

Life Mission? Save the World

Together with his volunteering groups, the increasingly known Thomas Eitzenberger is trying to achieve what seems impossible. Let's meet the man whose mission is to save the globe from the threat posed by consumerism.

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY OONA KALLANMAA



Lately broadcasted by BBC and CBC Radio, Thomas Eitzenberger, 47, lives with his wife Gudrun in a small town near Graz in Austria. His persistence to help the refugees in Hungary has gotten a lot of attention and many volunteers have followed his example and joined the cause.

But who is this man who sacrifices more than half of his

work week to help strangers and our globe?

SOUL SEARCHING

About a year and a half ago Eitzenberger participated in a rebirthing practise where a person re-experiences the time of his birth. This showed Eitzenberger that his soul wanted to come here to save the world.

“It’s just a good explanation of why I am the way I am.”

Eitzenberger doesn’t believe everything he hears, but enjoys experiments.

”At the end it’s about how we live together, and whatever helps you to get things sorted and to be more human towards others, the better it is.”

Already at age 10, Eitzenberger wanted to change his city into a more sustainable one where people could live in a healthy environment without cars.

"I planned the city having several lanes [of conveyer belts] ... and thought about how to build the houses and complexes in a way that people still have trees and gardens etc."

As a child, Eitzenberger's imagination didn't have boundaries, but his need for change got snowed under when growing up.

"It was always with me and in me, but it got probably lost because of too much everyday business", Eitzenberger ponders.

BREAKING POINT

The Austrian national elections in 2009 permanently changed Eitzenberger's life. The popularity of the far right parties and shocking advertisements against refugees and foreigners pressured him to act.

"There were flyers on the streets everywhere telling that the asylum seekers are criminals and that they are raping our wives."

Eitzenberger participated in a light chain in Vienna protesting against the radical messages, and ended up organising one afterwards in Graz. Preparations lasted for 14 days and around 700 people participated.

"We walked with candles through the town telling the people that we don't want that; we want human beings to be human beings wherever they are or whatever they are. Wherever they were born or where they came from, it's not relevant. They are human beings and they have to be treated in a respectful manner."

After the event, it was difficult for Eitzenberger to return to his everyday life. Therefore, he started attending demonstrations and organising different events in order to plant seeds of change.

Topics were mainly related to society and culture, and refugee issues have stayed close to his heart.

purpose: to establish a European and an International Criminal Court of the Environment and Health.

The Charter of Brussels is still open for signatures and will be handed over to the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon during the COP21 Climate Conference in December 2015.



12-year-old dog Funny is an important part of the family.

"The easiest way of solving the drowning in the Mediterranean Sea is to let refugees fly in. They are paying around 10 000 euro to get here."

While this is not forbidden, the EU places responsibility on the airline companies who do not accept passengers without a visa.

ENDING ECOCIDE

Eitzenberger's longest project this far is 'End Ecocide on Earth'.

This grassroots movement works purely with voluntary forces: "It's a global network of engaged citizens that work for a common goal."

Eitzenberger explains that the strength of the movement is its simplicity. It exists only for one

Over the last three years their network has also greatly levelled up.

"When we started we were talking to people and maybe some NGOs... Now we are reaching the executive level of states."

This gives Eitzenberger hope that the movement can truly achieve something.

COMPROMISE OF LIFE

Volunteering projects have changed Eitzenberger's life in many ways.

Now working as an IT and quality assurance freelancer, Eitzenberger made a decision to give up his profitable job and concentrate on other values. His current 20-hour work week

allows for time-consuming volunteering and for family time.

"If my kids are coming on the weekend, I have only one purpose, and that is spending time with them, doing things with them, and having fun with them."

Eitzenberger describes himself as a person with a helping syndrome and obsession to fairness.

"Gudrun always says: if there is a guy somewhere on this planet shouting for help, but announcing also publicly that he has nothing to give in exchange, I would be the first to ask how to help."

As his motto, Eitzenberger simply mentions: "If there is anything that needs to be done, it needs to be done."

