

Lesley Mac Makes:

Interview Transcript and Business Language Lesson Worksheet.

Ruth, from *Blue Noun English Language School* met with *Lesley Mac Makes* in Comrie, April 2019.

Lesley Mac Makes replied to a *Blue Noun* advert in local press inviting makers and craftspeople to get in touch, with a view to doing studio visits and workshops with our *Blue Noun* language learners on our General Professional programme. Such workshops form the immersive part of our unique English Course, which features an afternoon 'Meet the Makers' programme.

Find out more at www.blunenoun.co.uk



What follows is the transcript of a very interesting first meeting...

Sara: Hi, I'm Sara and this is my mum, Lesley.

Ruth: Hello, thanks for inviting me.

Ruth: Do you work together?

Sara: Well it's mum's business, primarily, and I'm around to help and support.

Ruth: You had a shop in Blairgowrie before - was it a similar kind of business?

Lesley: Yes, it was, it was on a larger scale, and then I retired and moved here, and my family encouraged me to keep making, but in a much smaller scale. In the past I exported and sent good all over the world.

Ruth: Was it similar objects that you were making?

Lesley: Yes, it was, but now it is all kept in house.

Ruth: So now your clients are just walking in the door.

Lesley: Yes, Comrie is a real hub for creative people.

Ruth: I think the whole of Strathearn is, if you can sell your product all over the world and live somewhere this pretty, why would you not. It's fantastic.

Ruth: Can you tell me a little about the things that you make?

Lesley: This is one of my handbags. I tend to make them all unique, so everyone buys a one off, the next one will have a different lining or design. I don't ever repeat.

Ruth: I guess that keeps it interesting for you too.

Lesley: Absolutely.

Ruth: I used to work for a seamstress a long time ago. She was a costume maker and a dress maker, and she always used to talk about the fabric, "speaking to her". It is how she selected fabric in a shop.

Sara: That's like mum. She was doing that in Holland.

Lesley: And yet I can walk out of another shop with nothing, because nothing had clicked.

Lesley: These are another thing I've been doing - cushions. They are very thin on the ground at the moment: They've been selling like hot cakes.

Lesley: Then I have to also make smaller things for people who want a quick gift: so I do little purses and pouches. There's some up there in tartan.

Ruth: So what is your relationship with *Harris Tweed*? It's obviously an important aspect of your work.

Lesley: Well *Harris Tweed* and *Liberty's* are my two favourite fabrics, and they marry so well together.

Ruth: I know Harris Tweed but I don't know Liberty's.

Lesley: It is flowery and silky and beautiful to touch. I like to use a combination of those two fabrics.

Lesley: At the moment what is selling well is the hand-embroidered little objects.

Ruth: I saw them on your *Facebook* page.

Lesley: Someone came in yesterday and bought them all!

Lesley: So we'll be doing a few more of those!

Sara: They are done on Scottish Linen. We get through an awful lot of Scottish Linen.

Ruth: Where do you buy it from?

Lesley: At the moment our supplier is in Dundee, but I'm now thinking of going directly to the makers. There's a mill in Kircaudy, so I think I will probably start buying direct from there and cut out the middle man.

Sara: Mum's grandfather was a linen maker in Northern Ireland, so it's really in the blood.

Ruth: The industry was in this whole area too, wasn't it? It used to be a really important **cottage industry** for the villages.

Sara: Yes, particularly here in Comrie.

Ruth: So do you have people **taking an interest** in your work because of the links to the past and heritage?

Lesley: Absolutely. With the *Harris Tweed* I used to go over to Harris every three months and buy direct from the weaver. If I buy from the mills, they **take their cut** and the weaver **loses out** and I have to pay premium price.

Ruth: And plus you get to go to Harris...

Lesley: Well yes, exactly. Now I tend to collaborate with one weaver for a season. She gets to know my work, and I get to know hers and she lets me know what she's got on her loom, and I get to design my colours and products around what she is going to send me in three month's time. That works very well.

Ruth: It is incredibly popular again, *Harris Tweed*, it has seen a big resurgence.

Lesley: Yes, particularly with these bright colours that are **coming in**. Harris now has its own training school and young people are staying on Harris and learning the trade - and that's where the brighter colours are **coming from**.

Ruth: Are they still using traditional dyes?

Lesley: Absolutely.

Ruth: But they are managing to get stronger colours.

Lesley: It is exactly as it was always done. That's not changing at all.

Ruth: I guess that is why people still want it, because the processes haven't changed.

Lesley: but it is **moving with the times** - colour-wise anyway.

Ruth: It is an expensive fabric to buy in, because of the skill, time and craft involved.

