

Where I met the Other Me  
Foreign-Familiar or  
Foreign in a Native Land or  
Where Ancestors call Home or  
In the Land of my Forefathers

By Eric '17

## Foreword

*The core of our being is often hidden by where we are, and revealed from where we go.*

Travels always start somewhere. For some, it is an idea, or a whim, perhaps even just a means. In my instance, it was an unbeknownst force; something between will and yearning. The smallest passing moment rooted the thought that made me want to travel.

In a low level German class, on some insignificantly normal day, the professor, before starting class mentioned a program which the department of German language recently became acquainted with. It was called the Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange program. At the time, an exchange seemed completely out of the question. Engineering was at the time causing me to question everything about my academic and professional life, but the introduction mentioned technical and engineering students. I jotted a note down, then tucked the thought away. Weeks later, I saw the note again. After a little research, the thought occurred to me that I might like to do this exchange. The application was due by the second week in December, and it must have been sometime in November. Hesitantly, I communicated to my parents my desire to apply for this program, and began the application. That process is of little interest; the only aspect of note is that all was done under a veil of novel uncertainty.

After hearing back from the program in February that I was not selected for the next round of the selection process, something clicked inside me. I knew, without doubt, that I was going to be in that program. Rejection galvanized my resolve. In that moment my travels began; and even a simple choice, a real and significant decision, can have profound effects on who we are as individuals.

Travelling starts before we step on a vehicle to our destination, it begins with the spark that ignites the desire to *go*.

# Preface

## A Construct of Person

In finding how the experience of travel reveals the truth of a person.

We are people of two interactions; our internal machinations, and the machinations of what is (who is) around us. In travelling we change the context of the outer machinations. By doing that, we more accurately reveal what is truly ourselves. Things about us which do not change are in our core, distinctly ourselves. The context in which we place ourselves has twofold impact; we remove one set of externalities, and simultaneously add another set of externalities. The removal of one externality for another imparts our person in many ways. Consider culture shock as one obvious manifestation of changing externalities.

The interaction or intersection of externalities with our core being, results in what most people know as “us”.

Herein lies the value of travel. We can identify the constructs of our core, and the differences in how externalities help create “us”. Through this understanding of the constant and inconstant we can better become who we want to be.

# Chapter 1

## Arrival

Landing at Frankfurt's International Airport was much like any other landing. People bustled to and from terminals, families clumped together, and business people clad in suits and slacks exchanged travel talk. Only two differences were most noticeable to my eye; the airport itself was exceptionally well kept, and the pervasive language spoken was German.

Upon exiting the plane, my explorative senses were overwhelmed. Despite not having slept on the roughly eight-hour flight to the airport, sleep was furthest from my needs at that moment. Every small detail excited my being, how fascinating the simple difference between the running man exit sign of Europe from the EXIT of the United States. Childish wonder is the only description of how I felt during that first day.

After following the members of our party more familiar with foreign terrain, we passed customs, found our baggage claim, and proceeded in the direction of our new adventure. My first interaction with the coordinators of our program is one that I will not forget. Ute, only upon seeing me instantly asked if I was Eric Gauck. Taken aback at being recognized by a complete stranger, she pronounced my name correctly, further stupefying me.

To clarify, never before had a stranger pronounced my name correctly having only read it before. Most Americans would say something along the lines of "g-aw-k" resembling the word hawk, but in its proper German pronunciation it sounds like "g-ou-k" like the word "ouch". Throughout my time living in Germany, not once did a single person mispronounce my last name. The simple fact of never having to correct a person on how to pronounce my name would later contribute to the fondness I felt toward Germany and its people.

The rest of that day, from looking out the bus window to seeing a real castle for the first time. every tree, car and sign, each and everything brought me the greatest level of excitement and awe. Not long thereafter though, the feeling of sleep won out against all my childish joy.

## Chapter 2

### Host, Family

As a program, CBYX never planned to let its 75 participants stay together in their entirety, and after the orientation we were divided into three groups destined for our respective language schools. Cologne is where the program decided to send me, and the drive there was an adventure. The commute was spent talking with other participants and admiring the beautiful landscapes of Germany. When we arrived in Cologne my sense of location was completely disoriented, and I remembered seeing this beautiful metal foot bridge over a manmade pond in the city. The structure's supports spiraled over the pond which reflected a small skyscraper containing artfully rendered clouds on its exterior, creating a mirage of the sky. It took me weeks to discover the structure was actually sitting right behind our language school.

The speed with which travelling can be conducted in this modern world, is often dizzying. Moving so rapidly from one place to the next does not allow the mind to time to take in all the detail and process new surroundings. By the time I stepped off that bus my mind was whirling trying to process every new facet of this place I had landed in shortly before. I hoped my host family would take their time in picking me up, some were already waiting when we arrived, others would be arriving later. Right after receiving our information packets and completing some visa paperwork (the program thankfully handled everything for us), I was immediately overwhelmed by the presence of a little boy with curly blonde hair and a grin of magnitude. He stood close to me and stared me down, just casually eating an apple. Needless to say, I was simultaneously confused and intimidated. This was the first interaction with my host brother Nils.

Nils would be one of my two host brothers, and I would grow fond of his childishness, and his own personal dialect of German. His parents, Claudia and Wolfgang, greeted me with every courtesy and kindness, and between Wolfgang's near perfect English and my highly inadequate German, we carried a conversation during the drive to their home. Wolfgang, modestly claimed his English was terrible, despite it exceeding a level many people in the United States do not possess. This simple modesty is a common trait among Germans.