Eitzenberger is also an introvert and gains his energy sitting alone in his favourite hammock chair on the porch. He does not care for small talk, but can be very sociable in company.

"I am also shy, which no one believes."

LESSONS IN LIFE

Happiness was not always self-evident, but Eitzenberger has learned a lot in life.

After 13 years, Eitzenberger divorced his first wife, and two young daughters made the process particularly challenging.

These difficult years got Eitzenberger to ponder the ultimate questions in life, but hours-long talks with his oldest sibling helped finding some of the answers.

"Love is not enough for a relationship to survive. There are times when you have to work on it; you have to adapt, you have to change, you have to revive, you have to fight for it... Whenever you hurt the other one, a little piece of the love is dying and it's not necessarily coming back", Eitzenberger sighs.

He continues saying that small things matter: "How you communicate with each other, express respect and appreciation, and show the other one that he or she is special and unique [is important]."

"Gudrun is not the most beautiful woman in the world, but to me she is."

Eitzenberger clarifies: "When you fall in love with someone, it's not because he or she is perfect, nobody is... you just see the good things and the things that make it special for you."

Ten years have now passed smoothly with his current wife who also had three children from a previous marriage. Despite the difficulties in the beginning, the five children have learned that they have more than two loving parents.

DREAM WORLD

"An ideal world would be one



Family is the most important thing for Eitzenberger, even if the worries of the world are close to his heart.

without human beings”, Eitzenberger simply states.

He believes, however, that the key to a better planet would be to change our culture into one where we see ourselves as guardians of this one shared planet.

”If this is the narrative told by religions, by politicians, by the industry and in marketing”, change would be possible.

Eitzenberger admits that the economy is not interested in the new narrative and that this is why we are brainwashed into constantly buying new things.

”In Austria they are now telling you that a phone that is older than a year needs to be replaced.”

Eitzenberger also believes that we could learn a lot from indigenous people. He continues saying that the first step would be to only do something if the next seven generations would be fine with it.

”Many of our leaders still think we are flying, but we are not. We jumped off the cliff and now we think we can fly... but we will crash if we continue like this.”

CHANGING HABITS

When asked about possibilities to make a difference, Eitzenberger discloses two things we can do. Firstly, it’s not about buying better quality, but thinking more consciously of what we buy.

“For example, why on earth would you buy pineapple on a weekly basis in Austria?”

Also, for coffee lovers he has the following message: “Coffee is a luxury good; drink it twice a week. Then it gets value again.”

Secondly, Eitzenberger emphasizes that not all the changes should be done at once.

”Change is comparable to travelling: if you travel, you need

to take a break, you need to look back, and you need to enjoy the view and appreciate what you have already accomplished.”

Eitzenberger and his wife started focusing on local organic food seven years ago. Now he advises others to also reconsider their choices and to buy less of whatever cannot be found regionally.

When Eitzenberger talks about reducing, he doesn’t use this term, but instead emphasises how many hours people gain to spend with friends by watching less television, for instance.

”People in this neoliberal materialistic world have forgotten that the most important things can’t be bought: time and love.”

During Christmas season, Eitzenberger walked around the city with a group giving free hugs and telling people: ”If you really want to give a gift to the people you love, don’t go into the shop and buy something; go home and spend time with them.”

TAKING INITIATIVE

Eitzenberger trusts that people start to see the reality when they stop following and believing everything they see and hear.

”If you start thinking and take your time to look at how the world really is, you start to ask questions, and everything follows from there.”

Eitzenberger asks, for instance: ”Is it really necessary that our industry keeps growing, and that we have more welfare every year? It’s not that we produce more welfare, as a matter of fact, we take it from others.”

Even if Eitzenberger spends half of his work week volunteering, he still doesn’t have time to reply all his emails. He

gladly helps and activates others, but advises to take initiative.

”Find friends, make a group and then organize it.”

Eitzenberger concludes that the main thing is stepping out of the system which makes us consumers and followers. Then he takes the last sip of his organic drink and smiles reassuringly.