

Breaking new ground



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ETH graduate and donor Bigna Salzmann's love of nature has been a recurring theme throughout her life. She believes innovative ideas are needed when it comes to protecting our natural environment, and ETH has a role to play here, too.

When you think back to your ETH studies, you think of forests. Why is that?

BIGNA SALZMANN – During my Bachelor's degree in environmental sciences I chose to specialise in "Forest and Landscape", and spent a great deal of time outdoors. I did my Master's thesis at the Swiss Federal Institute for Forest, Snow and Landscape Research WSL, and in the Swiss National Park. The forest was a key element of my studies, but nature and the environment have interested me since childhood. As a young girl, I published a magazine for nature-lovers, which my father had to copy for me at his office.

Why do you support ETH Excellence Scholarships?

We can only master the challenges of the future if we give people with outstanding abilities the necessary freedom for innovative research. These talented students have the potential to create something new. I also believe it's essential to provide support for start-ups.

What is it that keeps you connected to ETH?

Mainly my professional network – Switzerland's environmental scene is not so huge. I often meet former fellow

students in my everyday work. If I need a professional opinion, it's very helpful; I usually find I know someone with the relevant expertise who I can contact.

To what extent is your working life built around your ETH studies?

As a Senior Corporate Responsibility Manager at Swisscom, I advised the business customers division on the issue of sustainability. I was also responsible for the topic of climate protection, and investigated potential new forms of working as part of the "Work Smart" initiative. At Freitag, I now focus on what is known as the "circular economy", i.e. the question of how energy and material flows can be created and managed in a more resource-efficient manner. My studies gave me a good grounding in all these areas, but everything is of course a great deal more complex in reality than in theory.

You spend a lot of time dealing with future issues at work - how do you personally see the future, including as the mother of two children?

I have a very positive basic attitude, and generally believe that problems can be solved. Sometimes it's just a case of what you focus on: instead of saying that we shouldn't eat meat every day, we can take pleasure in the variety of vegetarian food. Or when we travel on foot or by bike, we can place less attention on the fact that we're going without a car, and more on the exercise we're getting. For me, I see the excellent academic education I was able to enjoy as an obligation to raise awareness of possible solutions in a positive way, both at home and at work.

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Bigna Salzmann

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