

Mindfulness over Mindfulness

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Mindfulness – The challenge of being in the moment

I just came back from a winter walk in 13 degrees and lovely sunshine. For the first time there was that smell in the air, of dry soil and a hint of fresh flowers. If it was only spring already, I thought to myself, imagining all the lovely things we could do then.



That reminded me of another walk through Greystones town at the beginning of December. The Christmas lights had just come on, but I didn't fully embrace the sparkle they brought to the dark season as I was already anticipating how dull the town would look again in January after they have been taken down.

Playing with my 8-months old son, my mind sometimes wanders off. Once he will be able to walk, we can run around in the garden. Or I think of all the board games I will introduce him to when he is old enough.

Mind-numbing



There is nothing wrong with watching TV shows during my many repetitive tasks I have as a [stay-at-home mom](#). I am too tired to read at night time in bed, so I watch another low-impact TV show to drift off to. What else could I be doing during a 10 minute break, but to scroll through other people's lives on my phone?

For the longest time mind numbing felt good to me. I liked having my mind occupied at all times, not being able to ponder or rest. Only very slowly did I notice a social and even physical impact triggered by my habits. I felt irritable and disconcerted by topics people shared online, or the tone prevalent in threads, as well as poorly researched and fake news. On family walks my mind was occupied, taking pictures for my social media or thinking about what to post next.



Whilst I was aware of my unhealthy behaviour, I found it extremely hard to let go of living in this parallel world. But I soon came to realise that I wanted to be back in the real, present one with all my senses again.

New Mindset

I first posted this article in January 2018. Eventually I got rid of social media and became an active part of family time again. Rather than following like a shadow, capturing images for future use and a pseudo reality, I enjoy the real thing.

I got back to reading at night time but had to work on focussing my attention to words on the page over some trivia web or TV content. During household chores I watch documentaries which I really enjoy and that are inspiring for my writing.

At times I still reach for my phone, longing for a senseless news feed scroll and get a pang of disappointment when I notice the apps aren't there. It is more like a physical automatism instead of something I really *want* to do. So I remind myself why I deleted them and to not fall back into old habits.

The Art of Mindfulness



When I heard of Mindfulness Courses for the first time, I wondered why you needed someone to teach you how to be in the moment. But with all the input and distraction available, and almost unavoidable these days, mindfulness has become an art. The fear of missing out, or not being informed at all times, has become a big part of our daily lives.

From a young age we teach our children that they constantly should be doing something – learning another skill, doing another sport, joining another club. Hardly ever do we let them just be. Since when do we think it is healthy having kids

on a schedule, rushing from one activity to the next? Often we overcompensate for our own busy lives and end up in a vicious cycle of mind-fullness instead of mindfulness.

Having experienced how hard it is to be in the moment when it should be the easiest thing in the world, I want it to be natural for our kids. We intend to keep them away from video games and social media as long as possible since I feel they are big contributors to, if not reasons for, mind-fullness and absent-mindedness. Luckily the town of [Greystones is a pioneer in phone free primary schools](#) to prevent an addiction whose impact we probably haven't fully grasped yet.

What's it with the Germans? A Holiday Review

No Foamed Lattes and Cash Only!

"We only open at half twelve", the woman emerging from the shut kiosk replies harshly. Even though the connected restaurant has just sent me over to get my coffee-to-go here. Awkwardly I check the time on my phone, balancing the baby in my arms. I wait the three minutes to opening time and eventually order my coffee. "No lids or card payment", she says, as she hands me a small paper cup with black coffee from a percolator. It smells nice and strong and I have to add four plastic containers of coffee cream to make it drinkable. Welcome to Meck Pomm*, I think to myself as I return to our spot by the lake shore of the [Fleesensee](#), waiting for the rest of my family to arrive.



