

Just a chat – with a member of staff

SIMONE VON RICKENBACH – *Switzerland*

Why did you choose history and German philology?

When I started my studies, I was going to get a teacher's degree, and a teacher's degree needed two subjects. History was pretty much a given. It helped that I have had great history teachers. I was thinking of doing macro economics as the other topic but then I realised that there was too much math. I also considered art history.

I like to read (all the classics and contemporary authors), so German philology seemed a good fit. Now, however, I don't think I would be a good teacher. I'd like to go into cultural management: museum work, exhibitions, institutes where you deal with historical questions about society.

Why wouldn't you be a good teacher?

If I ever taught, it would be to teenagers. I don't think I'd be a good teacher because of the repeating aspect: every year, I'd be covering the same issues. Exhibitions change, and you can reach a broader audience, people who are interested, and you can reach them in a different way. I think I could engage people not through a whiteboard but through objects and help them see the big picture. I think it would be more challenging.

Have you always been interested in history?

Yes, always, from middle school. But I'm not just interested in history: I want to understand. I have to know where something comes from. I like to find out about everything. I don't think you can understand the world now without a basic knowledge of history. I like to give my opinion but only when I know what I'm talking about.

Historians in general don't like the word, 'facts', because you always have different sources. Look at Wikipedia and other online resources. On the one hand, they're a good thing: online resources make knowledge available to everyone. Some articles on Wikipedia, for example, have a high standard. But, there is a danger, too. You never know where things come from. An opinion can be 'covered' as a fact. People should learn how to deal with new media. People have to be careful about information – is it reliable information? One recommendation is to see how many books or other sources writers have used in producing their information. If they cite a lot of sources, than that they've written is probably more reliable.

How much longer do you have to study?

I'm doing one course and the master's thesis, which is on industrial history. It's focused on one canton, and it's about how it developed from an agricultural to an industrial region.

What steps do you think you need to take to get into the profession you want to be in?

There are not as many jobs there as I would like. Networking is important. Experience is important. (I served a four-month internship in a museum.) You have to be willing to do a job that is not exactly what you wish, and you need patience.

You benefit from every job you do during your studies. A lot of people tell you if you do any job, it helps you to gain experience.

What free-time activities do you enjoy?

In general, I like to go to the cinema and the theatre and to museums, of course. And, also TV: I like good quality TV shows. I love to read books and magazines. I like to hang out with friends: dining out or having drinks. I'm not sporty, but I like to walk to clear my head. I like to travel, especially to cities like Paris and New York. In October, I'm going to Istanbul with my mom and sister. What I love to do when in a new city is to go exploring neighbourhoods – whenever I can, I walk so that I get the feeling of a neighbourhood, and see how the neighbourhoods change. I like all of the things you can find there: bars, cute places, parks, shoe stores, boutiques. I don't necessarily buy anything, but I like the way they present stuff, the way they furnish their places: I copy these ideas at home.

What advice would you offer to students?

If you're at B2 level, go abroad to an English-speaking country to improve. I stayed with a family as a nanny. You're surrounded by people using the language in the way it's supposed to be used. You get to think in the language. You can hear how people use the language. The good thing about the nanny part is that, if the children don't understand, they won't listen; so you have to learn, and children don't mind telling you if you say something wrong.

If you go to a school, you meet people you can speak to, but in a family, you don't have anyone you can talk in German. You can get lonely. I had moments when I felt lonely even though the family was great: I had my own place and bathroom; they encouraged my privacy; and I had my weekends off. I was one hour from Manhattan, so I could go to New York every weekend. It was worth it!

Otherwise, try to use English in as many ways as possible: watch movies in English, read a book or if this seems too much, try an article in magazines. (The New Yorker has a good online version available: www.newyorker.com)

Would you like to live in the US?

I'd love to, if there was ever an option.

Do you have a motto or favourite expression?

I like the saying, "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger." I like all experience. I think it's important to get experience of whatever you can. I have an optimistic outlook on life, but I'm quite sarcastic.



KONRAD WITZ – HIS ART AND WIT

An exhibition of paintings by Konrad Witz (about 1400 - about 1447) is in the Kunstmuseum Basel by *Elisabeth Stoevesandt* – *Germany*

Though the exhibition closed on July 3rd, the Kunstmuseum has reserved a whole room for Konrad Witz. I'm still chuckling while remembering the paintings of this medieval artist. His name was Konrad, but he was given an additional name: Wit. If you would like to know why, you may discover with me some hidden jokes in his works.

