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Brendan: Learn a New Language at Any Age!

At 67, I must be one of ILCF's oldest students. I previously worked as a producer with both the BBC and the Irish broadcasting service RTÉ, before becoming Arts Editor of the English Catholic weekly The Tablet. Now here I am in Paris surrounded by students a third of my age.



I didn't learn French when I was younger. France and its culture were mostly closed to me, because I could not speak the language. I disliked being unable to engage with people when I came here on holiday, as I only knew a few phrases in French.

So I decided to learn the language. Since 2016 I have been coming to ILCF, at first attending the month long summer school. Then I decided to spend a semester here with one goal; to understand the spoken word ('compréhension orale'). This was my biggest learning issue, and had become a mental block. I could not progress with the language unless I dealt with this.

"As the semester ends, I have made decisive progress thanks to good sympathetic teaching"

In particular ILCF Professor, Fabienne Desmons. As I come from a family of teachers, I know excellence in the classroom when I see it. Fabienne is one of the best, with an authority that commands attention.

I have been fortunate with other professors as well, such as: Dominique Godin, Guillaume Daporta and Sophie Nasi. Dominique encouraged me to be adventurous with the spoken word. And this is my third year with lovely and kind, Guillaume who is infectious about his specialty, and French cinema. I can now watch and understand a film with French language subtitles, and hope to be able to manage without them soon.

Sophie, the ILCF's art historian, made the semester's highlight possible. Each year ILCF students take part in the Musée du Louvre event, Les Jeunes ont la parole, an initiative intended to familiarize students with the gallery's collections. 400 university students from Paris took part, including a group of us from the ILCF. Sophie brushed aside my objection that I was not 'jeune'. So, along with Eunbi Choi, my young Korean fellow student,

"I spent three Friday evenings introducing Nicolas Poussin's painting Eliézer et Rebecca to gallery visitors"

This entailed preparing a ten-minute presentation in French, with patient help and production advice from Pierre Espagnon. And I have literally 'been there, got the t-shirt' designed by The Louvre in a highly visible red so that visitors could know who we were. I will never wear it again, but am delighted to have it.

This began as my retirement project. However, as time goes on, I realize there is a need for more accurate reporting about France in the anglophone world. I can even envisage a further career ahead as a cultural journalist specializing in France. In this I have been much helped by the ILCF.

"I am thrilled to be able to listen now, to French radio and TV and understand much of what I hear"

It is my big win from my semester in Paris, and I am very grateful.
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