

Interview with Erdem Savas

Which generation of your family emigrated to Germany and which were the reasons for their emigration?

Erdem: My grandfather and my grandmother emigrated in 1967 together with my father, who was born in Turkey in 1964. To begin with, my family lived in the city of Canakkale which is near the antique city of Troja. My grandparents have seven sisters and brothers. The main reason for their emigration was the unemployment in Turkey. In addition, my grandfather did not want to work in agriculture. As a result, they abandoned their domicile and came to Germany. Fortunately, my grandfather had a qualification from Turkey, which was accepted by the German government. As a simple guest worker, my grandfather worked for *Continental*, a company that produces rubber tyres. There, he had to melt the rubber. In general, this work was very difficult because of the stench, which was the reason why the foreign workers had to do this work. His qualification was very good; as a consequence he was able to work in higher positions later. Furthermore, he got a master degree in his job because he went to a master school. Accordingly, he was allowed to educate other workers in his business. After years of hard work, he went into retirement in 1995.

How did your parents' and your journey through life continue in Germany?

Erdem: Well, my father ended school with the Certificate of Secondary Education and worked in many cities in different businesses. In the year 2000 he decided to stay in Hannover with his parents and the other family members and he began a job at VW. Fortunately, all family members are able to speak German. Only my mother and grandmother speak a lot of Turkish with me. I'd like to point out that my life was normal, as that of German people. I was born in Hanover on June 10th 1987. My parents and my older sister taught me German and therefore I was able to speak German with the other children in kindergarten. In particular, I learned Turkish from my grandmother and my mother. But I did not have to go to Koran school. After the basic education I went to junior high school. What is important is that I finished school as the only foreign person. I changed the school and went to gymnasium. I'd like to stress the point that I finished my secondary school education with the high GPA of 1.4! Now, I'm doing a "dual studies" education at VW: for three days in a week I go to the technical college in Hanover, on the other three days I work in my company as a technician. It is essential to say that I am very proud of my education because I am the first family member who finished school with a secondary school education. In the future, I am going to work in the foreign department of VW and visit a lot of countries all over the world.

So you are not the typical immigrant. Don't you want to live like your family and have your own big family?

Erdem: First of all, I am not a typical family man and therefore I want to see the world and travel through all countries. In addition, I will create a plan for my future. I might marry in my future, too, but at the moment I have other preferences.

Does your family live like the Germans or do they have a traditional life?

Erdem: Basically, one can say that my family lives a modern, German life. Not only the German families live in a modern way, but also the Turkish families. I would like to add that my mother cooks German and Turkish food. Moreover, on Easter and on Christmas my whole family gets together like most German families. Nevertheless, we celebrate the Turkish public holidays.

Are you more a Turkish man or a German one?

Erdem: Well, I am more German than Turkish, but I feel good in both countries. This is due to the fact that I know both cultures very well, thus, I can use both advantages. To give an example, I am able to speak Turkish with my assistants. It is very helpful to explain something to them in their own language. When I was able to decide, I chose the German passport. This can be explained by saying that I feel at home in Germany. Apart from that, I have the right for work and live in Turkey. To be more accurate, I am allowed to have all rights, except the right to vote. In Germany, I always go to a Turkish hair dresser where I can practice my Turkish. It bothers nobody there, whereas I do not speak Turkish on the streets where it might bother people. What makes me Turkish is my temper and my stubbornness, but I have also German traits such as punctuality and diligence.

Has your family ever faced discrimination?

Erdem: Nobody in my family was received badly by the Germans. But all the members of my family have done a lot to adapt to German life since they came. My grandfather and father worked very hard and I am the first one to have a good starting point in life. I was brought up bilingually. And I was lucky not to look Turkish, with my blue eyes. Many Turks still have a lot of problems at school because they don't speak German well. This is due to the fact that they stick among themselves. They do not know where they belong. Generally, mistakes are made by both sides, Germans and Turks. A better looking after would give many a better perspective. Education is the only way, but you have to do something for it, too.

Will your parents ever go back to Turkey?

Erdem: My parents have always spent time in Turkey, so they will never lose the contact to that country. I don't think they will ever leave Germany for good, having friends and family here and having built a house. But they might "commute" between the two countries in the future, spending the summers in Germany and the winters in Turkey. Which is what many German Turks do. It is also true that they prefer BMWs.

Interview by Saskia Sack

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