

STUDYING ENGLISH ABROAD A UNIQUE LIFETIME EXPERIENCE

by Michael Aeschlimann – Switzerland

Shortly before the end of my apprenticeship, a Key Account Manager gave me a piece of advice. He reflected upon his life and then said that he spent many hours studying for his university degree and working long hours for several companies. However, there was only one thing he rather regretted: he had never spent some time abroad. His suggestion was simple. "Leave your comfort zone and rock your life".

For me, his message sounded quite weird. A stay in a foreign country can cause a lot of inconvenience. First of all, it was quite expensive. Furthermore, it seemed to me very hard to spend a long period of time without friends and family. Even worse, I would be on my own, meaning I would have to organise everything myself. Normally, this was not a big challenge but would become one due to my low language skills. My former superior talked about fun, excitement and life experience; but for me, it just did not appear as a big deal.

Despite these uncertainties, I decided to follow his advice. My first stay away from home was in Rugby in the West Midlands (UK). I got a very warm welcome from my host family and most people were very helpful although my English was quite hopeless. After a while, my English improved rapidly and I could participate in discussions. I liked it so much that, four years later, I decided to have another stay in an English-speaking area. I went to Vancouver which is one of the prettiest towns in North America. I had to admit that I was very sad to fly home after six splendid months.

Besides having fond memories of a great time, I was really able to broaden my horizon. I got an understanding of why people in a foreign country behaved differently than Swiss people. Moreover, I had to cooperate with people from different nationalities, which was very challenging but provided me with intercultural skills. Finally, it looked great on my CV as it proved my ability to adapt to a foreign culture.

Today, I can safely say that I have understood the advice of my former boss. Meanwhile, he has made up for his missed opportunity by immigrating to Chicago!

Just a chat – with a member of staff

NZA WEILENMANN – Jamaica

How did you become director of studies at the school?

When I first came to Basel, I was singing all the time, but back in 2000 I decided to do something more serious. Not speaking much German, I felt that my best bet was to work somewhere where I could speak English. By chance, I saw an ad for a receptionist at the school. Actually, it was the first place I applied to, and a day later, I was called for an interview. I was quite nervous, but I got it.

There was a Saturday morning event for the students which no one else wanted to do, so as the "fresh meat", I had to do it. After that, the director of studies persuaded me to do a "travel lesson" on Jamaica. Paradoxically, even though I've been singing in front of audiences most of my life, I'm rather shy; and I was so nervous about doing this lesson that I over-prepared, but the students really liked it; the director was impressed and said I should teach.

Coming from the music world, I never saw myself as a teacher. For me, teachers were just boring! But, she kept asking me, so I finally took her up on her offer: I took the CELTA course in Zurich – which was quite hard because I was on crutches at the time, but that's another story!

Anyway, I worked as a teacher for four years before taking on the job as director of studies.

What do you do to re-charge your batteries?

Stay positive. There's always someone else worse off than I am. Thinking about that helps put things in perspective. If something's got to be done, then I get on with it.

What do you most enjoy about your work?

The interaction with students, not only in lessons but also just chatting with them. In fact, I'm a people person. Of course, I also like hanging around with colleagues.

How did you cope with the differences between Jamaica and Switzerland when you first arrived? And what has changed since you moved here?

I was still young – 18 – when I came to Switzerland. I had an idea that it would be different, but I wasn't prepared for how different. Climate differences, you can adapt to; but the mentality was totally different. When I first got here, I used to say "hello" to people in the street. They'd look at me as if to say, "Why are you talking to me?"

What I discovered is that the Swiss are more reserved than Jamaicans. It takes them more time to befriend you, but once they get to know you, they're great. As for racial issues, I have had none: my attitude to it has made a difference, too. I just act in a normal way; I don't go around with a chip on my shoulder.

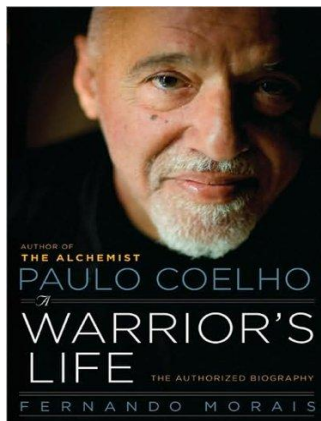
As for what's changed in Jamaica, I get snippets of information from my sister who still lives there – my family is scattered all over the world! Jamaica is quite Americanized now, which makes sense because of its geographical location. Being a mother, I'm more aware of teenagers in Switzerland. People always comment on how polite my son is, which gives me the feeling that, in general, respect is lacking. Switzerland is a stable country, but there is more choice in services now.

