

Just a chat – with a member of staff

SIBYLLE MÜLLER – *Switzerland*

As a university student of economics, do you use English?

The lectures are in German, but many of the books are in English. Some students have problems with this, but it's important to learn the English terms as well as the German ones.

What kind of work do you want to do after completing your education?

I could imagine myself in the HR department of a company, but there are a lot of options. In a year's time, I have to decide what particular area of business I want to specialise in. The course for my bachelor's degree is three years and the master's is another year and a half. I'd prefer to work in a 'stage' or work placement before doing my master's because it's important to have some practical experience.

Would you like to work in a big company with thousands of workers or a small one with hundreds of employees?

I like the fact that in a small company you would know everyone, but a big company can be a challenge, too. Some friends who work in big companies say that it bothers them to be treated like a number.

Why did you choose to work here at the school?

I saw an ad on the internet and thought it would be a good opportunity to practise English again, and I like being with people.

What was your job interview like?

It was relaxed. Julie was very kind. She warned me that she would ask me a few awkward questions, one of which was "What would you do if a work colleague didn't do any work?"

Why did you work as an au pair in France?

I wanted to improve my French and, obviously, Paris is pretty attractive. I'm from Lucern, which is quite different from Paris!

What was it like working as an au pair?

I looked after a two-year-old little girl who, being the only child, was a little spoiled, so I had to set limits for her. The lifestyle was quite different: I went to restaurants several times a week – I never go to restaurants here! The family was quite rich: they had a cleaning lady, and everything was tidied up in an extreme way. At first, I couldn't feel at home, but as time went on, I got used to it. My host parents were quite young: the mother was 26 and worked as a German teacher and the father, 35, had his own company. I worked four days a week and went to school one day a week. My weekends were free, but I babysat from time to time. I met other au pairs and I had a fun time with them.

Would you recommend others to work as au pairs?

If you like being around children, then I think it's good, because it helps you to be more independent. If you don't like children, then you shouldn't do it.

A reply to last month's opinion piece

In last month's issue, Ursula Weber submitted an article called, "If I were a man, I would never get married." Below is a reply, offering another view.

WHY WOULDN'T YOU GET MARRIED?

Dear Ursula,

Your opinion is that happiness due to love dominates life, as I guess from your article. Do you truly think that emotional and sexual love is the only aim in life? Sure, nobody can live without love. This is the background to our existence. But if love is fading away, as you mentioned it, you propose to change partners and begin once more and so on. If, for you, this is the way to be happy your whole life, one day perhaps you will realise that it was a mistake. May I explain my reasons?

1. As the years pass, you become older, less mobile and less attractive. If you are a woman, would you be ready to accept marrying a man ten, or many more, years older than you?

2. For thousands of years, mankind has created families. There must be wisdom in it. Living in freedom like you propose will sooner or later fill you with emptiness.

Perhaps, when it's too late, you will be aware that what you should have had is a family with children. If you want to avoid the worries and costs it causes, or the costs of a divorce, you must know this: risks are included in the fact that you are alive. You can't escape! Moreover, children can't change their father any time.

Perhaps I am old fashioned or old-aged in your eyes. In 20 years you will understand.

Best regards,

Gertrude

MY (SHORT) STAY IN A B&B IN LONDON

by **Michael von Büren** – *Switzerland*

Do you know what a B&B is? A Bed-and-Breakfast is a kind of hotel but much more family-like. You usually have a personal contact with your hosts; you can ask them for tips about sightseeing; and, of course, a B&B house is smaller and cozier than a hotel.

As I have had lots of good experiences in different countries when staying in a B&B, I decided to do the same during my nine-day trip to London, too. That was the beginning of a not-very-nice story....

Actually, the beginning was quite ok: at the time of my arrival, my hosts were at a lecture, so a neighbor of theirs opened their house to let me in and to show me my room. He was a very friendly and interesting man, and I thought: "oh, it's going to be a good trip here in London when the beginning is already so welcoming!"

After the neighbor had left, I decided to unpack my suitcase and to relax for a while. But why was I that curious? Well, to be honest, I am a curious man. But this time, it didn't make my situation better. My curiosity let me go downstairs to the living room. I was wondering if my hosts had family because the house, as small as it looked from outside, was quite big with about eight rooms. I started looking around, looking at the pictures of the hosts with their three kids and stroking the nice but intrusive dog. I was wondering if my hosts would serve a classic English breakfast or a continental breakfast for me in the morning. That's why I opened the fridge, which was a bad idea, because my eyes fell upon a very dirty and rusty fridge with half eaten food without any plastic covering it. Hmm – that was not like at home.... But I said to myself: "Easy: other countries, other practices!" My anticipation for breakfast the next morning having shrunk, I was thinking about eating in a coffee-shop and telling my hosts that I wouldn't need any breakfast.