Swimming in Chilly 24 Degrees

The surface of the water is smooth. Just once in a while tiny waves ripple towards the edge when paddle boats pull into the small marina. Ducks and seagulls bob up and down in the water, seemingly enjoying the free ride. I dip my feet into the shallow water, sand squishing through my toes. Behind me, the beach promenade is slowly coming to life. Restaurants are busy taking in deliveries and some joggers are trying to get ahead of the big heat. Back home in Ireland we are spoilt with gorgeous beaches at our doorstep, but not with 24 degrees at 10 in the morning and a water temperature of 23 degrees. Germans don't even bother showing up for a swim at 'chilly' 24 degrees, I was told.



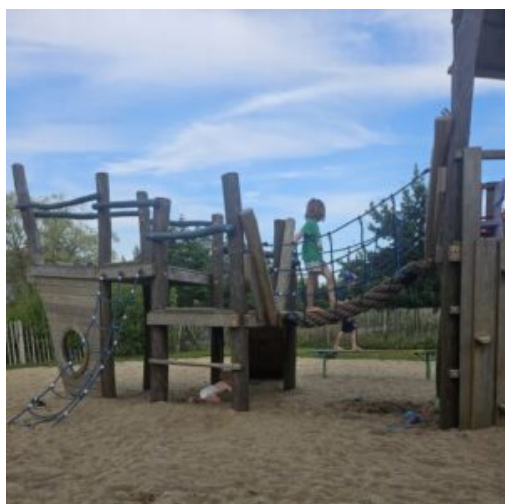
Tourism Hot Spot...

When I walk with the buggy down to the beach again the next day, I notice the well-tended farm-style houses in the red-brick architecture, characteristic for the region. Surrounded by lush gardens and orchards they stick out like gorgeous little islands among the clean, almost sterile, holiday rentals that definitely outweigh them. That makes me wonder what it is like to be one of the 520 residents of [Göhren-Lebbin](#), dealing with ca. 450.000 overnight stays a year. Considering it is the end of the season, it almost justifies the brusqueness we have been experiencing by some locals. But does it excuse an above-average amount of retirees wearing neon pink hair dye or T-shirts with dubious prints? I am not sure.



The resort we are staying in has the character of a village onto itself. Consisting of colourful timber-framed houses with self-catering units, restaurants, children's facilities and several adventure playgrounds including water play and a petting zoo. Our apartment on the ground floor is spacious and definitely designed with a family in mind. There is plenty to

discover and do for all age groups. Our terrace is facing the fields, lined by a forest in the distance and is a lovely space to unwind. There are kids everywhere on the compound, bustling about on Go-karts or pulled along by their parents in handkarts. We are absolutely comfortable having our 7- and 4-year old roaming around on their own.



...and Unspoilt Nature

Another morning I bring the baby for a walk on the sandy path right behind our apartment. It is hot as I push the buggy through the dust, welcoming every gentle breeze rustling through the trees. I appreciate their shady patches, giving the dirt track an alternating pattern. I truly enjoy those morning walks, focusing on the regular breaths of my sleeping baby, accompanied by the humming of bees. My destination is Kirch Poppentin, a red-brick church from 1882 with its

attached cemetery. Surprisingly I don't encounter a single soul, despite of three big hotels based in the neighbourhood. Eventually I meet two well-gearred up cyclists with friendly faces who ask me for directions. Three indicators that they are not local.



English – Nein danke!

For Sunday mass we locate a Catholic church in the nearby town of [Waren](#). When we arrive, the car park is bursting out of its seams. People are welcoming and friendly, but keep their distance once they hear we are speaking English. An older gentleman is brave enough to approach us for a chat, encouraged by the Southern German number plate of our rental car. When I tell him – in German – that we live in Ireland, he nods friendly and swiftly makes his goodbyes.

It surprises me that the region of Fleesensee advertises itself as the largest Golf resort in Northern Europe and yet we stick out as English-speakers everywhere. Even our holiday resort seems to survive on a German-only policy, apart from Reception. I feel for the staff in the shop who had to explain to my husband one morning – using gestures and hand signals – that the pre-ordered chocolate croissants hadn't arrived.

What is it with the Germans?