How does your experience of coming from another country help you in your work?

I can understand what it's like for learners of English. While learning German, I went through all the emotions that they are feeling. I spent a whole year being afraid of making mistakes, but I realised that if I wanted to learn, I had to speak and I had to keep at it.

THE WARRIOR PAULO COELHO

by Laura Almeida – Switzerland & Portugal



"Intuition is actually a sudden immersion of the soul into the universal current of life."

Paulo Coelho – from "The Alchemist"

From the moment I had the chance to get to know the writing of the widely read Brazilian author Paulo Coelho many years ago, I've avidly devoured almost all of his books. The most popular one, amongst all others, is "The Alchemist" which helped him to become a famous star writer overnight. Since its publication, his career has taken off and he has gained millions of interested readers, his books being translated into over 60 languages.

In the first-ever authorized biography "A Warrior's Life" where Paulo Coelho worked

together with the journalist Fernando Morais in order to note down his life experiences, we find out many curiosities that haven't been published before. For, this autobiography is based on diaries and tapes the author had withheld from the public until the release of this book. The reason which led him to issue this book was his desire to look intensively for the truth, since he was sure that, once written down, it would set him free as well as reveal the hidden sides of his life.

The first chapters of "A Warrior's Life" deal with Coelho's childhood and youth, showing the difficulties and hurdles he had to overcome in order to fulfil the dream he had always had in mind of becoming a famous writer.

He first worked as a lyrics writer, scriptwriter, journalist and music producer but unfortunately had to face a lot of trouble and experience dangerous and extreme situations. Due to his political activities, he was arrested by the military forces and tortured. During the following years, Paulo Coelho immersed himself in many experiments and tried out philosophies like Hare Krishna or Black Magic.

At the age of 38, he decided to break away from his – both eventful and shocking – past and set out for the long walk on the pilgrim path to Santiago de Compostela. This spiritual experience was the fundamental happening that initiated Paulo Coelho's ever-desired new life as a well-known writer.

For those who are keen on reading biographies, "A Warrior's Life" by Fernando Morais is certainly a really fascinating and absorbing one and can be highly recommended, especially if you're fond of Paulo Coelho's work.

Something to tickle your funny bone

AN APRIL FOOL at the END of the 19th CENTURY

by Elisabeth Stoevesandt – Germany

My mother-in-law (born 1886) told me: "Once on an April 1st, when I was a child, our local newspaper brought out a small article, saying: 'Attention! Tonight, if you come to the cemetery, you can see the moon rising in the shape of an octagon!' – In the evening, nearly everybody from the village were standing and waiting in the darkness. Finally, one after the other left the place, ashamed of having believed such nonsense."

A JOKE FROM THE GUARDIAN NEWSPAPER

contributed by Jan Nufer – Canada

Three religious men – it's ALWAYS men, isn't it? – were discussing when life begins. The priest said he was certain that life began at conception. The minister said that life began at the moment of birth. The rabbi said, "No, you're both wrong. Everybody knows that life begins when the kids move out."

A COMEDY OF ERRORS

by Shalini Sairam – India

This happened when I was working as an English teacher in Delhi Public School, Hyderabad [India].

It was Wednesday, and it was that day of the week which I dreaded the most. My timetable was hectic. Apart from the regular classes, I also helped with the hobby sessions on Wednesdays. Therefore, by the end of the day I was usually completely drained.

At 11:30 am, while I was teaching, the peon entered the classroom. She told me to leave the class and proceed to the Principal's office immediately. Looking at her face, I could make out that all was not well and trouble awaited me there. Wondering where I had gone wrong, I slowly walked towards the office. With a heavy heart I knocked at the door and wished my Principal good morning. She did not seem to be in a good mood as she did not respond to my greetings. She asked me to sit and informed me about a call which she had received from a parent of a ninth standard student. The parent had conveyed her displeasure with regards to my English test paper correction. The test had been held the previous week.

I stared at my Principal in disbelief, because I usually re-check the answer sheets before handing them over to the students to avoid any mistakes. So, this type of complaint was totally unexpected. Anyway, I apologized to my Principal in a calm and collected manner, assured her that I will do the needful and left the place. My entire day was spent in reprimanding myself for a mistake which I had not committed.

