

Circle

OF



Shona, Gwen, Nicky and Laura on a visit to Château Cheval Blanc

friends

Moving to an area of France where you have no personal connections can be daunting, but can also provide a great opportunity to make new friends, as *Gillian Harvey* finds out

Serial expat Shona, 53, moved to France in 2011 when her daughter Molly, now 19, reached secondary school age.

“My husband Phil, 53, had been working in Dubai, Hong Kong and India, and we’d moved around a bit, but we wanted somewhere where Molly could settle and learn a second language properly,” explains Shona.

With Phil’s job as a management consultant taking him to different locations, the family had a wealth of options for their permanent home. They settled on France as both Phil and Shona have family in Scotland, but didn’t feel tempted to move back to the UK.

“Once you’ve been a permanent expat you find when you go back people think you’re a bit odd!” explains Shona.

Initially the family moved close to La Réole, with Phil and Shona sharing the task of driving Molly to school in Bordeaux. However, when Phil took another contract in Hong Kong, Shona made the decision to move closer to the school to make the journey easier. She found herself renting a house next to fellow expat Nicky, 40.

“Nicky’s husband is English and an ex-international rugby player, so like Phil he was often away,” says Shona. “We struck up a friendship and she introduced me to Gwen, 46, who is also British with a French partner. He’s an ex-international footballer who now works as a TV and radio presenter in Paris, so is also often away.”

The trio became close with another woman, Laura, 49, whom they met while chatting at the school gates.

“Making friends with other expats is really important. You have shared background and the children find things in common too”



Celebrating Christmas Day in 2018

Shona Munro, Nicky Worsley, Laura Jallier and Gwen Sagnol met at the school gates in Gironde and have become like family, holidaying together and joining forces to set up a new relocation consultancy – BordeauxLife

“Making friends with other expats is really important,” says Shona. “You have shared background and the children find things in common too. Gwen’s eldest son Sam, 11, has become best friends with Nicky’s eldest boy Max, 11 and Laura’s youngest son Guillaume, eight, is best friends with Gwen’s youngest, Oscar, seven. Molly babysits them all sometimes, as she’s a bit older.”

With their husbands frequently away, the foursome have become like family to one another, even spending time going on holiday together.

“All our husbands travel extensively and we have 10 children between us!” explains Shona.

“We have spent holidays together, with and without our families, supported each other through some awful times, celebrated milestone birthdays, business successes and everything in between.”

Last year, when Shona’s daughter left to go to university in Portsmouth, it was the friendship group who supported her.

“I was having a bit of empty-nest syndrome,” she admits. “But Gwen spoke to me and reminded me that I’ve often talked of running a relocation consultancy. She suggested we could work together.”

The pair spoke to Nicky and Laura, who were also interested in taking part, and BordeauxLife was born.

“We set up as an equal partnership, with the help of an accountant friend and his wife, a lawyer. We weren’t sure if we’d be successful, but we’ve had 17 clients in eight months!” says Shona. “It’s going really well.”

bordeauxlife.com



The foursome go through good and bad times together

“We talked all evening and we’ve been friends ever since!”

Though Carole and Cindy had never met before, their lives converged when they separately decided to make the move to France, both travelling to their new homes in Charente on 5 October 2012.

“We met about three weeks after we’d both moved to neighbouring villages,” explains Cindy, 57, “but were amazed to find out we’d come across via the Tunnel on the same day.”

Their reasons for making the move were similar too. Both wanted to embrace a quieter, simpler way of living.

“I’d recently divorced and moved to France for a more tranquil way of life,” says Carole, 54.

“I came with my partner; we’d also tired of the rat race and wanted a quieter life,” says Cindy.

The pair first met at a local music night, where they found themselves sitting on the same wall at the back of a garden.

“We both smoke - bit naughty, but there you have it,” says Carole. “We sat on the wall and introduced ourselves. We talked all evening and we’ve been friends ever since!”

The meeting was particularly fortuitous for Carole, who subsequently discovered that the heating in her new house wasn’t as reliable as she’d hoped. “She actually moved in to live with us for two months when her house became too cold,” explains Cindy.

The following year, Carole was able to return the favour when Cindy and Dave set up their planned business running open mic and karaoke nights.

