

I heartily welcome you all to the memorial service for Erica Tell. Jörg asked me to speak at the beginning and end of the service. I am honoured to do so. For many years, I have been friends with Jörg and therefore was also in frequent contact with Erica.

After me, others will speak about Erica. Wolfgang Wahlster, Chairman of the Management Board of the German Research Centre for Artificial Intelligence, where Erica worked for many years, Hans Uskoreit, a friend and colleague, Conny Schröder, an old friend, Carsten Ullrich, a colleague, and Markus Breitenbach from Erica's Buddhist Sangha.

What I will speak about here comes from what Rahel and Andre, Erica's children and Jörg, Erica's husband, have told me.

I would like to begin my reflections on Erica with a sentence from Jack Kornfield, a Western Buddhist meditation teacher. In the last years of her life, Erica turned to Buddhism and highly regarded Kornfield. Kornfield says:

"Just as all the great oceans have but one taste — the taste of salt — so all of the teachings of the Buddhas are said to have but one taste, which is the sweet taste of freedom in the heart."

Buddhists see life as the road to freedom. After I spoke with Rahel, Andre and Jörg, it became clear to me. Erica chose this path with great energy and determination. She came a long way. Let me talk a little about that.

It begins early on. After a childhood in Cuba and Montevideo, which she fondly remembers as spectacular. Back in the GDR, her parents die when she is still young. She is just 12. Moves in with her uncle and aunt. Is the fifth wheel. At the same time, she is a top pupil at an elite school. The basis for her future, exceptional academic success. She develops characteristics that serve as a model for her daughter Rahel: "ambitious and dedicated." This is not an easy time for Erica. She feels that she is not treated well by her step-parents.

Her release is her marriage to Charles. The first years are very happy. Erica is a good mother for small children. Andre told me, "you can cuddle well with her." Jörg can confirm that.

They do not remain as happy. Erica frees herself again and goes to Kaiserslautern. It is not easy for her or the children. Rahel and Andre try to understand her. In Kaiserslautern, Erica meets Jörg. "She chose me," says Jörg. He is the great love of her life.

The West is a completely new context. Erica is one of the few scientists from the East that succeeded in the West, says an admiring Rahel. And Jörg adds: "Western women couldn't hold a candle to her." Erica becomes interested in what Jörg is doing. Automated theorem proving. In Saarbrücken, she takes up Jörg's ideas and develops them with great technical persistence. She makes a breakthrough. "Knowledge-based proof planning." Jörg and Erica prepare many publications together. Erica is the ideal partner for Jörg thanks to her energy, focus and technical precision. "She does not accept half-baked work," say her children. And

Jörg adds: “She was more intelligent than me.” And there is no lack of recognition. Edinburgh, Carnegie Mellon. The leading scientists in this area invite and congratulate her on the discoveries.

Automated theorem proving is Jörg’s area, however. Again, Erica searches for freedom. She finds it in her e-learning project ActivMath. Andre told me that Erica was very good at explaining things. He saw it in a private lesson that Erica gave. From this, she now develops a new, large, scientific project which has become the Center for E-Learning CelTech in the meantime. It is her own area. Erica has a large work group, completely funded by external donors. She has amazing success. Nationally and internationally. And enjoys it.

Over these twenty years, she repeatedly goes on beautiful trips with Jörg. There, she is released from the enormous demands of her scientific work. “Totally relaxed” is how Jörg describes her. “Like a little princess.” She summons Jörg with the words, “Come on, Bibi, let's do something nice.” This side of herself, enjoying relaxation, she did not show many people. But she had it!

The relationship with Jörg has its ups and downs. Occasions for Erica to find more freedom by searching for contact with herself. Besides her successful academic work, she begins to paint. On her website, you can find “selected paintings.” Since 2000. An enormous number of paintings and drawings. “That did something for her,” says Andre. Erica dances and writes. She searches for herself with great determination.

Then Erica falls ill. A threatening disease. Erica researches, undergoes difficult therapies. She frees herself of the disease at first. She celebrates her rebirth on her sixtieth birthday. As a sign of her release, she adopts her maiden name again. Erica Melis, as I knew her, becomes Erica Tell. Friends from the Sangha are also at the celebration. Erica has turned to Buddhism. It is a beautiful and happy celebration.

Unfortunately, the disease returns. Our releases are limited by time. For Erica, this limit comes too early. Erica fights. Together with Jörg. The collective time becomes a very new experience for both, as Jörg sees it. In this time of need, Erica can rely entirely on his love. Shortly before Erica’s death, I was able to see this myself. How peaceful Erica was. A last release? I had the impression that she found freedom in her heart at the end.

“Just as all the great oceans have but one taste — the taste of salt — so all of the teachings of the Buddhas are said to have but one taste, which is the sweet taste of freedom in the heart.”

Erica repeatedly savoured the sweet taste of freedom. This is how she succeeded in living her way.

Now, Wolfgang Wahlster will speak to you. He is the Chairman of the Management Board of the German Research Centre for Artificial Intelligence, where Erica achieved her scientific breakthroughs.

Hans Uskoreit, Erica's colleague and friend, especially recalls in connection with her that they both grew up in the same neighbourhood in Berlin. He will speak about this.

I would now like to ask Conny Schröder, Erica's friend, to speak.

Now, one of her colleagues, Carsten Ulrich, will speak about Erica's academic work.

The final speaker will be Markus Breitenbach from Erica's Buddhist Sangha.

Many thanks to everyone who spoke.

At the end here, I would like to read a poem that I sent Jörg after Erica's death.

The Journey

Above the mountains
the geese turn into
the light again

Painting their
black silhouettes
on an open sky.

Sometimes everything
has to be
inscribed across
the heavens

so you can find
the one line
already written
inside you.

Sometimes it takes
a great sky
to find that

small, bright
and indescribable
wedge of freedom
in your own heart.

Sometimes with
the bones of the black
sticks left when the fire

has gone out

someone has written
something new
in the ashes of your life.

*You are not leaving
you are arriving.*

~ David Whyte ~

We still hear the mantra that Jörg and Erica heard during her passing.