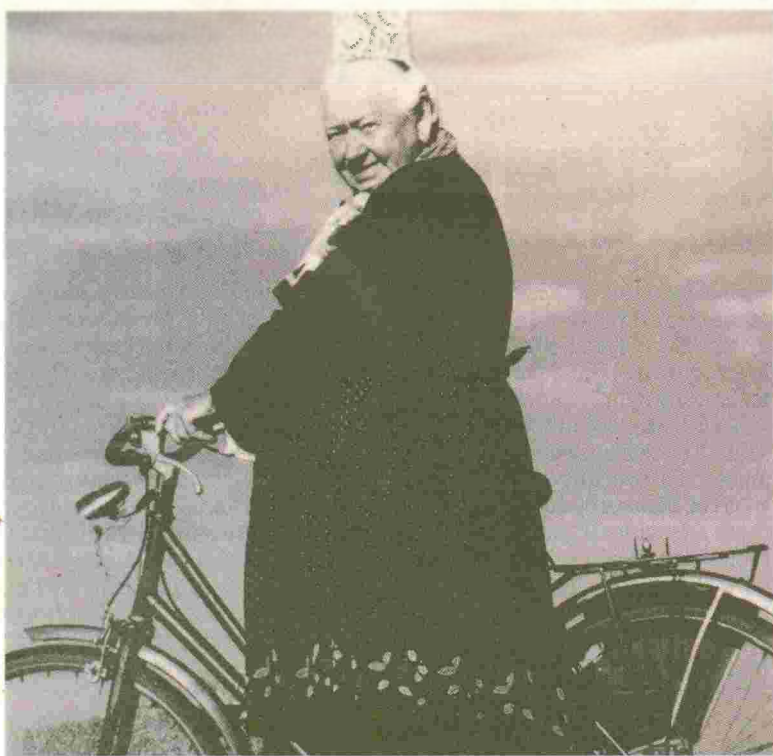


LIFE & TIMES **PEOPLE**

# Recipe for success

Determination and perseverance are among the ingredients for success for French creperie owner Caroline Broutin, writes **Aneeta Sundararaj**



Portrait of Caroline Broutin's grandmother at the creperie.

AS I am early for the interview, I take the opportunity to appreciate the ambience of La Creperie de Caroline in Bangsar Baru, Kuala Lumpur. There are life-size photos of scenes from Brittany, France, mounted on the walls and, at the bar, there is a beer tower in the shape of the Eiffel Tower. The setting is intimate and cool. Together with its name, there's no doubt it is quintessentially French. La Creperie is owned by a young French woman by the name of Caroline Broutin and she explains to me that a creperie is a small restaurant that serves crepes.

Very early on, during a discussion on the upcoming Francophonie Quiz to be held on March 18, organised as part of the French Language Week 2015 to promote the French language, it becomes obvious that Broutin is one tough cookie. In fact, there isn't much you can say to dissuade her once she has set her mind on something.

"I'm the black sheep of the family," admits the 32-year-old. "I remember telling my parents that I'd never open a restaurant. They have their own restaurants and with their long working hours, I hardly saw them. I didn't want to be like that."

She looks around her restaurant and adds sheepishly: "But here I am."

## Francophonie Quiz

**When:** March 18, 8.30pm to 11pm

**Where:** Restaurant la Creperie de Caroline, 33 Jalan Telawi 3, Bangsar Baru, KL

**Contact:** 017-213 0238. Early reservation is recommended

**What:** Open to the public with a registration fee of RM15 per participant upon arrival at the restaurant. Prizes include a 3D/2N stay at Novotel Kuala Lumpur City Centre and gift sets from Christian Dior, L'Occitane and Yves Rocher.

Quiz topics include French-speaking countries and organisations (OIF-Francophonie), French language, culture, and famous people from those countries.

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She continues: "I have always wanted to travel." Twisting a lock of blond hair round her finger, she recalls that after graduating in International Business, she went to Hong Kong. "I'd buy jewellery to sell in Europe."

After Hong Kong, she worked in



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Malaysia as country manager for a lingerie company.

## HOW IT STARTED

Two years ago, Broutin wanted to eat crepes but couldn't find a place in Kuala Lumpur that served this dessert and thought that she should open her own creperie. After discussing the matter with her parents, she returned home to St Omer in Lille, north of France, where she spent a month or so learning to make crepes.

In May 2013, she returned to Malaysia and, four months later, made plans to open a creperie. The challenges she faced then seem

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Caroline Broutin

hilarious now: Contractors gave her inflated quotations because she was a foreigner, suppliers failed to deliver on time and maintenance work on equipment such as faulty freezers took longer than necessary. What she didn't expect though, was that the lackadaisical attitude extended to professionals as well.

"I think it has to do with loss of face," says Caroline. "I needed someone to advise me about licences and visas. So, I got in touch with a lawyer. He said: 'Caroline, I can do this.'

"After that first meeting, I was so sure that we would have no problems and that I was in good hands. I sent him all the documents but then, nothing. He was always busy."

Yet, she persevered and learnt to adapt to each situation. "I was prepared to wait two weeks for things to be sorted out if something went wrong. If I didn't adapt, I'd be so frustrated."

Her tenacity paid off. Says Broutin: "I love coming to work. This is a friendly place and I love my staff. We're like a small family. I feel like I have seven or eight children. And I'd say about 90 per cent of our customers go home happy."

