

**Name:** Henna

**Home country:** Finland

**Languages:** Finnish, English, Swedish, German. She is learning Arabic, French and Italian

**Intercultural relationship:** Henna is married to a North African man

## INTERCULTURAL FAMILY/COUPLE

Henna met her partner on the Internet and they have been pen pals for 1,5 years. She was living in Finland and he is from North Africa, so she never thought that they would meet in reality. However, life brought him to Europe for work and they decided to take the first step and arrange a meeting in Helsinki. When they first met face to face, they found out that their feelings were more than a friendship. Henna moved to the Central European country where he was living and working for one summer. There, their relationship became stronger and eventually both of them realized that they would like to get married. By the end of summer, they had moved to Helsinki together as spouses.

At the beginning of their relationship, Henna had difficulties anticipating internal changes that were to happen with regards to her behavior and lifestyle. She thought that living with someone from another culture would require her to change to a certain extent, especially taking into account cultural and societal norms in her husband's country. She was always convinced that she would not like to change her personality and, for example, give up her career. Luckily, her husband never expected her to do so. It was a relief for her when she noticed that her partner was also open to changes from his side to adapt to the Finnish culture and way of life here. She says with a smile that after so many years in Finland he is now more Finnish than he used to be.

Henna especially likes the fact about their relationship that two people with diverse interests, coming from different cultures want to be together. She believes that their marriage works so well because they let each other be who they are and be free in what they want to do.

*Henna's tip № 1: Let your partner be who they are and give freedom of choice. Your and your partner's different cultural backgrounds bring richness to your couple, so don't make your partner change completely.*

## EMPLOYMENT

Initially, Henna's husband suggested settling down in Central Europe. However, the couple decided to move to Finland instead, as Henna knew that she would definitely experience challenges being an immigrant. Looking back at times, she realizes that perhaps it was not the best decision of theirs to move to Finland due to the crisis, which made her husband's path to employment in Finland tougher. For him, the start in Finland was rough, as he gave up a good career in Europe and began building it from scratch in Helsinki. Eventually, after struggling with finding a workplace, he became self-employed.

First, Henna's husband took part in an integration programme where he was interviewed to find out his skills. Then, he participated in a programme that allowed him to team up with a professional who would help calculate a start-up budget to launch his own business. After the calculation, he applied for money to start the business. However, now he believes that the best option for him at that time would perhaps have been to enroll in a university or other work-related training in Finland. Indeed, becoming a student is a viable option to enrich one's knowledge, get connections in a new country, decide on a career path and get ideas for employment.

Henna knows that unfortunately a job seeker with a foreign name can be discriminated against. That is why her husband recommended keeping her maiden name when they were getting married in order to ensure better employment chances in Finland. However, she insisted on taking his surname because she likes that one can have a better idea of who she is by looking at her descriptive surname and

assuming that she is in an intercultural relationship. According to Henna, so far she has not been affected by a foreign surname careerwise.

Henna believes that for job seekers in Finland, it is important to grow professionally and develop their skills, being able to identify their own strengths. In this way, one can be ahead of other candidates and have a higher value for an employer, possessing unique and relevant skills for a job.

*Henna's tip № 2: Incorporate self-education into your job hunting routine. It can be something relevant for your industry or a unique skill that will make you stand out from the rest of the applicants.*

## FINNISH LANGUAGE

Henna and her husband speak Finnish at home, as he has learnt it well. At the beginning of his learning path, there were comments from Henna's friends that her husband was not good enough in Finnish and that he should learn faster, which she couldn't agree with, as the language itself is difficult. However, he was persistent and always carried a notebook with Finnish grammar and vocabulary with him.

He asked her grammar-related questions quite often but she sometimes was not able to answer. This is quite a typical case when a Finnish partner cannot provide answers to all questions, as being a native speaker implies perceiving many language aspects as given. The majority of people conjugate verbs and use the right endings automatically.

*Henna's tip № 3: Sometimes it is not helpful to look for sense in the Finnish grammar and the only way to learn it is to memorize the rules.*

## WELL-BEING

Henna thinks that moving to a new country is always linked to one's internal transformation. She highlights the importance of maintaining self-esteem and confidence during this challenging transformation period in order to make it less stressful. For example, Henna's method for keeping her self-esteem high is self-reflection. It is crucial for her to take her time and interpret her experiences making sure she has not lost herself in the outside world.

Overall, living with a foreigner, knowing her husband's path in Finland and seeing what he is going through in terms of integration makes her respect immigrants and their capabilities. Henna thinks that being an immigrant in Finland can be challenging even after many years. That is why she feels that it is very important to remember to give her husband mental support with regards to this matter. She says that she could have been an immigrant herself if the couple had decided to stay in Central Europe or even move to her husband's home country, and she admits that she would have needed a lot of courage and effort to leave her old life behind and start a new chapter abroad.

*Henna's tip № 4: Find something that brings you joy and relaxation and practice it to maintain positive attitude and self-confidence. Yoga, self-reflection, meditation, sports, an evening walk, painting or listening to music that you like can help to sort thoughts out and clear your mind.*