that you've been with AIKB, you've had two major events really thrown at you what with Covid and Brexit, or the other way around. Brexit first and then Covid.

Maggie. Yes, Brexit first, but yes, that was a challenge. Because, of course, when I first joined AIKB there was no mention of it. It's something that happened over the later part of my time with AIKB, and unfortunately, it did happen, we helped a lot of people apply for their residency permit, the Titre de Sejour, first of all we encouraged people to apply for a European Titre de Sejour, it was actually easier for those people to transfer that into a Titre de Sejour version Brexit but then there were people who didn't have those and we just helped them with their application to go straight into the Brexit Titre de Sejour..... and all these years afterwards I'm still meeting people who didn't make their application for one reason or another and so we're having to seek help with the prefectures to find out what they should do in their situation. So, yes, it's been a very interesting time to work through and now of course the situation has completely changed because people can't just come and go as they please. If they're on holiday they have to count the days and if they want come and live here they have to apply for a long stay visa, which can be validated as a Titre de Sejour, but the whole system has completely changed and we've had to adapt and learn how to deal with it basically - and how to help people in the circumstances

Elaine: That's great. I know it's been extremely, people are very, very grateful for all the direction and help that they've been given because the fact is that it might be difficult in their own language even, but to be dealing with it in another



language and the, is a further challenge so you've been tremendously helpful there I know. Can you remember any particularly fun or happy experiences from the last few years?

Maggie: Well, I think that's probably some of the events that have been put on, notably two that Lorna organised. And that was the Dog Show and also the Raft Race, both of which were, especially the raft race, were hilarious events and fun for the people that took part, but also fun for people who were spectators or just went along for the event. Those were really good events, but, of course, like anything else that happens in AIKB, those events depended on volunteers being willing to help. Just the same with the other big events that we do, like the Summer Fair, and the Christmas Fair, and the Easter Fair and recently the meal that was put on to celebrate 20 years of AIKB, and also to say bon voyage to me, and also to welcome Sarah. That was incredible because that was all volunteers. That was the board members, their family and some volunteers and they put on amazing, happy event despite it being just after the bad storm, Ciaran storm, some of them weren't able to communicate with each other, some of them didn't have electricity, but luckily the electricity was still on at the hall and the vast majority of people who'd reserved places to go to the meal did attend. So it was, and that was another very happy occasion. It was bright and colourful and happy.

Elaine: Excellent.

Maggie: It was a big relief when we went up to get the keys on the Friday morning, because the meal was to happen on the Sunday, it was just a big relief to find that the electricity was on.

Elaine: Someone was looking after you. Someone was shining down and saying, ok, just put a wall around this place please. So what piece of advice would you pass on to Sarah who is your successor?

Maggie: Aah

Elaine: Based on experience.

Maggie: Based on experience. Well. From the minute the door is unlocked in the office, that's it, there's no tea breaks, you do get a dinner break, but there's people coming in all the time. So my advice would be to make your cup of tea before you unlock the door.

Elaine: And keep it warm in a thermos.

Maggie. Yes



Elaine: Finally Maggie. What are your future plans for this next chapter in your life?

Maggie: Oh well, because I'll have more time I want to spend a lot more time with my family. My children, and also my parents. So I want to take more of a role in looking after them.

Elaine. Well, I know on behalf of all the people, members of AIKB, who you've helped over the years they would like to say a huge, big thank you and are very grateful for guiding them so calmly, I would say, through some very choppy waters at times and I think that is an essential virtue that you've brought to the job, so thank you very much and wish you every happiness in the future.

Maggie. Thank you. Thank you very much.