

Jan/Feb 2016
\$5.00

Balloonning

JOURNAL OF THE BALLOON FEDERATION OF AMERICA



Balloon Fiesta
Where Dreams Take Flight pg 16

Zen and the Art of Crewing pg 28

Focus = Rewards pg 44



The Circle(s) of Life

at the 3rd Women's European Hot Air Balloon Championship

Story and Photos by Nienke Bos: European Correspondent for Ballooning



When having an abstract look at my young, yet, interestingly filled life, I notice that everything is structured in circles. You probably have them, too in some way or another: a ballooning circle, a family circle, and a job circle. Each is filled with different sets of friends, behaviors, emotions, and maybe even different clothing too. Or, would you wear your yellow fluorescent AIBF gear to an important business meeting? Could be, but that's another topic.

I had the luck to live in several different cities, and even in various countries too. Therefore, most of my own life circles are based upon locations.

Sometimes two (or more!) circles somehow merge. I fulfilled my bachelor degree in the Southern part of the Netherlands in a beautiful city called Maastricht. I faced some difficulties understanding the dialect there, but the

amount of historical buildings in the city center and the proximity of Belgium, Germany, and even France, made up for that. After not having been there for four years, I had a look in Maastricht once again last winter. I met up with a good friend from Russia, being an exchange student living in a spare room of my Intercultural Communications teacher from Canada. I initially met my Russian friend in Estonia, while both studying there, living in the same student apartment and sharing a mutual interest in long walks along the basically deserted Estonian coast-line. In Maastricht my Estonian circle and Maastricht circle merged, which is oddly satisfying and confusing at the same time. We had a lovely day, but somehow it was just a bit a bit strange to see him walking around in this circle that hosted me just after I turned seventeen years old.

That evening we added even more internationality to the circle. We met

up with my friend from Poland, which I got to know during my time as a volunteer in Denmark. She fulfilled her internship in Maastricht, and would move into my International Communication teacher's spare room as soon as my friend from Russia returned to Estonia. It's a small world sometimes.

I thought about the above example when being at the third FAI Women's European Hot Air Balloon Championship, held a 20 minute drive from the place I was born. Circle one: home, the basis. Circle two: balloons. An important international balloon gathering this close to home was already an exception. Yet, another circle quickly mingled in. As soon as I conquered the muddy terrain with my rubber boots, I was delighted to see an abundance of Lithuanian faces, accompanied by their language pleasing my ears with recognizability. Funny, how one can connect facial features with nationali-

ties, without exactly being able to point out what characterizes these faces so clearly. It must be some sort of an inner radar combined with an odd addiction of guessing nationalities from people's faces, haircut and apparel. Anyhow, circle three: Lithuania, one of my homes because of my beloved university, located in the Northeastern part of Europe. So, all of a sudden I was overwhelmed by being at my birthplace, surrounded by balloons, and, moreover, balloonists from countries that I adore so much. What a delight!

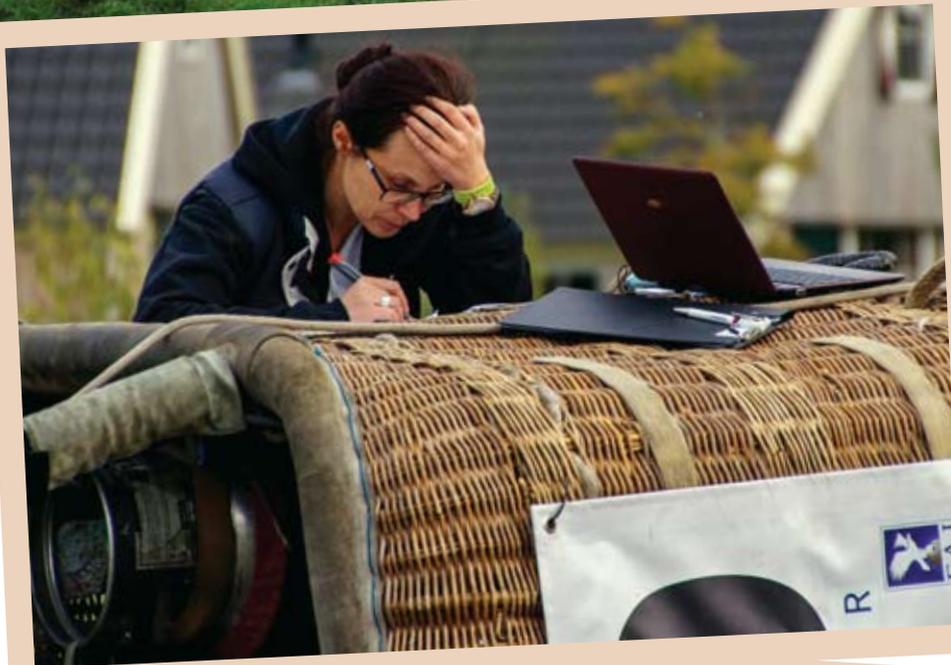
Now you probably expect a detailed summary of the championship itself. Well, I'm not able to provide that, as I only joined the balloon madness on a dull-weather Friday afternoon and a gorgeous but rather foggy Saturday morning. My colleagues at work, coming across the balloons on their way to the office earlier, heavily questioned why on earth I was calmly sitting at my desk with all the magic happening outside. Oh well, one has to work!

There weren't only balloonists from Lithuania, but also from countries like Poland and Russia. I'm big on connecting good emotions, so when seeing the Poles fly, I also still feel the excitement of all my little trips to Poland. People had been telling me Poland was unsafe, and stubborn as I am, I wanted to show them the opposite, alone. I proved to be right, and my solo trips to both the very north and very south of Poland, were some of my most valuable trips ever made.

If you ever have the opportunity: Gdansk is a Hanseatic city where the spirit of Amsterdam and Riga meet, while Krakow keeps amazing you with all the little details in various architectural ways, with the nearby Auschwitz concentration camp as the terribly sour, rotten (but certainly not to be forgotten) cherry on top.

When seeing the Russians fly, I also think about my 20th birthday, celebrated on a cold January day in St. Petersburg. I actually left my teenage years behind in Russia. Even though I considered the championship to be rather East European focused (which I totally didn't mind), there were of course also participants from countries like the Belgium, Great Britain and Germany. Only three out of nine flights actually happened, due to unfavorable





weather conditions. With a total of seven tasks, it surely resulted in a valid championship after all.

It was a rather grayish Saturday morning and the last flight of the championship was flown. I stood in the middle of a giant pasture, in which a target had been set. Slowly, all the balloons headed towards me. The ladies skillfully dropped their markers, and the excitement on their faces was clearly seen from the ground.

Third place was eventually taken by Austrian pilot Elisabeth Kindermann. Daiva Rakauskaite from Lithuania was second. I posed with the Lithuanian flag on her crown line the other day, and when I helped the team to pack away their balloon after the last flight, she wondered why I wanted to have my picture taken with her national yellow, green and red striped flag (which I personally still consider to be an African-looking flag). Well, I won't bother you with that again; I've mentioned it way too often already. For my efforts I was rewarded with a small bottle of mead, a drink well appreciated in Lithuania, made from fermented honey.

Poland's Ewa Prawicka-Linka turned out to be the best of the thirty female competitors. My Polish vocabulary doesn't reach further than the words bread, apple, here we go (by car), here we go (by foot), what are you doing and a swear word, so just an understandable congratulations in English for Ewa for now!



On the podium:

1. Ewa Prawicka-Linke (POL)
2. Daiva Rakauskaite (LTU)
3. Elisabeth Kindermann (AUT)

Podium photo courtesy FAI Media Team