

**Just a chat – with a member of staff**

**SUSAN HOBBS** – *Scotland*

**You spent some of your formative years in Belgium. What was it like?**

It was a varied experience. My father got a job in Brussels, and we lived there for six years. I went to a private British school which was a little isolated, a little expat bubble, but my father being someone who didn't conform was not part of the expat social life, and so we didn't live in an expat area. Instead, we lived in a small Flemish village. We felt the conflict that exists between the Flemish and the French and in fact, because we only took French in school, we had trouble speaking to the local Flemish speaking residents. The shop keeper would speak to us in French as long as there was no-one else in the shop. As soon as anyone else came in, we had to speak in English. Our mum warned us not to speak French to the shopkeeper so that we wouldn't put her in a bad position. I was in Belgium from the age of 8 to 14, so for me, that was my life. It was normal. I worked in Brussels as a student and I found it an exciting cosmopolitan town compared to the deadly dull English town where my mother later moved to.

**How has living in Belgium affected you?**

Funnily enough, my husband, John, is also a child of immigrants. John's parents are Irish and went to London. My parents were economic migrants from Scotland who also went to England. I view Scotland as my homeland, but there's little work there. Once you've moved, it's easier to keep moving. The key difference for my kids is that they're integrated as much as possible in Swiss life. They go to the local schools and they've lived in Switzerland most of their lives. We are a typical immigrant family which has a different family language to what is outside the home.

**You recently passed an exam for B1 German. Has that helped with the stress of living in Basel as an expat?**

The stress comes from very often understanding little of what's going on around me, feeling ignorant. Looking back, I wonder how I managed beforehand! Daily life is easy for someone with B1 German. For reading, in particular, and engaging in more social contacts, I need to improve my German further. For me, it's strange studying and speaking High German while being surrounded by Swiss German. While I can be lucky enough to understand the gist in Swiss German, I still find myself very often understanding nothing of what's being said to me in Swiss German. But, the more you join in and have exposure to Swiss German, the more you start to pick it up.

**You play tennis, ski and enjoy ice skating in winter. What else do you like doing?**

I love reading and watching TV dramas and comedies and films. I do like cycling from A to B, but I'm not a cyclist as in "Let's go for a 10km bike ride!" I try to avoid cycling by or near tram lines as I'm a bit paranoid: I always imagine having an accident at just the wrong moment and getting run over by a tram.

**Have you considered doing social work in Basel?**

I couldn't imagine that my British qualifications wouldn't be acceptable. I wouldn't rule out doing social work as a future option. I could imagine doing some kind of voluntary work – for example at a drop-in center for mentally ill people – but writing reports in German is definitely not an option at the moment, nor can I envisage a time when my German is up to that level!

**What do you like about teaching English?**

I enjoy supporting people in their learning, getting to know students and working out their strengths and weaknesses. The added bonus for me is learning more about life in Switzerland and the lives of people from all over the world. When I was young, I thought about being an English teacher so that I could travel, but the TEFL course was £800 at that time; so I went a different way. Now as an English teacher, I get a sense of other cultures without the travelling around bit; I can live vicariously through other people.

**Have you got any future plans?**

No, not really. Once the kids have finished school and left home, then we might decide to move on. My hope is that, for our children, home will be wherever they happen to be, and I hope that they will feel secure with that.

**A piece of advice**

## TIME IS PRECIOUS NOWADAYS

by *Mireille Nägelin* – *Switzerland*

Do you know the word which is said most often every day worldwide? If not, you might have a guess as to what it could be. Yes, you are right: it is "time". We say this word several times daily without realizing it. We often say "I'm afraid I don't have time" or "Could you tell me the time (I'm in hurry)?" Time is precious nowadays, and no one seems to have enough. It is insane how fast everything has to move forward, no matter the situation. Take the example of when you order something; you expect the delivery within a single day. Everyone is in an enormous hurry every day, but it is often we, ourselves, who make us feel that way, not someone else.

You will easily find time for everything that you want to do if you are strict with yourself and write a timetable. You will see that, with good organization, you can do a lot. Another important point is to say no when there is something that is too much for you, no matter the case. Time is like a glass. You can fill a lot in every day, when you really want to.



## THE CIRCUS

by *Elena Wüthrich* – *Switzerland*

When I was a child, those few days when the circus came to my little town were beautiful days for me. I forgot school, and my friends and I would go to see the spectacle. Each year, there was something different, and each time, I was fascinated by the costumes of the acrobats and the trapeze artists, and also by the circus animals – the tigers, the elephants, the bears, and the horses which jumped for their trainers – and, of course, by the clowns with their charm and miming.

You may not know this, but the circus spectacle has a long history. The oldest and first circus spectacles were the "Maximims" in Rome. I found the picture which you see above on the Internet, and it's only an 'educated guess' of what the spectacle was like in the Maximims circus in this historical and dramatic time. We have seen similar pictures in films like "Ben-Hur" and "Gladiator".

The circus was a building for occasional exhibition of horse and chariot races, jugglers, acrobats and gladiator combat. The gladiator games started in Rome before the Roman Coliseum was built.

For some time after the fall of Rome, Europe lacked a large animal circus. Later, the American circus brought its influence to bear and changed the old traditions of the circus into a new, modern character with larger crowds and more extravagant programs. Today, the circus has the same status as the theatre, the opera and ballet.

Have you seen the "Circus Soleil" spectacle? With the music, the lights, the costumes, the choreography, and the energy, grace and power of the acrobats, you will be captivated for a few hours.

These beautiful and real dreams have the name, "THE CIRCUS".

**Fun with language**

