

PrimeTime Member Spotlight

August 2008

Each month *Connections* talks to a PrimeTime member to find out more about who they are, what they do, and their association with PrimeTime.



This month we spotlight

Lavinia Waterhouse
Press and Information Officer
at European Commission

Personal talk ...

Connections: Where are you from originally, and how long have you been in Singapore?

Lavinia: I'm one of the few Singaporeans in PrimeTime! I moved back here in 2000.

Connections: Have you lived in other foreign countries? If so where?

Lavinia: I went to university in Queensland, Australia, and did bar exams in Melbourne. After that I went to London, did another set of bar exams, and met my ex-husband there. After we were called to the bar, we taught English in Poland for just under a year. Then we moved back to London for 7 years. He wanted a break from London, so we decided to give Singapore a shot and moved here in 2000. I'm leaving in September for Berlin, Germany.

Connections: What brought you to Singapore?

Lavinia: My ex-husband wanted a change of scene and my brother, who had just moved back to Singapore from Boston, persuaded us that it would be good for us.

Connections: What do you enjoy most about living here?

Lavinia: I've made some wonderful friends here. That's what I'm going to miss most about Singapore. And if I'm perfectly honest, I've really enjoyed having a full-time housekeeper and not having to do any housework. Oh yes, and there's the delicious food – from cheap hawker fare to fine dining. Did I mention, I also like the low taxes compared to Europe, and there's... well you get the picture. I liked living here better than I expected to and I'm going to miss it.

Connections: What are your interests and hobbies?

Lavinia: I enjoy reading but rarely find enough time to read all the books I buy. I also have a 4-year-old mongrel, Poppy, who I love to bits and I try to spend as much time as I can with her.

Connections: Have you had any particularly interesting experiences you would like to share with us?

Lavinia: Have you ever been to Tanjong Beach on Sentosa late on a Monday night? KM8 is closed and the beach is usually deserted. I went there with my partner for a late night stroll on the beach a few weeks ago. There was a slightly cool breeze, the water was warm and we were all alone on the beach. When the water washes up on the shore, it deposits these little sea creatures that look like tiny glowing stars on the sand. I nearly forgot I was in Singapore (well, ignoring the hundred or so ships that were parked alongside).

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Connections: Which are your favourite restaurants/shops/places to go?

Lavinia: So many, lah! How to say?! Seriously, this is a tough question. So here goes in no particular order:

- Favourite Restaurants: Garibaldi's & Flutes at Fort Canning.
- Favourite Hawker: Boon Tong Kee Chicken Rice at River Valley & Haron's Satay at East Coast.
- Favourite Casual Dining: PS Cafe at Paragon & Original Sin at Holland Village.
- Favourite Indian food (which gets a special mention as I'm Indian): Komala Villas on Serangoon Road for vegetarian (good and cheap!) and Chat Masala at Greenwood for non-vegetarian. (The lady owner does the cooking).
- Favourite Shops: I'm an East Coast girl. My favourite mall is still Parkway Parade. You can get everything there.
- Favourite Places to go: Anywhere I can take my dog. The Botanical Gardens and Tanjong Beach on Sentosa.

Connections: What one thing would you like to accomplish in your lifetime?

Lavinia: I'm about to do it. I've wanted to be a mother for the longest time and now I'm pregnant. My partner and I are very excited. The baby will be born in late February in Berlin. Right now I'm so happy about being a mom that I can't think about anything else.

Professional talk ...

Connections: Could you tell us a little about the company you work for and your current role?

Lavinia: I work for the diplomatic mission of the European Commission in Singapore. As Press and Information Officer, I'm responsible for our media relations and for our public diplomacy initiatives.

Connections: How long have you been working for in your present role?

Lavinia: Three and a half years.

Connections: Have you always worked in the same industry? If not, what else have you done/where else have you worked in the past?

Lavinia: I'm a lawyer by training but I've never practiced. I've pretty much been in communications for most of my career.

Connections: What do you enjoy most about your job?

Lavinia: Where to begin! It's all been very interesting. I have a great job and I've had the opportunity to meet some amazing people – the sort of people I used to only read about in the papers. I had the opportunity to be at the World Economic Forum, the IMF/World Bank Meetings and the EU-ASEAN Summit. I've organised events where the guest list has included Ministers and Ambassadors. And I'm terribly grateful for the opportunity. It's been really wonderful.

Connections: What do you enjoy most about the company you work for?

Lavinia: It's not really a company. The European Commission is the executive arm of the European Union. The office in Singapore functions pretty much as an embassy but without consular (passport/visa) functions. It is headed by an Ambassador whom I answer to. The best thing about working here is that the Ambassador has been very supportive of my various initiatives like the EU in Schools programme. This is a programme where we organise a presentation on the EU by the various EU Ambassadors in Singapore at local schools. This year we've started expanding it to the international schools. There is a surprising level of interest in the topic and we usually get lots of questions from students after the presentation.

Connections: Have any of the PrimeTime programs you've attended helped you in your job?

Lavinia: When I used to have my own PR Consulting firm, I used to go to the Small Business Group regularly. That was terribly useful for everything from time management to filing tax returns.

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Connections: Do you have any advice for job hunters trying to move into your industry?

Lavinia: There are two routes to joining a diplomatic mission. One is through the foreign ministry of your own country and the second is to be hired as local staff at an embassy in Singapore. For the second option, you should keep your eye on the embassy websites as they usually advertise their positions there. They also advertise in the local press. Some embassies require you to be a citizen of their country, for instance the British High Commission only takes UK nationals. Others might prefer locals who speak the local languages and others are open to anyone with the right skills.

PrimeTime talk ...

Connections: When did you join PrimeTime and how did you find out about it?

Lavinia: I joined after I returned to Singapore in 2000 after 7 years in London. I found myself back “home” but was a complete stranger to everything. I had just started working at a PR firm and was handling an art gallery opening when I met Sandra Faillace (former 2nd Vice President at PrimeTime) and she told me about this wonderful group and invited me to my first 2nd Thursday meeting. The rest, as they say, is history.

Connections: Which PrimeTime subgroups do you belong to?

Lavinia: I used to be the Communications Officer so I think I'm still signed up for all the subgroups. The ones I've enjoyed most have been the Marketing Group, the Arts Group and the Book Club.

Connections: Do you volunteer at PrimeTime? If so, in what areas have you become involved?

Lavinia: I served two terms on the board as Communications Officer and before that I was the Volunteer Coordinator. I've worked mostly on the website and also on the newsletter.

Connections: What do you personally feel are the benefits of being a PrimeTime member?

Lavinia: I've really enjoyed meeting professionally minded women from all over the world. I've made some really good friends here. In addition, the programmes are usually interesting and I've been to at least one meeting of just about all the subgroups except the Mother's Support Group (no kid) and the Golf Group (no swing). I like that you can “drop-in” on groups and then there's no pressure to keep going.

Connections: Which was the most interesting or inspiring PrimeTime event you've attended?

Lavinia: Much as I enjoy all the programmes and speakers that we've had, I actually enjoy the annual Christmas Party the most. It gives me the opportunity to see PrimeTime friends who I might not have seen for a while and we're all there just to have a good time!

Thank you Lavinia!