

CALIFORNIAN FLAIR MOVES INTO LEUBSDORF

Filmmaker Becky Taylor-Hellwig trades her wild big-city life for a down-to-earth village community. She brings her esprit and commitment to her new home with passion.

Why does a Californian choose a completely different life and swap the faraway Sunshine State for a small, calm village in Central Saxony? When you hear the open-minded American talk about her old home, the difference becomes clear: "I grew up in Silicon Valley in California. Sunshine, colourful city life, people from different backgrounds and long evenings together are omnipresent here".

In the 40 years she lived and studied in California, she had frequent contact with Germany. Already at a young age she maintained a pen friendship with a German member of an Elvis Presley Fanclub. And among other things she lived together with a German in a shared apartment. In her early 20s, she worked for the Red Cross, which also has a presence in America. There, through an employee, she met her husband.

He was originally from the Ruhr area in Germany and at that time he was working as a scientist at the IBM Research Center in San José. In 2004, the young couple married and lived together in California for several years. Some years later, the first addition to their family was announced. Their daughter and the twins grew up bilingual from the beginning, with her husband speaking German and herself speaking English. After eleven years, the longing for more time with their grandparents in Germany became so great that the family considered moving. The prospect of a job at the Technical University in Chemnitz for the husband also strengthens the plan, and so they were looking for a new home nearby the workplace.

The ideal place for family and guests was found in central Saxony

In Leubsdorf, they discover a suitable house in 2016. The newcomers agreed on a deal with the seller: they would live there on a trial basis for six months to test out rural life. After all, the change from a lively big city to a quiet village is considerable. After just three months, it was clear to the lively Southerner: "I want to go back!" The familiar feeling of the old home, with its many offerings, community undertakings and creative activities, was missing too much. Her husband, however, pleaded for life in the country. The children also liked living in the village: "I liked the soccer field best from the beginning," remembers 10-year-old twin sister Rosalee. The bright children quickly made friends after buying the house and became enthusiastic about horseback riding in the neighboring village.

As a sociologist with a degree in community change, integration and women's rights, the fresh-faced Middle Saxon saw this as a challenge to bring a little more life to her new home and foster community spirit. She founded a women's initiative in the village, which was immediately met with approval. Today, this results in regular joint activities such as herb hikes, book readings, trips to major cities and wine evenings at home. "Our house is open and there is always room for new people," she emphasizes, pointing to her large round table.

Whereas at the beginning of her time in the village she used to sit at the local bakery three times a week drinking coffee in order to socialize, nowadays dear neighbors and new friends get in touch all by themselves: "We also get together to play music or just chat". And in her greenhouse, where others would grow vegetables, you'll find a seating area on sandy ground: "For a bit of a Californian feel, my husband surprised me with this." Togetherness means a lot to her and she has managed to integrate this important aspect into her new life. She uses her mother tongue for this as well. In the Villa Gückelsberg in Flöha, she has been regularly running an English Café for some time, a kind of language tandem in a cozy atmosphere. When she is not volunteering, the filmmaker writes concepts for new projects. Her most recent film, "Open Doors," premiered in October 2022.

It shows the journey of three people with different migration backgrounds, picking up on individual emotional worlds: Fear during the flight, courage during the arrival and joy about all that has arisen in the new home. She met the protagonists herself in the German course she has been taking since 2018.

It was also through the search for new professional relationships that she found the Nestbau-Zentrale: "I received helpful contacts and was able to expand and benefit from my own network" she recalls.

Today, she still enjoys traveling to major German cities and also to California. But she really misses the moods during the different seasons, the colorful fall or the homey atmosphere at Christmas. And so she always enjoys coming back to her new home in Leubsdorf in Central Saxony.

ALWAYS OPEN FOR NEW PEOPLE



Arriving in Central Saxony

"From my own experience, I can recommend finding a reference person who can tell you about life in your new home and thus provide support for integration. The Saxon support project Profil+, which offers mentoring for migrant women, is also helpful."

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