


Daniel Saunier, grocer.

**Looking at him operate in his shop, you'd think he was born with a dozen eggs and a kilo of asparagus in his cot: a natural. Indeed he describes himself as a born salesman, although the phrase in French, which translates as: "a salesman in my soul" is much more evocative.**

So like my Dad, who abandoned his father's gentleman's outfitters after decades of dutiful service to become an actor, and indeed like my own recent leap from the world of education consultancy into the world of translation and music, Daniel, who is 53, looked around himself in mid-life and decided he didn't necessarily like what he saw. However, far from being one of life's long-sufferers, he decided to act, to become an agent rather than a victim of his own existence. All he knew was that he loved cooking, and food in general, and so he decided to let that be his guide.

Now, in his third year of operating, he claims his business is turning a corner and starting to make a profit. It's been tough, and not without risk, but when asked, he draws on his cigarette, reflects, and then says he hasn't regretted the transformation for a second. There's a French expression "il est bien dans sa peau", which translates literally as "he's fine in his skin". It's used for people who seem at peace with themselves, fulfilled. And you can't help applying it to this extrovert grocer.

As we sit chatting, we're often interrupted by customers looking for fresh lettuce, a pint of milk, a soft drink, or a punnet of brilliant red strawberries. One of this morning's visitors is a white-haired old peasant, his face creased with the strain of making ends meet for decade after decade. I sit patiently outside the shop looking in. Suddenly, out of nowhere, the two men are singing in unison. The words "I love ham and sausage" float through the air, set to a jolly tune, interrupted by a peal of laughter. And at that, I set down my pen, knowing that the article is complete, and that in this spontaneous song, in this moment of shared joy, is captured just about everything I want to say about my new home. ■