After this shock, I thought it could be interesting to look around a bit more intensely. That's why I saw the dirty carpet in my room, the dead beetles under the closed window and the hairs in my bed – even though I hadn't already been in it. In fact, the whole house looked like that. It was clear to me that my hosts had never paid for a housekeeping

FROM LONDON TO EDINBURGH

by **Stefan Kramberg** – *Germany*

Before you begin a trip such as the one I went on, you normally do some preparation. You book some nice hotel rooms which you need during the journey, look for some events which you want to attend and, of course, plan your route and work out how to reach your final destination.

So it's easy to say, but I did nothing like that; the only thing I did was book the first hotel room and choose the cities which I wanted to visit (London, Glasgow, Edinburgh). My trip wasn't supposed to be a relaxing holiday: I wanted to improve my English, and everyone knows that it's human nature to go the easy way. That's the reason why I didn't prepare the whole trip, because I wanted to force myself to speak.

Well, I began my trip at the airport in Basel. I flew direct to London Gatwick. When I arrived there, I had to reach my first stop, a hostel in London. I stayed in a six-bed room, and it cost 16 pounds a night with breakfast included.

Before I was allowed to check in, I had to wait till 2pm. I left my luggage there and visited London city first.

A friend of mine had told me that I had to take the city bus tour, so I did. In the evening, I visited a karaoke bar. It was really fun, and I really enjoyed the cider which was really tasty.

I started the next day with a huge breakfast and a big headache. While I was having breakfast, I planned my next stop.

I chose a Bed & Breakfast in the middle of London near Victoria Station. The owner of the B&B was from India and very difficult to understand: he sounded like Apu from the Simpsons. But this was not the worst thing: I left my luggage in the room (a single bed) without a closer lock. I went out to visit Madame Tussauds, Baker Street and, of course, Trafalgar Square which is the biggest square I've ever seen.

After a big meal, I decided to see a movie (Limitless). I didn't want to stay out late, because my next stop was Glasgow.

Back at the B&B, I got the key at reception and entered my room. After I had prepared myself for bed, I watched the news. I felt as if I were being watched, and I heard every footstep from the room next door. This wasn't the ugliest thing. Before I fell asleep, I realised that something was tickling me on my left arm. I turned on the lights and saw a little unknown creature walking on my skin.

Damn! I prayed, "please let me cope with this night!" Luckily, I fell asleep very quickly. I woke up the next morning, and the only thing I wanted was to leave. So I took a shower, but this was another disgusting situation. The shower was the worst thing I've ever seen, and I have never taken a shower so fast. After breakfast, I left and went to the train station. I had a long journey in front of

service and they, themselves, did not like to clean house either.

What choice did I have? Crowded London doesn't give that many opportunities to find an affordable hotel. And finding a better B&B was just impossible, because the houses are not marked as a B&B from outside so I would have had to ask my agency again and the same situation could have happened again. That's why I decided to stay and to get to know my hosts. Who knows? Perhaps their hospitality would let me forget about all the problems!

That's why I then went out to discover a part of the center of London. The trip took its time, because the B&B was rather far away from the center. After having a nice evening and a good meal, I came home late and could only say good-night to my hosts because they just wanted to go to bed. No problem about that, I thought, let's talk tomorrow – because that was my reason for going to London: to practice my English, and I was hoping to be able to speak as much English as possible with my hosts in the B&B.

Well, the next morning did open my eyes quite a lot; my hosts disappeared after serving breakfast to sit in the room beside mine. Just a wish for a good meal and the question if I would need anything else: that was all. No personal conversation, no discussion, no talk. Was that what I was searching for: uninterested hosts and a dirty B&B? No, after the second night and the same procedure in the morning, I decided to leave that place to search for a hotel, which was not easy – I had the chance to take the very last free room in London (it was the beginning of the weekend that day) or to search for a bridge where I could sleep under. The decision was easy: I said "yes" to the friendly lady at the tourist information desk, and she booked me the room in a modern – and a bit more expensive – hotel but not without telling me that I'd better come to them from the beginning next time rather than choose a B&B on my own, because she knew about many stories of unfriendly places like that.

And the moral of the story: don't be too curious – it can destroy your holiday-feeling! ☺

me, because my next stop was Glasgow, approximately five hours by train. It wasn't a direct train: I had to change platforms at Lancaster, near the Scottish border. After I got on the train, I had to stand, because the train was a little bit crowded and so I had time to listen to a conversation. First, I thought it was some kind of Turkish or Russian. Then, I recognized some English words. Suddenly, I realised that the language that they were speaking was Scottish. "How shall I ever understand such a language?" I thought. When I arrived at the station in Glasgow, I had to find a place for the next night. I found one in the middle of the party zone, YES! And this one seemed much more comfortable than the one in London.

