

Meet Your President!

Andrea MacLeod is a busy mom, wife and co-homemaker with her husband Andrew, and a busy volunteer. She juggles all of that with a full-time job. But she graciously agreed to a video interview to tell SGC members her story.



Figure 1 Old Leipzig City Hall

Andrea Hermann was born in 1984 in Markranstädt, a town situated on the outskirts of Leipzig, Saxony, in what was known at the time as East Germany. She grew up in Leipzig and went to school there. She belongs to the third generation of the Hermann family to live in Leipzig, a city of about 500,000 when she lived there. She does not remember much about the time before the fall of the Berlin Wall, but she does know that her father participated in the so-called Monday demonstrations against the government of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). These large rallies are often seen as directly contributing to the fall of the Wall on 09 November 1989.

Andrea grew up in what she considers a middle-class family. Both parents had professional jobs, her father was a civil engineer, and her mother was a laboratory technician who analyzed the chemical contents of water samples. Both grandfathers were teachers, and both grandmothers were secretaries/office clerks. Andrea grew up with an older brother, her parents and her paternal grandmother. Her other grandparents, aunts and cousins also lived close by. The Hermanns owned a stand-alone house with a large yard, not common in East Germany. They had a large garden and many fruit trees. Most mothers worked in East Germany and babies were commonly taken to a daycare from an early age. During her school years, she often would go out and play with her friends after homework was done. She was a latchkey kid or so-called Schlüsselkind.



Figure 2 Family home

The family's lifestyle did not radically change after 1989, but they eagerly explored the rest of Germany as often as time allowed. They were intrigued of course by the greater array of consumer goods available to everyone. Her mother was particularly fascinated with fruits she had only read about or seen in magazines like mangoes and kiwis. Bananas and oranges were now available year-round.

Andrea's fondest memories of her young life in Germany revolve around family. There were always birthday parties and frequent family get-togethers to attend. It is this same family closeness (including extended family) that she really appreciates in her husband's family here in Saskatchewan.

After graduating from High School (Abitur), Andrea applied to be an Au Pair and paired for a one-year position in Edmond, Oklahoma, not far from Oklahoma City. The Au Pair participants are encouraged to enroll in some University-level courses. Meanwhile, Andrew MacLeod of Saskatoon was attending Oklahoma Christian University, and the two met at a potluck dinner for international students. And so began what became a six-year long-distance relationship. Andrea had been learning the English language since her third year at school, and naturally, her relationship with Andrew and his family greatly improved her language skills. She is perfectly bilingual today.

Andrea and Andrew married in Germany in the summer of 2009. Andrea was still working on her university degree. She holds the German equivalent of a Master's degree (called Magister) in English-American Studies supplemented by studies in Linguistics and Philosophy. Part of her education involved a student exchange program in Northern Ireland. One of the bureaucratic hurdles she faced when immigrating to Canada was the necessity to obtain police clearances from both the United States (FBI) and Northern Ireland because she had spent more than 6 months in each country. After the necessary medical examinations and tests, she finally arrived in Canada in August 2010, entering the country in Toronto. The immigration checks at the Toronto airport were stressful, but she managed to catch her connecting flight to Saskatoon. Andrea had arranged for a container of personal goods to be shipped ahead of time, and when that arrived, Andrea and Andrew set up their home in Saskatoon.

Through her marriage to Andrew, she acquired Permanent Resident (PR) status, and in 2018 she became a Citizen of Canada. Andrea holds dual citizenship in both Germany and Canada.

Shortly after arriving, Andrea attended the German pavilion at FolkFest, where she quickly met Gabi (Waidelich-Harrison) and Uli Hecker. Andrea was soon teaching German for the Saskatoon German Language School. Of course, this was only part-time. She also found work at Dutch Growers Greenhouses for several months. In 2011 she was hired as the Administrative Assistant for Saskatchewan German Council, at first part-time, which soon turned into full-time. Andrea remembers being interviewed by Sabine Doebel-Atchison and Ilona Beck. She worked at this job until her son Natsu was born in 2014, with expectations that she would return after her maternity leave. But in the interim, Andrew accepted a new job in Regina, where they now live.

Andrea worked at several jobs, mostly in the non-profit sector, in Regina until being hired in 2017 as the Administrative Assistant for the Saskatchewan Writers' Guild, where she still works today. In 2018 daughter Freya was born. As she had when Natsu was born, Andrea spent several months of her maternity leave living with her mom in Leipzig. While Andrea had been teaching Natsu German words and phrases at home in Regina, she was amazed at how quickly he picked

up the German language when he was surrounded by it. The family goal is to raise two trilingual children – German, French and English.

Andrea says it was never a plan of hers to live in Canada; it just worked out that way. Sure, she misses Germany, but she doesn't dwell on it. Andrea and her Mom "visit" every Saturday morning and both enjoy the recent technology of video calls. But her home is here now, and she is perfectly happy and content with her life in Regina, Saskatchewan. When pressed though, she admits to missing the geography of Saxony with its mountains and forests, especially the beautiful autumn colors of the hardwood forests. Her favorite season of the year is autumn, but it is much too short here in Saskatchewan, she says. Like all ex-patriate Germans, she misses the breads and buns, and public transportation. The biggest difference between living in Germany and living in Saskatchewan, Andrea feels, is the public's use of public transportation.



Figure 3 Leipzig, view towards the main train station

What does she like about Saskatchewan? The sheer size, the space, and the distances involved make up her first response. Saskatchewan has a certain charm, which is hard to define. The people are great here, she says, very friendly and helpful. She likes the relaxed atmosphere. She can call her boss by her first name, which would be "verboten" in Germany. Andrea also appreciates the active multicultural communities in Saskatchewan. It is so easy to get around, if you have a car, that is, because there is not nearly the traffic one experiences in Germany. She credits Andrew's family for its immediate acceptance of her, and support for her here in Canada with settling in and creating a life in Saskatchewan. She says she felt very little culture shock in the process. Without hesitation, Andrea says the best part about living in Saskatchewan is the MacLeod family gatherings. There are always so many people, having a lot of fun.

Where else would she rather live? Well, that is a question she does not think about, but after a few moments, she said, "not Oklahoma, that's for sure". Any other city, province, or country would have its pros and cons, and Regina is as good a home as any. One gets the impression that Andrea is just too busy, and too content, to spend any time worrying about such matters.

Volunteering has long been part of Andrea's life. At her university in Chemnitz, she belonged to and volunteered for, the English Club. Her job with the Saskatchewan German Council (SGC) introduced her to the cultural landscape of our province and helped her to understand how the non-profit sector interacts with various government ministries. It was a great background for her current job. Soon after moving to Regina, she became active in the Regina German Club. She serves on the Board of Directors for the German Canadian Society Harmonie, which operates the Regina German Club and handles most of the social media interactions. She volunteers at most of the functions hosted by the Club, and anywhere help might be needed.

She handles many media interviews about club events. In 2015 she joined the Board of Directors of the Saskatchewan German Council, and in June of 2022, she assumed the role of President.

So how has her first year as President of SGC been? Answer: "It started fairly normal until Franziska, the Office and Program Assistant desired a change in her career and left the SGC. This did create some "Umschwung", a significant change, but I feel that we have weathered this as best as we could." (Andrea and Franziska Davies-Perret have been good friends for many years.)

Ladies and Gentlemen, members of SGC, "Meet Your President"!



Figure 4 Andrea in Rostock