As we potter through Waren, an old lady with a zimmer frame (but no pink hair dye) peeks into the buggy. I prepare for

another shower of compliments on our baby when she tells me assertively that I am to put socks on the poor child. Baffled, I follow her slow movement as she shuffles on without another word. What is it with Germans getting involved in how we handle our kids? Only the other day a parent told our 4-year old to not twist her baby sister's arm when she was playing with her on the beach, and I was standing right beside them. Um, excuse me?



Friendliness in Disguise

On our last day, I stroll down the foresty path to Lake Fleesensee one more time. As I drop into the village store, I open with a comment on the weather as you would when entering a shop in Ireland. Not expecting a huge response, I am all the more surprised when the girl behind the counter pours her heart out to me. When I finally leave, I smile to myself, remembering how curt she was the first day I came in.

Down by the lake I decide to give the woman in the coffee

trailer a second chance, too. Judging by her still grim facial expression, I fear to get told off for changing my order half way through. Instead I get a “no problem” and a hint of a smile. Delighted I toddle off with my *Bulette im Brötchen**, excited to introduce this typical German snack to my family.

The Charm of Mecklenburg Vorpommern

I am no stranger to the ‘Nordic charm’ as I would call the ‘friendliness in disguise’ in Mecklenburg Vorpommern. In my twenties I spent four years in Stralsund, studying Leisure and Tourism Management at the local university. And despite some raised-eyebrow-moments during our vacation, I knew that people weren’t intending to be rude. However, having lived in Ireland for over ten years has changed my perception of my fellow countrymen, [to being a tourist in my own country](#).

Fleesensee doesn’t strike me as a big international player in the resort business. It rather feels like a rural holiday destination with charming flaws, representing the innate culture it is surrounded by: straight forward and down to earth. I value its authenticity over an all pleasing service industry. Although a few more friendly faces around could do no harm. The all prevelant cash payment adds to the holiday feel and so does not having a stable 4G connection at all times.

The natural beauty of the area and its amenities are great for a fun and activity-filled holiday, complemented by pretty towns with its regional architecture. That is what makes Fleesensee attractive to us as a family of five. The [BEECH Resort Fleesensee](#) is the ideal place to combine all our interests and give each of us their own little space to relax. We will be back for sure!



***MeckPomm = Short for Mecklenburg Vorpommern: One of Germany's 16 federal states. Located in the North East, it was part of the former GDR. Bordering the Baltic Sea it also features extensive lakelands inland.**

***Bulette is the name for a meat snack, similar to a burger patty, in Berlin and the North East of Germany (from French "small ball"). It is usually served in a roll. Its name varies depen.**

Sexism works both Ways

On the back of some quite negative publicity I have read about men and childminding during the Corona Crisis, I realised that sexism works both ways. And I felt the need to show a different side of the story. It is obviously going to be a very personal point of view from within our family. Nevertheless I don't think that my husband John is an edge case. If we still *do* live in a world where men are misogynistic and can't or don't want to look after their children, I am even more lucky to have found the one and only super husband & daddy.

„Feminists shouting sexism all over“

I don't mind "Men-are-from-Mars-and-Women-from-Venus Jokes". Men and women *are* different by nature. They have different strengths and skill sets, often complementing each other. Generalising and joking about their flaws can be humorous. Especially when both sides are aware that it involves stereotyping and exaggerations.

A friend of mine sent me a video the other day about what would happen if women went on strike. It was hilarious! Men were holding crying babies, unable to work out what to do with them. Business men in suits panicking over having to pick up their little ones from kindergarten for the first time. Men at home clueless how to look after domestic stuff. It clearly was exaggerated and sarcastic which I don't have a problem with as such.

But jokes like that don't seem to work the other way around. Feminists would be shouting „sexism“ from all over. Why is it that we find it very funny when men are put down or made fun of when it comes to child rearing? But jokingly criticizing women's driving or mechanical skills – which is obviously as clichéd – is sexism?

