

Women in Business



URSULA SCHWEIGER

Island View Riding Stables

By Rose Holmes.

It was a "secret love" (with her boss) that originally brought Ursula Schweiger to live in Ireland.

She was born 1970 in Bavaria, Germany, in to a "non-hobby family", but always had an affinity with animals and especially enjoyed being around horses.

Originally she attended university to become a teacher of English and art in secondary school.

Ursula came to Ireland to improve her spoken English, and started working in a riding school in Co. Sligo. She loved it so much that she had to come back time and again, and to her real life as they say is "history".

When reciprocal attraction became evident from her "secret love" she ripped sticks, and left her civil service job in Bavaria to embark on an uncertain future here in Ireland, with her new husband, Raymond O'Connor.

Her husband's father had decided to add a bit of pony trekking to the existing milder cow and sheep herd.

The set up of the business was greatly helped by its location and the

The woman who moved to Ireland for love



REINS: Ursula Schweiger and two of her horses.

fact that the O'Connors farm (Orange) overlooks the Atlantic and with their own private island that can be explored on horseback, what better way to learn to ride in such a majestic, breathtaking location set in an idyllic paradise.

The business was only in its infancy (if not to say embryonic stages) then – so Ursula has played a

central role in its successful development since its inception.

Like most self-employed people, Ursula has a great passion for her work and is entirely devoted to its future.

Business, Ursula says, "is our life and if it wasn't for the job, satisfaction and commitment for what we do, we wouldn't do it. The

financial rewards don't justify the hours and commitment involved."

From the beginning it has consumed her heart and soul. Ursula is now a mother of two children (a boy of 6 and a girl of 10) and she feels that her roots are now truly well embedded here in Co. Sligo.

Ursula says that Ireland in 2009 feels more like the Ireland she first came to experience in 1990. "People have more time for each other and it is reflected in better customer care than in the Rat race years."

She enjoys updating her equestrian/instructor skills as well as her business skills, as it feeds her brain.

The artistic/creative side of her doesn't get much other enrichment in her present situation, but there is always retirement to look forward to.

Ursula is very proud of how the business has prospered from a small "cowboy outfit" to a professionally run yard that has not lost its personal touch and "old world charm".

She is particularly proud of the fact that this business has grown out of its own resources and is standing on its own feet.

She hopes to continue the improvements so that they get "not bigger" but "better", every year.

And with Ursula's ongoing enthusiasm in her idyllic paradise where it all began with a "secret love" I have no doubt she achieves her dream.

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PROFILE QUESTIONS

Q. What are the responsibilities of your job?

A. Responsibility is my middle name, 24/7, 365 days a year.

I am responsible for the well being of 50 horses and their riders. I have two full time staff, and an extended family that is scorching or other involved in the business.

As our business is small I wear many different hats, management, riding instruction, trail guiding, carriage driving, training of young stock, stable management, record keeping – the only thing I don't take care of is the mechanical end of things, field maintenance and saving the winter fodder and dishwashing (I leave those to my husband).

Q. What was the best business decision you ever made?

A. Starting our website and overcoming my computer phobia.

Q. What was the most valuable lesson you have learned in business?

A. Look after the customer that is here today and give them the best experience possible.

The customer you already have is your most important one.

Keep the existing customer happy – he/she are worth more to you than 50 who may see your ad word of mouth is everything in our business.

Q. Who do you admire in Ireland today, business, political, entertainment?

A. Is there life outside Island View Riding Stables? I am afraid we get very wrapped up in everyday chores here so there's little time or opportunity to meet others or go places.