The next morning, when I entered the staff room, I found a note on my table. It read that the aggrieved parent would meet me at the Principal's office at 12 noon. Although convinced of my thoroughness in correcting the paper, I was nervous. Never before had I faced such a precarious situation. Time passed slowly. Finally, the stipulated hour came and I met the parent. She wished me good morning, and told me that she was very happy with her son's performance in the English test.

I was at a loss for words, and so was my Principal. We exchanged glances, and my Principal asked the parent the reason for calling the previous day if she was happy with her son's performance. The parent replied innocently that she had never spoken about the English answer sheet. In fact, she was extremely unhappy with the French teacher as she had not corrected the paper properly. While speaking to the Principal over the phone she had just mentioned the name of the teacher without mentioning the subject.

We asked the parent to meet the French teacher the next day. After the parent left, my Principal and I had a hearty laugh. My Principal had forgotten completely that another teacher with the same name as mine existed in the school. This had caused all the confusion.

After this incident, whenever receiving a complaint from a parent, my Principal was careful enough to ask the name of the teacher AND the subject taught by her/him.

MUSICIANS GALORE!

by June Winterflood – Canada

As mentioned in this issue of What's Happening?, Nza sings in a music group. In issue 4, the chat with Andi revealed that he plays the guitar. Now, he's in a band, too. Another of our teachers, Jeremy, composes music! If you want to hear Jeremy's music – or even download it – check out his website at <http://jj3rm.net>

My favourite song

PRISONER OF THE ROAD

by Claudia Järmann – Switzerland

When I heard this song by Sivert Høyem for the first time, I had no words. It goes directly under your skin and is deeply touching, and so is the video. What captured me immediately was the deep haunting melody of the lament which still lingers in my mind. The tune is mainly based upon vocals and is only accompanied by the gentle sound of a guitar and a piano.

With this song, Høyem contributed to a charity event for the Norwegian Refugee Council and raised around 200 million Norwegian Kroner for their work with refugees in some of the most dangerous places on the planet: Afghanistan and Somalia among others.

Subsequently, the vocalist was entrusted with the task of opening The Nobel Peace Prize Concert in Oslo on 11 December, performing "Prisoner" live. "It felt like a musical equivalent to bungee jumping", he reflected on facebook. I saw the show later on the internet, and I sensed that it must have been an overwhelming feeling to stand on such a stage.

If you've never come across the music of Høyem or his previous band Madrugada before, do your ears a serious favour and check him out: www.sivert hoyem.com.

I'm not a Norwegian, by the way. I discovered Høyem's music years ago on a Swiss radio station.



DON'T LOOK BACK IN ANGER

by Kathrin Saxer – Switzerland

Have you ever had a moment that completely changed your view on something? I had such a notable moment when I first listened to 'Don't Look Back In Anger' by Oasis. I always reckoned that Oasis was an arrogant and big-headed band but, however, one day, I decided to give them a listen in hopes of finally comprehending their massive success and the ongoing hype about them.

On YouTube, I clicked on the first video/song that appeared when typing in Oasis.

The song starts with an Intro that sounds like John Lennon's 'Imagine' and the first thing you recognise is Noel with red round sunglasses (which might be another homage to Lennon). After the intro, the guitar kicks off and Noel starts singing about a girl called Sally. It was the first Oasis song I deliberately listened to and I fell in love with it right from the start – in fact it was the one song that got me into Oasis.

Later, I found out that Noel Gallagher wrote the song for his Mum who once told him not to look back in anger – not to look back on a childhood dominated by a violent and alcohol-dependent father. You can't change the past because it's gone and you do better if you learn from your experiences because there is something positive in everything.

'Don't Look Back In Anger' is among my favourite songs due to its simply marvellous lyrics and melody. Everything seems to be perfectly arranged and inherently consistent. Thus, it is the first song by Oasis that I learned to play on the guitar and the one I always come back to when practising.

Only recently, I came upon an acoustic version that literally blows my mind. The adaptation is perfect, and Noel's voice just touches my soul. If you want to give it a listen, type in 'Oasis – Don't Look Back In Anger (Standing On The Edge Of The Noise)' on YouTube. I warmly recommend you to turn the volume up and to remember: don't look back in anger about the fact that you had not heard the song before.