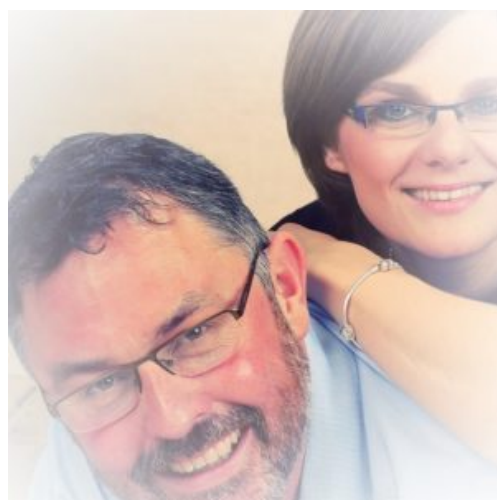
Men against Women

What I have noticed – even more during the Corona Crisis – is that often it is men against women. As if it was a competition that has to be won by either side. What happened to being partners? Making use of what we both bring to the table and work as a team? Rather than just finger pointing and jumping all over each other's flaws.

I am not saying that we never have these – let's call them gender-based – arguments at home. Who is more tired? How many hours did I look after the kids on the weekend and how many hours did he etc.? Who deserves a break more? We *do* argue about these things, because it can be tough at times. [Looking](#)

after two small children 24/7 in your own four walls while working from home is a challenge that grew exorbitantly during the pandemic.

However once our tempers have cooled down after above mentioned confrontations, we remind ourselves that we don't gain anything from *winning* in a marriage. (Well, except for half an hour extra sleep maybe at the cost of not talking to each other for a while.) We made agreements that we tend to stick to. And if we can't for one reason or another we try to compromise and re-adjust. Above all, we know that we are on each other's side and not in some strange pseudo-battle between male and female.



Lazy Housewife vs. Career-oriented Husband

One of our biggest standing agreements is how we split the roles at home. My main task is to look after the children and

the domestic chores in the house. John is the sole bread winner. We both have a big responsibility. But for some reason I find neither is perceived as such.

An example for the negative media coverage during the Corona Crisis that I mentioned at the start stated that women are the losers of the pandemic. They have to stay at home and look after the children whilst the men can continue their jobs as before. No one even considers the increased financial pressure now resting on the husband's shoulders whilst the mother gets to spend more time with the children. It might not have been the mother's choice, but not necessarily the father's either.

It doesn't help that the image of a house wife and stay-at-home mom is still not the best in modern society. People argue that women make themselves dependent on their husbands and are denied self-fulfilment. They talk about "giving up" something, but never about gaining at the same time. Everybody knows – at least in theory – that it definitely *is* a full-time job to look after young children. And an important one on top of that. So why is it that women still feel the need to justify themselves for being home carers?

The Grass is always greener on the other Side

It looks like neither men nor women get what they are looking for. Of course I enjoy withdrawing to our home office to work on the computer while John is minding the kids. John on the contrary can't wait to get out at night time and roll around on the floor with the kids.

Does that mean we envy the other person all the time? Is that why there is a constant, merciless battle between men and women? Neither a full-time job in the office nor minding the kids at home is always a pleasure. But John and I chose our roles for a reason. The more we enjoy switching occasionally for a break. However we are far from questioning our whole system.

Jobs with a Meaning

After a hard day – rather than arguing who got the better end of the stick – we try to show each other appreciation for what we have achieved. John in his job and I in mine. I also disagree with the assumption that having a paid job is generally more fulfilling. Whilst our children show me appreciation almost every day, John might be looking for it in vain in the office, despite his hard work.

When it comes to the questions whose job as such is more important, I am also the clear winner. The purpose of my work, i.e. our children, add by far more meaning to my life than John's tasks at the office to his. At the same time we are well aware that we couldn't afford our life style without John's long hours and his good salary.