“I was retired,” explains Carole, “but as I’ve always been interested in photography, I offered to take photos on their event nights.”

Five years on, when Dave was recovering from a back operation, Carole offered to help Cindy out on the karaoke



Cindy and Carole at Manot music festival



Carole Mitchell and Cindy Mobey moved to France on exactly the same day in 2012 and since meeting at a local music night they have gone into business together, offering fun photo shoots and karaoke for weddings and parties

nights and this was when the pair came up with an idea for a shared enterprise.

“We’d both become interested in photography and were always taking funny, quirky shots,” explains Cindy.

“So we thought, why not set up a photo-booth style business to take to events and parties - anywhere people want to take a fun picture?”

“As we were registered for photography and karaoke, we could offer either or both for parties.”

While the business - Peekaboo Pix - is

still in its infancy, the pair are enjoying planning for future events - buying and making props, and working on the website of their photography business.

“This year, we’ve spent time getting set up properly so we’ve only had a few bookings,” explains Carole. “Next year we’re going to really push it and see where it takes us.”

The pair have also found that their strengths and interests complement each other in business.

“Carole is very creative, and does a lot of the craftwork, whereas I also work as a freelance writer, so am able to take on that side of the business,” explains Cindy.

Despite the fact it’s early days, the pair are having so much fun they’re considering branching out - creating a fairy garden using a tree on Cindy’s land. “It’s something we’re thinking about for the future,” Cindy explains. “We both love magical things and fun experiences, so it could be a great adventure.”

peekaboopix.com



Linda (back row far right) and Gillian (front row, second left) both joined the local French choir in Coulon, Deux-Sèvres

PHOTOS © OLIVIER DRILHON

When Francophile Linda, 60, made her move to France in 2008 to settle permanently in the holiday home she’d owned with husband Mike since 2003, she was fulfilling a lifelong dream.

As someone who had studied French at university, she’d planned to retire to the country and redundancy presented the ideal opportunity. Husband Mike joined his wife after retiring two years later.

A music lover, Linda joined a local French choir in Coulon, Deux-Sèvres, in 2014, hoping to meet fellow singers and form some new friendships.

Gillian had lived in Paris for 35 years when she retired from her job as a conference translator in 2016 and moved to Magné, also in the Deux-Sèvres department, joining the Coulon choir shortly afterwards.

With choir meetings focused and often busy, it was six months before the two women had their first meaningful conversation. Both were in for a surprise!

“We were sitting down waiting to start a concert when Gillian tapped me on the shoulder and suggested we go for a walk to pass the time,” said Linda. “It was the first time we’d really been able to talk.”

“I recognised her Edinburgh accent and asked her which area she was from. When she said Craighleith - the small area where I’d grown up - I was stunned and asked her if she’d gone to the local primary school.



Gillian Marty and Linda Eaton attended the same primary school, in Edinburgh, Scotland, but had lost touch from the age of nine until they joined the same choir in the Deux-Sèvres department

“It took a couple of minutes, but I remembered having a friend called Gillian at school, who’d gone off to study French. She had the same, curly blonde hair and something clicked. My heart in my mouth, I asked her ‘you’re not Gillian Baxendale by any chance?’”

It turned out that the pair had been best friends at primary school, where they’d sung in the school choir run by Gillian’s mum - the school music teacher. But they’d left at different times and had not seen each other since the age of nine.

“I was completely gobsmacked when I realised who Linda was,” says Gillian. “I was over the moon as I’d completely lost touch with everyone from Edinburgh; the fact that we used to be best friends was the icing on the cake!”

The pair have various memories from their school days, including one particular incident when Gillian’s music teacher mum decided Linda’s voice wasn’t good enough for choir and encouraged her to play the glockenspiel instead.

“Linda’s mum - who’s in her 90s - still remembers my mother. She was so angry about it at the time!” laughs Gillian.

The pair are now firm friends once again. And their partners have found a connection too - Mike now plays in a band with Gillian’s husband Jacques, 64.

“We only live 20 minutes apart so we’re always meeting up. It’s an amazing coincidence that we should have met again in this way, but wonderful too,” says Linda. **LF**

“It’s an amazing coincidence that we should have met again in this way, but wonderful too”