

St. SomeTimes

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Halloween



Yes, Halloween is alive and well in Switzerland!

My family would be very proud to hear the Swiss know how to celebrate Halloween. It is our family tradition to keep this holiday above all others.

Hallow's Eve can be seen in many of the stores and all over the media here, but it's not THAT big. Our school has a Fall Festival party instead of celebrating Halloween. There were very few costumes, but there was some decorating. I didn't do much with my class because

there is just so much more to do. My students have been very busy and there just isn't enough time in the day to throw in Halloween activities.

I have been teaching too long. Or maybe it is just that celebrating is so expensive, like everything else here. Sure, I could drop \$100 on some candy, decorations, and a costume. Remember, everything is double or triple the cost here.

There is a party tonight for staff but I just don't have the urge. It is that time of a new school where I need some time alone. It is the same people all the time. Even though

there are 130 different staff here, it seems like I end up with the same people every dinner, breakfast, and trip into town. It is time to branch out. It's also Greg time. Alone for studying the GRE during free time.

Inside this Issue

Changing Leaves/Clothes	2
Something new Every Day	3
Top 10 Swiss Observations	4
Prepping for the GRE Tests	4

Counting down the months left in my Favorite number

2013

Number 13 has always been my favorite number. I figured a lot of amazing things would happen in 2013, but have they really been lucky? Nope. I'll leave the Top 13 of 2013 for my New Year's Issue. Everything is flying by here in Switzerland. The semester is almost over and we are creeping into the Winter Holiday. Hard to believe? Not when you are 44 years old.

The leaves are changing in Lugano. It has been 13 years since I have seen leaves change.



Changing Leaves

When is the last time you sat back and really thought about the beauty of the changing leaves? I haven't seen Fall since I left the USA years back. The leaves just don't change in the Caribbean, South East

Asia or the middle of the desert. I am still looking for that perfect photo of the colorful leaves. This place is relatively mild for weather so I should be able to find some nice leaf shots well

into November. When the leaves are all off, I guess its time for snow.

Having Enough Clothes

When I left Venezuela, I left with only one suitcase. I gave away all of my clothes, dive gear, and miscellaneous stuff. People still ask me if I have enough clothes for the colder weather of Europe. YES.

Please don't worry. I have a warm collection of clothes for the weather here and around Europe.

Remember, double. Most things cost double here in Switzerland. But with that price, you get the availability of the best quality items. Almost anything in the world can be found in Switzerland. I even found Dr.Pepper. It is a six pack of bottles for about 10 ChF (=\$10 roughly). The labels are in German.

Most expats that live here go to Italy to buy things. The prices are lower if you don't get stopped by the border patrol and taxed on the way back.

Naturally, a lot of the teachers here (and students) have packages sent to them from the US. It takes about a week for things to arrive but the system works. Boxes actually arrive.

The bottom line is: I don't really need anything. I will rent skis when I go skiing. My clothes are sufficient to keep me warm and look professional. It's all good. Thanks for the shoes dad.



Scary Tech Stories

Every once in a while, I have really poor luck with technology!

1. Sony Laptop

Dead screen. Coming to Switzerland, I had to put my carryon bag below. I sacrificed my Sony Laptop for my hard drives and Macbook, which I carried onboard. The sony Windows 8 Touchscreen is smashed. I recently bought a large screen for it. Ughh.

2. My 4TB drive in Limbo

No physical damage. The drive just decided not to be read by Win or Mac. I can see the drive but not the files. Jason might have to send my backup. Just think losing 4TB of work. Anyone have ideas? The web is full of useless banter and more scary Seagate 4TB stories.

3. Software to Fix Windows?

I have no idea where all of my copies of Windows rescue software went to. Waiting for help from Marcelo.





Every Day Brings Something New

The Bellinzona Castle was a field trip for a day. Each day is something different, something new. The five short stories below are everyday anecdotes from my life in Switzerland.

No Travel, No Food



We teachers pay a lot of money each year for room and board at our school. Three meals a day. Really the only other kind of institution that provides like this is a prison.

Anyway, the middle and high school classes went on field trips for a week. The entire school emptied out and left the lower school. The solution was to give each teacher 20ChF for dinner.

Hendrik and Sam invited a few of us over for dinner. It was fun to see some of the elementary teachers in a different light - rather than just at school.

Next time, I am going to host some kind of party at my place.

Oh Canada !



I think Canadian Thanksgiving is held on the second Monday of October each year. This year was a party at my neighbor Pam's apartment.

Pam is a Canuck recently from Britain at our sister school in the UK. She lives right next door to me and invited me to her little Canadian get together. I learned a lot.

While Thanksgiving is official in Canada, French speaking Canada doesn't care much. They see it as a day off.

Canadian Thanksgiving has roots in the European Harvest festival time.