A Healthy Co-Dependency

There is no doubt about it that it needs us as a team to make it all function. Rather than striving for personal happiness and self-fulfillment, we believe that owning up to our responsibilities and contributing our part is the key to a content (family) life on the long run. With this comes happiness and fulfillment.

Apart from that, there is no reward system or competition going on for the harder worker. If one slacks off, the other one has to bear the additional load, or things will start slipping. We are not ashamed of admitting that we are depending on each other. Our marriage and family would not work if we were two separate individuals fighting to realise our own personal goals.

Trouble Shooting in the Crisis

The Corona crisis has required a lot of re-adjustment. Even though our traditional roles made it easier for us to adapt quicker to childminding and [working from home](#), we weren't

prepared to master it all by ourselves, entirely without the support of family and friends.

Hence we do have our moments when when we are sick and tired of it all and annoyed by each other's company. We had an argument recently which we didn't sort out before we went to bed. However we both agreed the next day that we didn't like that and won't be doing it again going forward. (Well, we will argue for sure, but won't drag it out until the next day.)

There really is no point. We know that we are generally on the same page and agree on the 'big stuff'. Otherwise we wouldn't have got married in the first place. When we argue it is about day-to-day things in combination with being tired or overwhelmed. At the end of the day we know that our marriage is the base camp where we both re-charge our batteries.

Foreigners of Greystones – Spot the German

My husband John says that you can spot a German in Ireland. Apparently they wear rain or hiking gear of a certain brand, often in matching colours with their partners. I guess that speaks to the German virtues of being prepared and a lack of spontaneity. When I was working in tourism, we described the German target group with the term "planned spontaneity". I always thought this was very funny and apt at the same time. There is a bit of truth in every stereotype.

The Beginning of a Friendship

When I met Anja for the first time in the Greystones Breastfeeding Support Group, I definitely didn't "spot the

German". In fact Anja spotted me, or rather overheard me speaking to my 4-months old in German. Anja had a newborn baby girl at the time and this was how our friendship began about three years ago.

Anja had already been living in Greystones for three years and on and off in Ireland since 2007. As a matter of fact, she was living right around the corner from us, but our paths had never crossed. At least I had never spotted her. Maybe she wasn't wearing the right type of rain jacket to identify her as a German.

The two of us clicked from the start. Our little ones being close in age gave us a lot to talk about. We were sharing a similar daily routine, challenges and worries as new first time moms. Not that talking in German was essential to me, but it gave me the extra bit of familiarity and comfort to settle in to my new life in Greystones and as a stay-at-home mom.

The Ladies who Lunch

Soon we had our regular Thursdays together, venturing through Greystones with our buggies. We met other mummies, shared baby updates, and went for coffee or lunch. Whilst our outings were not purely pleasurable, and often dominated by keeping our little explorers at bay, John pictured us as elegant ladies 1920's style, strolling along the beach promenade, parasols in hand and pushing our sleeping babies. Anja's husband David had a similar image in mind and nicknamed us "The Ladies who lunch" or "Yummy yummy Friends".

We always had a good time though! Neither of us missed being stuck in the office or behind a desk. All the more when most moms went back to work after their maternity leave, we appreciated the time with our little ones, as well as each other, out and about as stay-at-home moms.



Closer in Ireland

Not only our children becoming best buddies gave us a lot of common ground. We were never short of something to talk about, even though our interests would have been quite different before we had kids. Anja is passionate about (classical) music and dreams of playing the piano one day. She has been a member of the [Bray Choral Society](#) since 2015, where she sings the Alto Voice.

We do share an interest for foreign languages which both brought us to Ireland. Anja has a Diploma as Literary Translator, translating novels, children's books and plays from English and French into German. Time permitting she works on projects of her choice on a Freelance basis.

I am grateful how fate brought us together in Ireland, as we surely wouldn't have met back in Germany. As it happens we are

from the opposite sides of Germany, with almost 500km between our hometowns. Close enough in age, Anja was born in West Germany which was divided by a hard border from East Germany, where I grew up, before the wall came down in 1989.