In Glasgow I picked up a friend at the Glasgow train station. After a welcome in German, we decided to speak English the whole time (we both had the same level and wanted to improve our English). He stayed with me the rest of the time. After we stored our luggage at our hostel we went out to drink some wonderful Scottish beer. But I didn't know which one is good because they had so many. So I asked the bartender if he could recommend one. He listed some brands, but I wasn't able to understand him because of the live band which was playing. I answered: "Just give me your best one." After a few minutes, he gave me the pint, and I suddenly started laughing. The name of the beer which he gave me was Belhaven BEST! It was very tasty and a little bit different from the beers in Germany. We stayed in Glasgow for two nights and did a lot. We watched a football game (Rangers against Dundee United), visited every pub (I think) and, of course, talked to so many people.

Our last stop was Edinburgh and this was a blast. The hotel was in the middle of the city with a great view. The old city with the little lanes and the buildings which were made of bricks were really great. The last three days were the best. We met so many people from different countries (France, USA, Canada, and Switzerland).

Another funny situation happened on the last day. We met a couple from Germany. After we ordered a drink, they asked us where we were from. "From Germany," we answered. But they asked in German, and we answered in English. After another question, I tried to answer, but it was a mixture of German and English. My friend and I looked at each other, and we both started laughing. We weren't able to speak our own language! A very funny situation.

Our last evening ended like the other ones before, with a pub-crawling tour. The following morning, after a last huge breakfast with beans and sausages, we went to the airport. The flight took two hours to Basel, and we slept the whole time. It was a wonderful experience that I'll never regret.

Just a chat – with a student

ATILLA TOPTAS – *Turkey*



Atilla is married and has got a son and a daughter.

Why are you living in Switzerland?

My wife was already living in Switzerland. We met when she was on holiday in Turkey. One of her friends was the girlfriend of one of my friends. (My friend and I were at university together.) After I completed my university studies in 1996, I was a teacher in a primary school. I first came to Switzerland to visit my wife – before she was my wife – in 1997. I came on a tourist visa and stayed for two months. We decided to get married in 1999 and to live in Switzerland. I continued working in Turkey until 2000 when I came back to Switzerland.

What work have you done since immigrating?

For the first six months, I didn't work. I only learned German and went to school. After that, I worked in the community at the "Rainbow Club and Meeting Place". I organised, and co-ordinated, activities, events and courses for immigrants to help improve integration through education. The courses offered tutoring in German, computers and English for adults and French and maths for children and youth. I organised meetings to discuss topics of interest to the community and invited famous journalists, experts and writers to lead discussions. The first aim was to learn what the people need and what we can do to help people in the process of integration. I gave courses, too, in Turkish and Kurdish to Swiss people – like doctors, teachers, and social workers – who are in contact with immigrants.

In autumn 2004, I began studying psychology at university, because it was difficult to get a good job – I need perfect German. I have finished my Bachelor's degree, and I will finish my Master's in the autumn.

In 2005, I had the idea that immigrant children have problems in school, because Swiss teachers don't understand their culture. There was a need to provide better communication between teachers, pupils and parents. So, I founded a project in Birsfelden to give this support. The project is called, *Kulturvermittelnde Schulsozialarbeit* ("Cultural Communication School Social Work"). There are four people: a Tamil, a Serbian/Croatian, Albanian and me, a Turk. When a child is having problems, we can react very quickly. The project was originally funded by the immigration office in Bern, the *Canton of Baselland* and the *Gemeinde*. Now, it is integrated into the school system. It is a unique project, and as its founder and leader, I have been asked to present it to other local governments.

I went into politics in 2006. I was elected to parliament in September 2008. As a member of parliament, I attend four to six meetings a month. Every month, there are two big meetings and a number of smaller "commission" meetings which focus on particular topics.

What are your plans for the future?

When I finish my studies in the autumn, I will look for a job as a psychologist, but I will continue to work as a member of parliament. I like politics. I like to change things into what I dream, my vision, especially in education and integration.

Why are you learning English?

In psychology, a lot of the literature is in English, but I also love travel. To my mind, English is the key to other cultures: it is the key to open the door to the world.

If you would like to be interviewed for the **What's Happening?** broadsheet, please send an e-mail to me at june_winterflood@yahoo.com, and we'll find a time to meet up for a chat. – June

Key to May's crossword puzzle

- 1 across: only women wear it = dress
- 2 down: covers your thighs = shorts
- 3 across: wear it on your head = hat
- 4 across: hangs from a woman's waist = skirt
- 5 across: put them on your feet = shoes
- 6 down: the opposite of 'bottom' = top
- 7 down: most popular item of clothing = jeans