

## PERSONAL ESSAY

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX, Germany, English Teaching Assistantship

In the serene still of an early morning in May, Hagen, Max and I moved out into tall grass. It was just past 5:00 a.m. and the woods we were leaving were shrouded in the peaceful silence of sleep. Hesitating in his tracks, Max lowered his rifle from his shoulder and pointed at a hunting stand down a path to our right. *Waidmannsheil!* He whispered, and disappeared behind us. *Happy hunting*, whispered Hagen in response. Following Hagen, I climbed into the stand and began scanning the field for Roe deer.

Although it was my first time hunting in Germany, the experience was familiar to me. Growing up, I spent my weekends and school vacations in Lower Waterford, Vermont, where my grandparents had a cabin and where, on weekends in the fall, I would tread just as softly through the woods with my father and grandfather. On that May morning with Hagen and Max, the ethereal still of the forest and our silent movements stirred up memories from my childhood. More than an echo of my experiences in Lower Waterford, I was struck for the first time by the immutability of man's connection to nature. It was my fifth month in Germany and I was just beginning to get a solid grasp of the language; I had met Max a few weeks earlier after a lecture in the forestry department of the Georg-August-Universität, where I was studying German, forestry and geoscience during my semester abroad, and he had invited me to go hunting at his house north of Hamburg. And so it happened that I found myself in a foreign country, speaking a language in which I was not fluent with two people I hardly knew. It suddenly became clear to me that the spiritual power I was experiencing transcended political, cultural and language barriers; that our different nationalities were secondary to our shared adventure.

In that moment, I was eternally thankful for the opportunity to study in Germany I had been allowed. My outdoor education, the foundation of which had been built in Vermont, was being combined with my interest in and passion for intercultural fluency. As a German major at Colby College, I had prepared myself for two years for moments like this, ones in which language and culture barriers fall away to expose the true and beautiful nature of a relationship or adventure. It was amazing to witness; I was moved by the simple beauty of the experience.

Working as an English language assistant at Stiftung Louisenlund in GÜBY, Germany was a similarly transcendental experience. Over the course of two months, I worked in chemistry and physics classrooms, helping German high school students to express the laws that govern the natural world in English, observing—and participating in—scientific pedagogy in an international context. I was able to express my own passion for the natural sciences, both as a Geoscience major and as an outdoorsman, while at the same time building upon my intercultural education. It became clear to me that, as an American teaching the natural sciences in Germany, the most important thing I could teach my students was not that, say, pulmonary alveoli are the gas exchange interface in the human lung, or that reduction-oxidation reactions result in the transfer of electrons between chemical species. Rather, the most important thing I could teach my students was that, no matter what languages we speak or what countries we come from, we all breathe oxygen and we all are familiar with rust; that the natural world is fundamentally intertwined with every aspect of human existence despite cultural and political barriers.

Although tied to the natural sciences, this idea is applicable in every educational setting. I would like nothing more than to live in Germany and further explore the teaching profession in an international context, to further refine my intercultural fluency and to teach others to think globally in every branch of their education.