

## Kim's Hometown

I'm an Anglo-Saxon. By that I mean I come from Niedersachsen, which you call Lower Saxony in English. I'm a German who lives in England and I love both countries.

My name is Kim. I was born on 27<sup>th</sup> January 1981 in Hannover. That's the nearest city to where my parents lived, and still live, a small village about eight kilometres away called Benthe.

Benthe is a sleepy, dull place with maybe twenty or thirty streets, a church, primary school, a few shops. Many Germans find this a perfect place to live and it's a desirable area for professionals from Hannover – but it's not so exciting for young people.

There's one special thing about Benthe, though. It has its own mountain – the Benter Berg. It's really a big hill, only a hundred metres higher than the countryside around, but in German we still call it 'Berg' – our word for mountain. It has its own hotel, called also the Benter Berg – a nice, peaceful place where I worked as a teenager in the kitchen to earn some money that I spent on going to the city at night.

The Benter Berg is a nature reserve, about three kilometres by a half kilometre and it's covered in woodland. I played in the woods when I younger – and there's some prehistoric remains: they freaked me out when I was a girl but when I was older I felt their spiritual energy. It's the highest point for a long distance. If you look north the flat Northern German plain stretches all the way to the Nordsee, which you can't actually see. I'm too young to properly remember the Cold War but I learned that it was here that the West had nightmares about Russian tanks suddenly breaking across the landscape. That's why we had so many British Army bases not far from Hannover. I used to listen to the BFBS radio channel – I liked the English music. Maybe that's why my English is good and why, from when I was young, I always dreamed of living in London – so different to Benthe and Hannover.

Hannover is the city of Hochdeutsch – the equivalent of the Queen's English. People from places like Hamburg or Munich joke it's straight-laced, boring and provincial. Maybe it is – but I like it. There's art galleries, an opera house and nice festivals like the Weihnachtsmarkt and the Machsee festival in summer – that's the artificial lake in the city centre that the Nazis built.

Most Hannover people, and Germans overall, go to school, then university, then work and die in the same city, but ever since the wall came down when I was eight I'd wanted to move away. I wanted to be an artist and thought I had to go to Berlin – to the squats of Kreuzberg. But by the time I got there in 1999, all the re-unification cool was disappearing. I lived five years with the artists in Friedrichshain – a crazy time – but Berlin's still really a small city. So now I'm here enjoying the buzz of London – the street-smart, urban artist but there's still a big part of me that's the little girl sitting and looking out from the woods of the Benter Berg.

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