

PERSONAL STATEMENT

NAME, Germany, Teaching English as a Foreign Language
English Teaching Assistantship

Sitting on the steps of a Munich church, a young girl struck up a conversation with me. “How old are you?” I queried. “Drei!” came the bright reply. A week later in my hometown as I was working on a farm, the farmer’s daughter came to inspect me. I posed the same question, and heard a proud “Three!” Smiling to myself, I realized I had just seen two snapshots of life from distant pockets of the world, of two girls who may never meet, yet who possess the same innocent enthusiasm.

Since I was little, my grandmother has shared stories and reflections on her immigration from Germany to America as a young mother. She had to make a home in a new country and discovered the humanity of neighbors that were once strangers. She has consequently traveled the world over and, realizing good and bad exist in every culture, decided to look for the beauty. Once you release the fear of moving beyond what you know, then in her words, “you feel like a person of the world.” Last July, at the end of six months studying in Germany, I made my way to Hamburg to meet her childhood friend and stand on the street where my grandmother had lived. “When I left Sophienalle, I never imagined my granddaughter would return,” my grandmother reacted. She need not have been so surprised after all; what led me to Germany and to that street was the *Wanderlust* I inherited from her, a *Wanderlust* that seeks to know the world, that leads one to see the value of all people, regardless of where they lead their lives.

What does it mean to really live in another country? You not only take snapshots of life from the outside, you also share the subjective sphere of those who live there. When I speak German, I think of myself as “Ich,” and this connects me to all other German speakers who do likewise. I began to see Germany from their vantage point. Through a hospitality club, I found hosts in cities I wished to visit, in order to see how people lived there; once my host invited me to a friend’s birthday party, where I had dinner in a small circle of strangers and learned a new birthday song. Such interactions lent color to my image of Germany’s people.

It is important today that more people have the opportunity and desire to study or work abroad. This means on one hand that they can appreciate the various possibilities of education systems, for example, or ways to structure one’s free time. Seeing this variety reminds one that the choices people make may be unfamiliar to oneself, but are nevertheless valid. On the other hand, spending time abroad proves that one can find familiarity where it matters more. In a theater group in Germany I met young people from all over the world. We could laugh together and find humor in the same situation, even if no one was speaking their native language. That we could share so much speaks to how similar we really are; reaching an understanding depends not so much on the words in the end or which language you use, but rather on the underlying ideas.

Last semester in Germany was just the beginning of seeing where this *Wanderlust* will lead me. I am ready to take a year to find myself another home, to seek the beauty my grandmother taught me to see, to share my laugh with new people, and to gather more snapshots of the world in which we live.