

Where are They Now?



Meet: Olena Decock

Position: Programming associate for REEL Canada's National Canadian Film Day and TIFF's Middle East and African film selections

Her story:

"It was around the fourth grade that my parents sat me down at our kitchen table to ask whether I enjoyed studying in the French Immersion programme. Until that moment, I hadn't critically considered what I liked about second-language education.

My parents had enrolled both my older brother and me in the programme from kindergarten. Neither of my parents spoke French, but they wanted their children to have access to the best opportunities.

Adopting a second language opened up my world to new cultures, new friends and new opportunities. The day after our kitchen table chat, I told my parents with conviction that I wanted to continue with French Immersion. And I continued to study in French for another 14 years, up until the day I defended my Master's thesis (in French).

Studying in a French helps to refine a host of skills: problem solving, active listening and memorizing patterns. And because I spoke French, studied abroad one summer in France and made a life-long friend with my exchange partner.

French fluency in Canada also opens up an array of career possibilities. While studying French literature at the University of Ottawa, my summer jobs consisted of research for federal-level government agencies, including Canadian Parents for French and the Canada Council for the Arts. When I transitioned from a student to an arts professional in Toronto, having a second language was an advantage as I looked for work. These days, I consistently use French in conversation and in writing at my two current jobs in film: as a programming associate for REEL Canada's National Canadian Film Day and for TIFF's Middle East and African film selections.

My relationship with the French language is not entirely romantic. Studying and living bilingually is work. And it's taken a lifetime of effort to learn, to maintain and to improve my French. But with any passion, the rewards far exceed the input."