Full Turkeys are astronomically expensive here.

These are the Drones!



These drones are actually recycling bins. Paper, Glass, and Trash.

Do you see the t-bar on the top of each bin? A truck comes along with a forked swinging arm. The arm lifts each pod up in the air and dumps the entire bin out into the truck from the bottom of the bin.

The silver colored square below each bin is the metal storage container. It is fascinating to think of the efficiency but also think of the esthetic value. Where is all of the rubbish? Where are all of the recycled bottles? Where's the stuff?

Storming the Castles



Castles. I have 14 of them in the classroom right now. Each one took planning, communication, and family support.

Sarah and I were worried that students would go out and buy pre-fab castles so we composed an instruction booklet and rubric for grading the castles.

At 18 in³ each, the castles barely fit into our small library. Some of the students created bigger ones, some smaller. All in all, we had a lot of great feedback from our families. The parents helped out a lot.

Students' success came from a lot of planning and attention to details.

Sonic Lives Here



My niece Ella would absolutely love it here. Why, because there is a Sonic living just below my class.

The hedgehog rescue was formed as the kids got into the action. Hedgehogs are protected in Switzerland so a cry went out for help.

There are three babies and one mother. Some of the teachers and students believe the mother is not around any more. She has already started to hibernate and left her children.

Who knows. But the cry for help has stirred up learning and excitement enough to start up a unit.

Top 10 Observations about Switzerland

10. Cars Stop Here

If there is a crosswalk, cars come to a screeching halt if you are waiting.

9. Green and Clean

This is one of the cleanest countries I have ever been in. It reminds me of a trip to Disney World - a make believe, clean park.

8. Wealth

You would not believe the line-up of cars that drive into the school parking lot to pick up their kids. Think of the top Price-tag Italian cars. Yep. What color do you want to see. I see them every day.

7. Attention to Details

The best example of how the Swiss pay attention to details is, in my humble opinion, can be seen along the roads. The hedges are trimmed as if with a hair trimming scissors.

6. Every Road is so Small

I have seen this before. All of the cars have mirrors that fold in. The roads allow only inches for one car in some cases.

5. On Time

With few exceptions, everything starts here on time. If something starts late, the Swiss blame an Italian. LOL.

4. Everything is Expensive

Imagine paying \$8 for a beer. That's a low cost beer by the way. \$15 for a Chai tea. \$30 for a Mexican burrito. This is why I don't eat out much. Converse Chuckies are \$120. A small deodorant was \$18. Yes, everything is expensive.

3. Sundays are Quiet - Thursdays Aren't

You could drop a pin and hear it in Lugano on a Sunday. Everything is closed except restaurants

2. Beauty is Everywhere

No, not just the blond haired beauties. It really seems like everything here has a touch of beauty. It's a good life here.

1. Multi-lingual

It seems like almost everyone here speaks a minimum of two languages: Italian and English. If they don't speak English, then they speak French, German, Spanish, or a smattering of any of the five.



GRE Testing - My Weekend Past time

Every weekend for the past month, you could find me in the main dining hall for most of both days. I have shunned parties, turned down rides into the city for shopping, and spent the rainy days studying for the GRE test again.

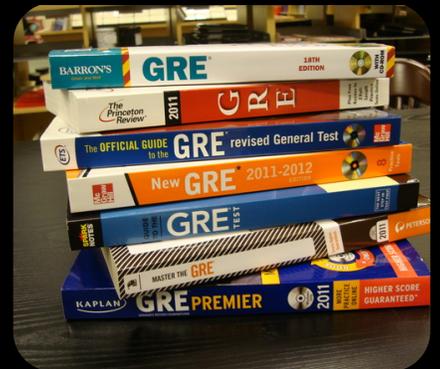
I am scheduled for the November 29, 2013 GRE test in Geneva. There is also GRE testing in Milan, Italy. Even though it is closer by six hours of travel, they don't offer the computer test. Italy has a reputation as being more laid back and disorganized compared to Switzerland. Perhaps or perhaps not. The bottom line is my scores have to go into the system ASAP. The graduate program I am applying to is a December deadline. I also like the immediacy of the computer score. Can you imagine taking a four and a half hour test and having to wait months for a paper test result? No way.

I have just three weeks left to prepare for the test. This better work. How can I shake the anxiety? There is only one way. Be overly prepared.

My August scores - the first time I took it with very little preparation - verbal were very mediocre and math was bottom of the barrel.

I will take a train to Zurich and another train to Geneva. I'll be leaving after school on Thanksgiving (which isn't celebrated of course) and getting to Geneva that evening. If everything goes as planned, I will arrive in the wee hours, sleep on the train, get ready in the hotel, take the afternoon test, and spend the weekend in either Geneva or Zurich.

Just a few more weeks and this should be over. Look out MSU - I am going to kick some GRE butt.



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