

Interview with Urs Biemann

My interview partner is Urs Biemann, 48 years old and constructed structural engineer. 16 years ago, he left Basel and emigrated to London. Today he is the CEO of UK Fostering. A company that provides support to children and young people who went through a bad childhood.

About UK Fostering:

“We are rated ‘Outstanding’ in all areas by Ofsted¹. Our foster carers provide loving family homes and are passionate about making a difference. Together we help create positive futures for children in our care. “
(<http://ukfostering.org.uk/>)

Q: When did you emigrate?

A: I emigrated in 2001, that means I have lived 16 years in England already.

Q: What made you emigrate?

A: 25 years ago, I went to London to learn English for three months. There I met a wonderful person and I fell in love with her. Today I`m married with my wife Yuko. So, love made me emigrate to London where I live today.

Q: What were your biggest challenges you had to go through according to the emigration?

A: I managed to go through emotional and practical challenges. Emotional would be to leave behind my family and friends back in Switzerland. Practical challenges were get used to my new home, my new job, the language of course and the long train rides to my working place.

Q: How did you prepare yourself for this change in your life?

A: I went to London for three months to learn English. After those three months, I worked one year voluntarily in a home for handicapped people. Then

¹ Ofsted is responsible for inspecting a range of educational institutions, including state schools and some independent schools. It also inspects childcare, adoption and fostering agencies and initial teacher training, and regulates a range of early years and children’s social care services (Wikipedia)

my wife and I decided to go back to Switzerland to live there. But, it was always clear that we would go back to England. So, after 8 years we moved back to London.

Q: What did you do to get used to the English language?

A: As I already said, I went to London and learnt English for three months. I can tell you that this was by far not enough to handle the language perfectly. The first three to four years were still a learning process for me. I had to get used to language and this was just possible by for example listening to BBC radio or reading a lot of newspaper and books and I must admit that I have stolen reports from my colleague at work to read them.

Q: What were your worst experiences after your decision to emigrate?

A: After three weeks in my new home... there was a murder. I went for a walk with my dog and then I heard a scream. Before we moved to London my wife told me I should not be naïve when something like this happens. It might be a trap or you could get in danger when you try to help everybody. Back in Switzerland it wasn't normal that a murder happens in the neighbourhood. I ignored the scream and walked away. A week later I sat across a man who was reading the newspaper and there I saw an article about a pregnant woman who had been in my neighbourhood. I was shocked. Just after three weeks something like this happened. That was really shocking for me.

Q: What do you miss in England compared to Switzerland?

A: (Urs smiles) I miss several things, for example: Cervelats, Rivella, meatloaf and good bread. Landscape with high mountains and of course my family and friends. Four to five times a year I visit my family in Switzerland.

Q: What do you like eating most in England?

A: I don't really prefer English food. I rather like Japanese food, because my wife is Japanese and she is a great cook. International food I like the most.

Q: How do you get involved with politics? Are you interested? Opinion about Theresa May

A: I don't get involved in politics but I'm interested. I like Theresa May, she is courageous, decisive, and upright.

Q: Are you still interested in what happens in Switzerland especially politics?

A: I still vote in Switzerland, I receive ballots from Switzerland that means I'm able to vote for Switzerland and England. The Basler Zeitung is the only Swiss newspaper I still read.

Q: What is your opinion about the Brexit?

A: I voted against Brexit. In my opinion the EU provides peace and stability and together I think you can master economic problems together.

Q: Recently, there was a terror attack in London. What is your opinion on that, are you frightened?

A: I do have respect about these terror attacks. I mean London is a big city with a lot of people and the chance is big that a terror attack might happen. When there is an event on the streets of London and there are about 800 000 people on one spot, then I avoid going there because of terror attacks. At my working place and where I live, I feel safe.

Q: You are the CEO of UK Fostering, what is it all about?

A: We are searching foster families, we recruit them and educate them. We are 100 people and thereof 17 children. In short, the foster families build a new home for children and young people. Some of the children or young people had to go through domestic abuse... That's why we want to make their life normal, so they have a reason to smile again.

Q: What are your worries in daily working routine?

A: I`m worried about the well-being of all people around me, especially about the young people who had to go through domestic abuse. I also want that everybody is well-educated so it doesn`t cause any problems.

Q: What do you like about your job?

A: I like to observe the process where the young people regain vitality, when they get over bad times and just smile again. Another process I like to observe is when young students who come from the university to work here are getting increasingly experienced. That`s what I really enjoy about my job.

Q: How do you and your wife spend your free time?

A: My wife and I work both at UK Fostering. We rather spend our free time and private life apart from each other. Me for example, I go once a week up to Notting Hill to climb there.

Q: Where do you and your wife spend your holiday?

A: In the past, we often went on holiday to visit relative and friends of me and my wife. Soon we will be spending three weeks in the highlands of Scotland, I`m really looking forward to this.

Q: Why do you live outside London?

A: I grew up in the countryside of Switzerland. I miss that. That`s the first point, the second point it`s too expensive to live in the heart of London. I rather prefer woods and fields. That`s why we planned to move further away from London, to the countryside of England.

Q: Can you tell something about the mentality of typical English person?

A: English people are very courteous, open-minded, especially while learning the language, very patient. They are also generous and they do have a special humour. You must get used to this humour but if you get it, it can be very amusing.

Q: It is said that football takes a very important part in English society. What can you say about that?

A: That's true. Football is the topic on Monday morning at work. At the beginning, I wasn't interested in football at all, but because a lot of the fostering families were into football I started to care about it too, so I had something to talk about when I visited the families. Today I'm a fan of Crystal Palace, that's a club near where I live.

Q: How do you see your future in England?

A: I have two big plans. In two years, my wife and I would like to move to the countryside and leave London. As I already said, I miss the countryside. And in five years, I would like to work less, because at the moment it's very stressful.

Q: What are your tips for emigrate to another country?

A: Just do it, pluck up courage and go for it. Before we moved to London we spent a weekend in London and in this time, we impulsively managed to get a job and a house.

Q: Are you often going back to Switzerland, visiting family and friends? Homesickness?

A: Yes, I'm homesick more and more. Sometimes I spend one day skiing in the mountains of Switzerland, that's something very beautiful.

Me: Urs thank you very much that I could interview you. I wish you a good time and I hope to see you soon. Take care

Urs: You are welcome, it was nice seeing you again. Take care