Introducing Bergisches Land

When Anja tells me about the region [Bergisches Land](#) she grew up in, it reminds me a lot of County Wicklow, which be both picked as our home of choice. Rolling green hills, forests and lush green all around, scattered farms in between. The wide-stretched nature district is situated between the dense industrial area of the Ruhrgebiet and the low mountain range of the Sauerland. Whilst the name Bergisches Land contains the German word for 'mountain' (=Berg), it is actually not referring to its geographical features, but was named after Count Berg who reigned the area in the Middle Ages.

Germany loves its Records

Anja's hometown [Wermelskirchen](#), not too far from [Cologne](#) with its UNESCO World Heritage cathedral, offers plenty to explore. It wouldn't be Germany if it didn't have one of the oldest, highest, most famous something. So let's throw some records about the Bergisches Land around, shall we?

The Eschbachtalsperre in Remscheid is the oldest potable water reservoir in Germany. Whilst the lake isn't suitable for swimming, the nature path around it is a popular local recreation area and part of the Camino de Santiago.

The Müngstener Brücke across the Wupper Valley holds a height record in railway bridges. Its impressive steel arch resembles the construction of the Eiffel Tower in Paris.

Probably the first and only elephant ever falling out of a suspension railway into the river below was "Tuffy". Whilst rides in the world's oldest electric elevated railway with hanging cars in Wuppertal are still a popular attraction, the

elephant passenger was a once off. A bronze statue in the city centre reminds of the curious incidents during the 1950's.

The “heart-shaped” Wupper Valley

No visit to Germany would be complete without seeing a medieval castle. You are certainly spoilt for choice here, but if you equally value culinary highlights, then pick [Schloss Burg](#) (funnily it literally translates as ‘Castle [named] Fortress’). It is famous for its ‘Bergische Kaffeetafel’ which would be similar to an Irish Afternoon Tea. Just replace ‘tea’ with ‘coffee’ which is here served in a traditional ‘Dröppelminna’ (= antique coffee pot made from tin) and with heart-shaped waffles.

No wonder that Anja and her husband David got married here. Well, not in the castle itself, but the lovely Wupper Valley. I am sure that something “heart-shaped” was involved anyway.

The Irresistible Irish Men

Like in [my own story with my husband John](#), Anja was put into David's life (or the other way around) by some helping hand. After gaining some experience abroad with her friend to improve her English skills, Anja left Ireland in 2009 after 1.5 years. It wasn't an easy decision, but she had only intended to stay for 1 year and thought it was time to go back to her family in Germany. Moreover, her plan was to start working as a translator which she had trained for.

However, Ireland wasn't ready to let her go and put David on the scene. Both fell in love by writing to each other online. Hence Anja didn't stay in Germany for too long. After she had met David on neutral ground face-to-face for the first time, Anja became a frequent guest in Ireland again. Being flexible as self-employed translator helped with her “jet-setting” life. In 2014 Anja and David moved from his Dublin City apartment to Greystones and the rest is history.

Deal Breaker Bus Timetable

Due to her excellent language skills and easing herself into the Irish way of life, Anja didn't really suffer a cultural shock when moving to Ireland for good. The Irish and German life styles are not too different after all. And you know that you are well suited for another country when you consider the bus timetables the biggest challenge.

I have to agree with Anja that it doesn't make sense to display the times the bus is leaving the terminus at, rather than the departure time from the bus stop like in Germany. On the other hand you can kill some waiting time by working out when the bus is supposedly getting there. Or it gives you the perfect opportunity to pull the "foreigner card" and start a chat with a local.

"Make Friends by Doing your Own Thing"

When I ask Anja what she found most challenging about getting to know Irish people she says: "Actually it was much easier than I expected. Whilst my first friends in Ireland were foreigners themselves, I made Irish friends over time by just following my own interests rather than actively looking for contacts. Hence I met one of my first Irish friends in the choir of Trinity College."

