

Sandra Seastedt:

Listening Across Borders

By Jessica Dee Rohm

Sandra Seastedt was born in Switzerland, the daughter of a Swissair flight attendant — a detail that feels, in retrospect, less like trivia and more like destiny.

“Travel was just normal in our house,” Sandra says. “Airports didn’t feel exotic. They felt familiar.”

As a young woman, she came to the United States one summer simply to learn English. She never left. What began as a short stay turned into a life rooted in the American Dream, shaped by curiosity, adaptability, and an instinct to lean toward the unfamiliar rather than away from it.

That instinct would later define both her professional path and her family’s extraordinary global journey.

Sandra is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist whose career has unfolded across continents, cultures, and crises. Her international life expanded alongside the public-health work of her husband, Eric Seastedt, whose leadership roles with NGO Population Services International took their family to Ethiopia, the Dominican Republic, Laos, and beyond. While Eric focused on strengthening health systems at scale, Sandra worked at the most human level — helping individuals, children, couples, and families navigate trauma, transition, and profound cultural change.

In Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Sandra maintained a private



therapy practice serving international schools, embassies, the United Nations, and European delegations. Daily life required constant recalibration.

“We had to boil the milk for our kids,” she recalls. “There was no pasteurization. You didn’t think twice about it — you just did what you had to do.”

Those moments of adaptation weren’t abstract lessons; they were lived experiences, shared with her children — Hana, Dario, and Kai — who grew up seeing the world not as something fixed, but as something to be learned anew in each place.

Sandra remembers one moment in particular that still tugs at her heart strings.



Ethiopia National Day, Hanna, Kai, and Dario



First day arrival in Ethiopia. Hana, Kai, and Dario

“I gave a child a banana once in Ethiopia,” she says, “and he just ate it — peel and all. It stopped me cold. It was such a reminder that my assumptions weren’t universal.”

That awareness — the humility to observe before judging — became central to both her parenting and her clinical work. Sandra specialized in supporting families dealing with adjustment disorders, anxiety, trauma, neurodevelopmental challenges, and the layered stress that often accompanies international assignments. She consulted with schools to build positive learning environments, led social-skills groups for children, and became



Sandra shopping for fruit in Laos



International Day at school in Ethiopia 2009.
The school had over 76 nationalities enrolled

a trusted referral therapist for embassies, NGOs, and international clinics.

In Vientiane, Laos, she expanded her leadership beyond the therapy room, serving as Board Chair of the Vientiane International School. The role reflected her belief that mental health is inseparable from community — and that strong institutions matter,

especially for children living between worlds.

Through it all, Sandra's children absorbed a global education few classrooms could replicate.

"They had great fodder for college essays," Sandra says with a smile. "Not everyone can write about boiling milk, learning three currencies, or realizing bananas can be eaten in more than one way."

Eventually, the family returned to San Diego, where Sandra now maintains a private practice, bringing decades of international experience into her work with individuals and families. Her fluency in German, English, and Spanish — and her deep cultural literacy — allow her to meet clients where they are, whether they're navigating grief, family conflict, anxiety, or the quiet disorientation of major life transitions.

And then there is bridge.

Like many who are drawn to the game, Sandra appreciates its logic and discipline. But what truly resonates is the partnership: the unspoken communication, the necessity of trust, the patience required when things don't go as planned.

After a life spent crossing borders — geographic, emotional, and cultural — Sandra Seastedt understands better than most that connection is both an art and a practice. At the bridge table and beyond, she brings the same steady presence: attentive, thoughtful, and deeply aware that the most important things are often conveyed without words. ♣



Hana's high school graduation, Laos



Sandra receiving a plaque from her bridge group in the Dominican Republic