The meeting of Melchisedek and Abraham was a very solemn occasion. In front of a golden background, you see Melchisedek, king and priest, welcoming Abraham with bread and wine. But, perhaps he was excited or in a hurry when he prepared himself for this event. If you look closely at his coat, you'll find that he made a mistake when buttoning it up: at the end, there is one button left without a corresponding hole on the other side of his coat.

On the painting of the holy Magdalena and the holy Katharina within a church, Witz painted a candle without painting it, for you see only the reflection of the light of the flame on the wall. What is more interesting is the background, where you have a small view of the city. There is a shop with...sculptures and paintings! I think, in our time, nowhere will you find such a noble form of advertising!

Two canvases belong together. They show three heroes delivering to their king David water which they have gotten – at the risk to their lives – from a fountain in the enemy's country. The second hero seems to be a bit anxious, for he is still wearing his suit of armor with a closed helmet. Perhaps he wants to be especially careful. But you can suspect what will happen in the next moment when he steps forward to his king, because his trail is held tight by the foot of the third hero who looks as innocent as a child who is playing a trick.

If I've whet your appetite to see more paintings, go and visit the Kunstmuseum and discover more details, for example the cobwebbed golden gate of Jerusalem.

New technology and how it can help you learn English

EBOOK READERS by *Elena Wüthrich* – *Switzerland*

Last Christmas, I received an eBook reader as a gift. At the time, I myself wasn't an enthusiast; I felt that it wasn't very practical to own so many electronic devices.

At present, I like my little eBook reader: it's light, and in any free moment, I can read books I prefer.

With eBook readers, we can learn to read and understand English books, build our vocabulary or learn simple everyday expressions.

In my opinion

STUDYING LANGUAGES IS NONSENSE

by *Mitch von Büren* – *Switzerland*

As I can imagine, the teachers of English Center Basel won't like this headline, but now is the time to tell the truth!

We are always taught that languages are the most helpful thing in your life and the most important thing to learn at school – or, even better, before school in kindergarten. Well, I have had another experience in my holiday in Portugal where I went for two weeks.

As my girlfriend and I were driving from Lisbon to Evora, we suddenly got hungry and needed a 'pit stop'. We found a very small town with one church, about forty houses and two restaurants. For those who haven't been to Portugal yet, I need to give you an idea of such restaurants in the 'wildness'. The buildings were old and simple, painted all in white because of the strong and hot sun which was also the reason for the darkness inside the restaurants: the lights were off to create a more comfortable environment. Although we had wanted to choose the better of these two restaurants, we realized that we didn't have any choice: one of them was absolutely full. We thought that the other one was probably less good, but as we were quite hungry, we had no other option but to try it out.

We went in and about twenty pairs of surprised eyes were watching us. "What the hell are these tourists doing here?" was written in their eyes. Well, we just wanted a meal and a chance to use the toilet – and that's what we did get! We sat down in a corner beside a dirty window and studied the handwritten menu. Study? No, that would be a lie. We just tried to read it, because it was written in Portuguese. My girlfriend took the easy option and ordered a salad which was easy

it's simple. If you don't understand a word or more, then you touch the specific word and you automatically have the translation of the word. Foreign dictionaries such English-German and English-French are included, so you don't lose time searching for translated words. For books in a foreign language, that time-saving is a good point.

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because it's the same word in Portuguese as in English. As I knew that people from Portugal love to eat meat from the grill, I was happy to see "Entremeadas grelhadas". Grelhadas? From the grill? That's always good, I thought, and showed the waiter with my finger my choice on the menu and tried to ask him what it was. That was the point when I realized that he didn't speak any English, and I was not able to understand his Portuguese. He turned his head from left to right and tried to explain to me without any words that I should order something else. It was a funny situation: my girlfriend and I were watching him while he tried to tell us with hands and feet not to order the "entremeadas". He tapped his hand on his own stomach and we thought: "oh my god, giblets – all the stuff a stomach contains?"

I was looking thankfully at him, trying to ask him with my eyes and hands what he would suggest to me instead. He understood and got the plate of another customer four tables away from us, to show me another dish which was called "espêtas grelhadas". These were skewers of grilled meat. I looked at the plate and my eyes were like stars when I asked him to cook me the same plate as shown.

The meal was absolutely perfect, and I can recommend from my heart Portugal as a destination with friendly people and good meals. By the way: the "entremeadas" would have been a plate full of 'pig stomach'!...

