



Manitoba,

THE STAGE

FOR A NEW LIFE

BY ROMAIN TELLIEZ

It is in the centre of her new stage, a classroom at École Lacerte in Winnipeg, that we meet Asma Zenatti. From her native Morocco, she had been waiting forever to become the star of her own life. Arriving in Canada on October 31, 2018, Asma is now teaching a Grade 8 class.

Asma's story could be summed up in four words: Will - Determination - Work - Merit. And Smile, too. Asma is a woman, a wife, a mother, a teacher, a student and an actress. She was confined to a few small routine roles in her previous life, but today, she is more than happy to be able to embody all the characters she wants:

"I am living a beautiful experience. I teach all day, then I go to my theatre rehearsals and then I do my homework sometimes at 11:00 p.m. or later. On Monday evenings, I take a class at the university on top of that. And I'm happy!"

Asma has a strong will. Born in Rabat, Morocco, she grew up in El Jadida, a city located 90 km from Casablanca. She first began her studies in the tourism field before turning to a career in teaching. She did her first year in a rural area, in a "douar". A small village, located at the end of a seemingly unending road, in the middle of nowhere, in very difficult conditions, sometimes "without water or electricity with very complicated access to food."



“ In Morocco, I counted the days until the next vacations. Here I count the hours until I get back to class.

That’s my true personality, I was just waiting for this.”

- ASMA ZENATTI

It was “hell”, in her words, a region of extreme poverty where one had to live with insects and scorpions. But despite these extreme conditions, there was a place where she found comfort.

“What comforted me was going down to the classroom. That’s when I realized that maybe teaching was my destiny. I really found myself in this profession. Facing students who spoke neither Arabic nor French but Berber. I loved them and I will never forget them.”

A Lifeline

She worked for a little over a year in these conditions before reorienting herself in private education after the birth of her daughter, Yasmine. “My family is my reason for living and when they grew up and had to choose their education, I had to ask myself the right questions.”

The right questions and the right decisions for them were to go to Canada, “everyone’s dream here (in Morocco). It’s a lifeline for us, another world.”

Her key to entering Canada was Brigitte Léger, Economic Immigration Counsellor at CDEM, “A wonderful person, she guided us from A to Z.”

Once the idea was planted in her mind, Asma plunged into her research, studious, hard-working, determined. The life that she had

found routine became a race. “I felt that I had the strength to do anything. I was so motivated that I could work day and night. It was as if my 40 years in Morocco had just been a break, I was not moving forward, I was getting the same salary, there was no future, no studies, no dreams.”

That is how difficult it was for this woman of action to wait. Between her exploratory visit and obtaining permanent residence, it took two years, but she finally arrived on Canadian soil on October 31, 2018, with her husband and two children.

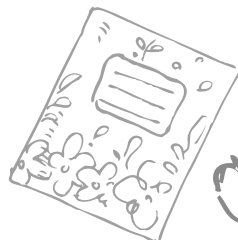
Since then, the race hasn’t slowed down; they had to find a place to live, enroll the children in school, then enroll themselves in university to validate credits for the right to teach. Despite her 20 years of teaching in Morocco, she still had to study to get the right to teach permanently here. But Asma never balked, she just kept learning. She took courses in school administration, as well as courses on French history in Manitoba. She felt like she was on a mission. She first worked as an assistant at École Lacerte for three weeks, then at the Service de perfectionnement linguistique (Language Development Service) of the Université de Saint-Boniface, then as an instructor to other teachers at the French Immersion Teacher (FIT) Program, and then went back to École Lacerte for a few replacement contracts where a position eventually became available.

After a year in Manitoba, Asma has already accomplished a great deal. “I felt like I was flying, I knew I had skills, but I needed to be evaluated and to improve.”

And she won’t stop there. “I don’t have a minute to lose, I want to finish my postgraduate degree and even get my master’s degree. Working and working more, that’s what I’m here for. The door has been opened to me, I now have the opportunity to move forward, so I don’t want to slow down.”

And as if all that wasn’t enough, Asma is auditioning to play a role in the Théâtre Cercle Molière. As with everything else she undertakes, she was successful in her auditions.

Asma is a mother, a wife, a student, a teacher and now an actress. On stage, since the beginning of March, she has been playing in La Liste, the story of a woman played by several women, but in real life, she is the woman who plays several women. ▶



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