Lesley: It is, but it lasts for years.

Lesley: The other side to our business is painted furniture.

Ruth: Do you make that too?

Lesley: we are using a local craftsman, he's a local painter and decorator. Sara buys the pieces, and **comes up with** the design and colours, and he executes them for us.

Ruth: Where do you find the original pieces from?

Sara: All over. When I find the right thing I hide them in my garage - don't tell my husband.

Ruth: It takes up a lot of space!

Sara: My husband also makes these. There are redundant whisky barrels which he takes apart and makes these amazing clocks out of them.

Ruth: What's your husband's name?

Sara: His name is Roy.

Lesley: And these little wall weavings here are Sara's work, and likewise with the Comrie Cottages.

Ruth: I saw those on your Facebook site too.

Sara: These are also made from old whisky staves. If you give it a sniff, you still get the whisky smell.

Sara: This one here has just had one sanding: that's the colour we get them in like - black like that. Then we sand them from hours.

Ruth: I've just bought two barrels for our language school - well four halves - to make into an organic herb garden. I'm disappointed that they don't smell of whisky.

Sara: If you warm them up they will. As soon as there is sunshine.

Ruth: (To Sara) So do you work in the workshop too then?

Sara: Yes, when I like.

Lesley: It's a real family business!

Ruth: And a dream lifestyle as well.

Lesley: We don't buy anything in, we make it all ourselves.

Ruth: Let's have a wee look at the workshop space...

Sara: So we are set up for one class. We have a group that we are actually teaching tonight and another tomorrow, to make lampshades and to convert a gin or whisky bottle into a lamp.

Sara: Se we have a little gin bar set up for tonight.

Ruth: What kind of work is this????

(laughter)

Sara: This is after hours work!

Ruth: My goodness. Is that a thing then? Is that what the ladies of Comrie do of an evening? They come in and have a G and T?

Sara: They come and have a gin and tonic and turn their empty bottle into a lamp.

Ruth: That's genius! It's way more stylish than **nicking your pint glass on the way home!**

(laughter)

Ruth: **Where do you source your bottles from?**

Lesley: People bring us their bottles when they have a nice bottle.

Ruth: That's also a growth industry in Scotland, isn't it. Artisanal gin.

Lesley: It's a **booming industry.**

Lesley: Our group tonight is a group of young mums. Tomorrow it is a woman and her daughters.

Ruth: Are they local people or do people travel to take your workshops?

Sara: At the moment it's local.

Ruth: What an innovative idea. What's your capacity per workshop?

Lesley: Four, for this kind of thing.

Ruth: Well we are looking for workshops for our students - and we have a maximum of four students per class. They have an intensive classroom-based learning in the morning, so it would be good for them to change scene, change teacher - and with you they would have nice hand-made souvenir to take home - as well as practicing their English in a professional context. They get exposure to a professional workshop and business - and a lovely one at that.

Sara: Do you just have four students?

Ruth: Yes, in terms of language teaching four is optimal for us. You get loads of individual conversation time in a class with four people, but there's also an interesting group dynamic too. It's a social group.

Lesley: I'm going to get in touch with the *Harris Tweed* authority, if you'd like us to work with you. We can give everyone a hand out, and give presentation about the history of the *Harris Tweed Company*, and why it is important culturally to our area. And then I have lots of bits and scraps to make things with.

Ruth: Even the opportunity to handle the different fabric is lovely. A presentation of the history of the *Harris Tweed Company* and its relevance to our area is perfect... it would be afternoons and a weekday. In my plan we have a traditional class in the morning and then every afternoon there's a different activity.

Lesley: We could provide tea and shortbread too!

Ruth: Sounds perfect.

Ruth: Do you want to talk prices or do you want to think about it and get back to me.

Sara: We'll get back to you.

Lesley: How long are you talking about?

Ruth: I would say half an hour of presentation about the company, your company, *Lesley Mac Makes* - or about Harris Tweed, and followed by about an hour of making something in your workshop, then cup of tea.

Lesley: So about two hours.

Ruth: And then I can pick them up, or they can get the bus back.

Lesley: The bus goes right past our front door to your front door!

Ruth: Why not. It's part of the adventure experience of visiting a new country.

Ruth: There's a nice cafe here too, I can provide lunch money and they can enjoy an afternoon in Comrie. It will feel like a holiday!

Ruth: Right, that's a good plan, I think. Let's use that as a working template. I'll be in touch soon. I'll write this up and get it onto social media.

Lesley: It was lovely to meet you.

Ruth: Thank you so much for this visit. It was lovely looking around your shop.

Ruth: I'll be in touch soon!