And the moral of the story: I did survive my holiday in Portugal because, when speaking with hands and feet, you can survive anywhere. That's why there is absolutely no necessity to learn any languages. Just enjoy life and feel free!

Just a chat – with a student

IRENE HARTMANN – *Switzerland*

Tell us about your career.

I got my nursing diploma in 1994 and worked as a nurse for seven years. Then, I took a course to teach nursing, from 2002 until 2006. When I came to Basel, I took a first course to be a teacher's assistant. One year after that, I began studying to be a teacher (not just an assistant).

Why did you want to be a teacher of nurses?

When I worked as a nurse, I was in a little management position, the head of a nursing station. The management position was stressful. When I changed my living situation – I moved from Winterthur to Basel – it was a good opportunity to think about my job. I thought that it could be very interesting to go into a school. I enjoy teaching. It's another kind of stress. For me, it's not as stressful as managing people.

How would you compare Winterthur to Basel?

Winterthur is smaller, not so open. Basel is more open to other nationalities, and the borders exist only on paper: it's a region without borders. Basel has more culture: a lot of museums, theatres. Unfortunately, I don't take much advantage of this now because with two children, it's difficult. I used to go to the museums. When we moved to Basel, we had a subscription for the theatre. My boys are six and three. The 6-year-old goes to kindergarten school and the younger one goes to a nursery.

How do you balance your work and child care?

A good nursery is very good for them because they play with other children and they learn a lot. It's important to have a good social net, because when the children are ill, everything breaks down. I manage with my parents-in-law. (My sister and parents live in Winterthur.)

But, now, I don't teach. If I were teaching now, I would have to teach on different days every week. It's difficult to manage child care, because all child care is for the same day every week.

I have finished my studies in nursing science, but I have to do the FCE to complete the diploma, so I just do my English course now. My younger son goes to the nursery two days a week, and on Mondays my elder son goes to eat his lunch at the lunch table at his kindergarten. That's quite enough time for me to study English.

What do you want to do: work as a nurse in a hospital or work as a teacher of nurses?

I like working as a teacher very much. You can earn a good salary. I miss the hospital now, a little bit. I worked on the post-operative surgery ward for adults. I like the work, the atmosphere. It's a busy day; it's important work; there's a social atmosphere. You meet a lot of people; you work with people. It's about life. There's the pressure of life and death.

I like teaching very much. If I took this work, I'd prefer to work as a freelancer at the moment.

Do you have a motto or an idea you live by?

I want to be open to other people and their beliefs. When working as a nurse, I meet so many people who come to the hospital with different stories or backgrounds!

How has the medical world changed since you started?

It's not good when money is the only thing we're thinking about. More and more, it's the cost of things. Personnel is the biggest cost, so they do the work with less personnel. New treatments are expensive, too. In fact, Switzerland has one of the most expensive health systems in the world. But who gets treatment? Age should not be the only criterion.

Your husband's also in the medical field. Would you encourage your sons to go into the medical world, too?

I would say, "Do what you enjoy. Your work is very important; you have to work for 40 years; it's a big part in your life."

You started here at the school when we were using the old system and now you have had some experience of the new system. How do they compare?

I love the new system, because the situations are more realistic than the ones in the old system. They're more current. I think the exercises are on a lot higher level – more demanding, but the speaking part was difficult for me, because the computer didn't understand me. It's better now, because I know how to calibrate the microphone when I change computers. I'm very happy with the group lessons, and now, also with the group activities.

What about the American emphasis in the computer lessons?

It's no problem. My mother-in-law is British, so my husband is half-British. I also watch British TV, and I've been to London twice. In fact, I'm going to London alone for one week. I will stay in my sister-in-law's home. I'll be going to a private teacher. I know this woman. I was with her in the spring. She's a nice person with a good sense of humour.

Music is the food of life, so play on

DO YOU WANT TO PLAY IN A BAND?

Kathrin Saxer, a 19-year-old former student of our school, is putting together a (Brit-) rock band. She plays the electric and acoustic guitar. She has already found another guitarist and they are both keen to meet any musicians – preferably drummer, singer and bass player – who love playing Rock'n'Roll and Britpop (like Oasis, The Smiths, Kasabian, The Beatles and many more), are willing to play regularly and do gigs if the opportunity arises.

If you would like to join their band, please get in touch with Kathrin. She can be contacted via e-mail at kathrinsaxer@yahoo.de or on facebook.