

Thriving Abroad Podcast

#Episode 46: LOUISE ROSS: STORIES COUNT: INSIGHTS FROM 20 INSPIRING EXPAT STORIES

Louise is originally from Australia and has lived abroad for 35 years, first in the UK, then France and United States. Six years ago, Louise moved to Portugal. In Portugal from 2015 to 17 she was President of the Executive Board of the International Women in Portugal - IWP. Currently she is President of IWP's Member Representative Board. Louise has a Master's in Psychology and Counselling, practising for only a few years, after which she applied her training to an eclectic entrepreneurial career. And this year, Louise released her sixth book: ***Women Who Walk: How 20 women from 16 countries came to live in Portugal.***



Podcast Episode

Have you ever thought about telling your expat story - sharing your international journey, the highs and lows, the insights and learning gained along the way?

This is exactly what 20 brave ladies did when Louise Ross invited them to contribute to her latest book: *Women Who Walk: How 20 Women from 16 Countries Came to Live in Portugal*.

In this podcast episode Louise shares what she learnt from these amazing stories. So much of what Louise shared in terms of common themes and insights resonated with me, and I am sure it will resonate with you also.

What also struck home was the value of really listening - giving people the time and space to talk about their experiences and journeys. Louise shares this quote from Barack Obama:

"I learned that if you listen hard enough, everybody's got a sacred story, an organising story of who they are and what their place in the world is. And they are willing to share it with you if they feel as if you actually care about it. And that ends up being the glue around which relationships are formed, and trust is formed, and communities are formed. And ultimately, that's the glue around which democracies work."

Often, we may 'think' we know people without really understanding their full stories. To be truly listened to and 'heard' is a becoming an unusual occurrence in this fast-paced technological world. And yet, offering a listening ear is one of the easiest things we can do. I hope this conversation inspires you to listen and give someone you know the gift of being truly heard.

Key takeaways from the episode:

- Women's stories matter, valuing our story is important to our sense of self-esteem, sense of self and place in our families, communities and the world.
- Listening and taking the time to have deeper conversations can lead to great mutual learning.
- Louise was able to pull from the stories a whole range of personal strengths that included, courage, curiosity, resilience, personal agency and adaptability.

- Themes that were common to many of the stories included the question “Where is home?” and whether it is ever possible to truly ‘go back’. Louise shared a quote from Maya Angelou:
“You are only free when you realise you belong no place, you belong every place, no place at all”.
Louise also talked about the label ‘trailing spouse’ which was new to her and a moniker that she found disparaging. What about you?
- What motivates people to live mobile lives? We talked about the gene DRD4-7R mentioned in a National Geographic article [HERE](#). Louise shared the quote from Nada Addu the President of Ghana:
“The movement of people is as old as man, there is nothing new about it, and it has always been linked to the same thing, the failure of where you are to provide you with an opportunity. And so, you move somewhere else.”
- The Hero’s journey talks about how the hero answers a call to adventure encountering trials and tribulations along the way, which test their courage but also provides opportunity for growth and development. The stories in the book followed this arc. Louise finished by saying: *“I think of travelling as an outer expression of the inner journey, which is the hero’s journey, or the universal experience of transformation.”*

What can you try?

Writing your story.

Why not write about your story with you starting as the central ‘hero’ figure. You can use these three questions from Louise Ross to help map your story out?

- What compelled you to leave your country or origin? (The story of your life pre-departure)
- What happened to you on your journey? (The story of getting from one place to another)
- What caused you to finally land somewhere and decide to stay, if not for the rest of your life, then for an extended period?

And two additional questions from me:

- What have you learnt while on your journey?
- How have you evolved and developed personally and professionally throughout the journey?

Sharing your story:

Come and join the closed Thriving Abroad Podcast Facebook group [HERE](#) and if you would like to, share some or all of your story, we would be honoured to hear it – equally there is no pressure to do so, just come and join the conversation.

Consider donating your story to The Expatriate Archive Centre in The Hague [HERE](#).

If you belong to any expat groups, consider following suggestions taken from my interview with Louise:

- A club blog devoted to members stories.

- Mini podcasts where short stories are shared. I would be very happy to host this on The Thriving Abroad Podcast if there were enough interest from podcast listeners. Email me Louise (at) LouiseWiles (dot) com.
- Face to face coffees and conversations where club members share their stories.
- Online group conversations – once again if there is interest I would be very happy to host this.

Note: This episode has focused on women's stories. As Louise Ross explained at the end of the interview, she is currently working on her next book, which will tell the stories of 20 men who have all come to be living in Portugal. Both male and female stories matter equally of course!

Listening to other people's international stories:

Look for opportunities to ask people more about their lives and international journeys. You could use the questions above as a base for your questions.

I will leave you this week with one final quote:

"The capacity and need to tell stories... and to understand and be understood by others in so doing, is part of our evolutionary and cultural heritage. Our ability to tell stories is one of the traits that sets humans apart from other species... and our stories are central to how we identify ourselves and connect with others". David Drake: Narrative Coaching: The Definitive Guide to Bringing New Stories to Life.

Learn more about Louise Ross:

Website: www.LouiseRoss.com

Louise's book: Women Who Walk: How 20 Women from 16 Countries Came to Live in Portugal from [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com) and all good booksellers.