"The Irish mentality is very welcoming and sociable so that you hardly feel excluded", Anja continues. "Besides, they are a nation of emigrants themselves and according to my experience the Irish perception of Germans is quite positive. So once you are open to it, friendships will happen automatically". Even when you don't use the bus timetable debacle as an icebreaker.

My "Wing Woman" for Mammy Friendships

Looking back, I can confirm what Anja says about meeting locals. At the beginning however, I found it hard to become

part of existing structures. After work (Irish) people went home to their families or went out with their group of friends. I needed a door-opener who already had Irish friends which was my husband John for me. Once you have kids, there are many locals who start from scratch too after leaving their work environment. That really helps. But even then I prefer to have a “wing woman” for going out. This is how Anja and I made many lovely mammy friends.

“Be Happy or Change”

I am grateful to have Anja as my friend. Apart from the fact that I like spending time with her, she is very positive and optimistic which perfectly counteracts my moody character. Her philosophy of life “Be happy. If you are not happy, change something” perfectly summarises her life-affirming attitude.

It looks like Anja doesn't need to change anything in her life right now. Her answer to what she misses most from our home country Germany (except family and friends) includes just minor things that she can easily live without. Hence Anja doesn't have the desire to return to Germany which suits me just fine.

How to become the Employee of the Month as a Stay-at-Home-Mom

Numerous times I have been awarded Employee of the Month. It usually is a small ceremony. Few words, big emotions. Sometimes even tears. The last time I dressed up for the occasion but unfortunately someone spilled on my top. No big

deal, it happens.

For the last two and a half years a young man has been managing the procedure. In September a sweet little lady joined the committee. Together they monitor me all day long and you never know what's going on in their heads. Sometimes I expect adoration and get shouted at. Other times for no reason at all I receive supportive smiles. They are harsh critics and they don't make a secret out of it. Their expectations are high and occasionally I struggle to meet them. I often have doubts that I am doing my job properly. The more surprised I am when I receive approval for my efforts.

The Challenge

The job itself is popular. Many people want to do it sooner or later. On the other hand you hear a lot of negative things about it. The job description sounds pretty straight forward at first. You'll find out soon enough though that you have to be flexible, able to improvise and multitask. Funny enough these are all skills that I didn't think I had . What I like about it is that I can work from home most of the time. That also means unfortunately that it is not 9 am to 5 pm.

When I took up the challenge in May 2017, I didn't have a clue what to expect. I thought I was well prepared, but in hind sight there was still a lot to worry about. I left my secure office job to jump into something completely new, which I didn't know if I wanted for the long term. Now I am glad that I had the courage to do it. I couldn't think of anything else that I would rather do. Of course there are days when I am fed up with it all, but I had these in my old job too. So I definitely made the right decision.

More than a Job

By now I am quite passionate about my work and that really helps. Once you got into it, it is hard to go back to a job behind a desk. A very important part of my day-to-day tasks

are the people I am dealing with. Different characters and sometimes even multiple personalities in one. This makes it prone to conflicts and it is on me to keep it all under control. This is something I really had to learn. I have always liked a structured and tidy working environment. And this isn't one. You are basically trying to keep the chaos to a minimum most of the time.

My shiny Award

Looks like I am one of those people myself who has a lot of negative things to say about this mysterious job. So I should mention at that stage that the reward I am getting makes all the stress and overtime worthwhile. And I presume it is also time to tell you what this 'Employee-of-the-Month thing' is all about if you haven't already guessed.

Instead of a gold-plated plaque to hang on the wall I receive colourful scribbles on paper. I get handcrafted cards with Thank-you-stamps and random animal stickers on it. Muddy little fingers bring me in daisies from the garden. I get cuddles and hugs, accompanied by heartwarming smiles and loud laughter. After a long day I am served 'homemade', imaginary meals. When I lie exhausted on the couch someone leans his tiny head against my shoulder without saying a word. With sparkling innocent eyes looking at me I get told "Mammy I love you". Then I know that I have the best job in the world and that for two little people I will always be the Employee of the Months. No shiny award needed.