My situation was different from that of most of my peers, I lived in a Dorf (a small village) in the outskirts of Cologne. It was literally at the end of the line for the Straßenbahn<sup>1</sup>. I lived in a separate house from my host parents, and was to share the space with another exchange student from Mexico named Eduardo. The house itself felt outdated, and as my host Brother would explain to me later, it was his grandmother's and "feels like such an old person home." Strictly speaking, the house is new by German standards, having been built after the second world war. My host parents lived in a house which is over three hundred years old. But none the less, the interior design and ambiance of the house I stayed in, was universally, an old person's.

Every day Eduardo and I were treated to breakfast with Claudia, Wolfgang, and Nils. Claudia pulled together a grand breakfast, she bought fresh bread from the nearby bakery each morning, and a spread of cheeses, jams, and meats were prepared, and on some mornings, we would have soft boiled eggs. On the few days when I woke late, I felt terrible at having to leave without taking time for breakfast. We bonded over breakfast, and often discussed numerous subjects. By the end of my two months in Cologne, departing from the Floßbach's felt like leaving family.

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<sup>1</sup> Street-train: surface level public transportation within cities, not to be confused with intercity trains.

## Chapter 3

### The Colony

Köln, or Cologne as it is known to the English-speaking world, traces its roots back to the Roman empire. The name comes from its original title as a colony of the Roman empire. Originally founded by the Roman Emperor Augustus, the colony was founded as a gift to his wife. During a tour hosted by our language school we learned an interesting story about the founding family. Augustus' wife, Livia, who after bearing a son, poisoned her husband to elevate her son to the rulership in order to rule through her son. Unfortunately for Livia, her son took a dislike to this arrangement, and had Livia killed<sup>2</sup>.

Fortunately for Cologne, its history is not as terrible as that of the family who founded it. With prime real estate of the Rhein river, Cologne grew into an important river trading location, and would only wane in that import after the redistribution of trade power from colonialization<sup>3</sup>. It grew as a religious and economic hub, and was well defended by a massive stone wall which surrounding the city. Portions of that wall still stand today. Among the most highly regarded cultural symbols of Cologne are der Dom<sup>4</sup> and Kölsch<sup>5</sup>.

Der Dom, or *the* Cathedral, is a magnificent Catholic cathedral which, as the locals say, will never be finished. Why will it never be finished? Well, the cathedral started construction in 1248 and was built in sections to allow section usage as they were completed<sup>6</sup>. In 1473 construction halted for an unclear reason. The spires were under construction at the time and a crane was left atop the incomplete spire. Der Dom stood in that condition for roughly 400 years, and they only continued construction after the original design schematics were uncovered, in Rome of all places. After completion in 1880 it only had about 60 years undisturbed before World War II. The cathedral survived the war relatively unscathed, and the stain glass windows survived because they were removed and stored at a remote location before bombing began.

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<sup>2</sup> Although the story is what I learned from locals, the names were verified through Wikipedia and Cologne.de.

<sup>3</sup> History of Cologne.

<sup>4</sup> Der Dom pronounced like "dare dome" in English.

<sup>5</sup> Kölsch pronounced like "coal-sh" in English.

<sup>6</sup> Wikipedia. Cologne Cathedral.

Three theories exist as to how der Dom survived the complete destruction that took everything around it. Theory one claims that it survived through the will of God. Theory two is that the Americans bombing the area respected its historical and cultural value so much, that they refused to bomb it. Theory three is that the cathedral was so distinctive from the sky, that Americans were ordered not to bomb it, so it could be used as a navigation reference. Regardless of which theory one adheres to, it is amazing that with the precision of WWII bombs, that bombers managed to destroy the train station less than 50 meters away without taking down the whole cathedral. Der Dom has been in some state of repair since then, thus taking on its local reputation as never finished.

Kölsch is the only thing a person can both drink and speak. The local dialect of German in Cologne is called Kölsch. In my limited experience with the dialect, it is as crisp and lighthearted as the people who speak it. Each word, though often completely different than Hoch Deutsch (High German) is equally as precise as its proper counterpart. The beer Kölsch is like Champagne in France. For Kölsch to truly be Kölsch, it must come from within a certain radius of Cologne, otherwise it is merely an imitation. The French region of Champagne has their exclusive claim to bubbly wine, and Cologne has its claim to the light and refreshing beer, Kölsch.

## Chapter 4

### Hidden in Plain Sight

Those first two months in Cologne were both amazing and terrifying all at once. Most days I wandered about the inner city, marveling at how old and new so casually intersected. Fortunately, unless I spoke with someone at length, my predominately German genetics allowed me to explore unfettered. More than once I was stopped and asked to give directions to this or that place. Usually I had to admit my own disguise and unfamiliarity with the area. Worse still were the occasions that I knew the location, but not how to give complete directions, and instead resorted to gestures and broken words. Not every day was an adventure though. Sometimes functioning entirely in a second language taxed me to a point that every interaction stressed and exhausted me. On those days I took refuge in two things, the fact that subways and street trains were treated with the utmost German courtesy (to not hold a captive audience prisoner), and that if I shut my mouth, did not smile, and went about my business everyone thought I was a local.

There was only one exception to this case. One night on the Straßenbahn, as I was riding home, the upset must have been blatantly visible on my face. A young man sat in the same booth as me and began to ask me questions. At first, I miss understood, thinking he asked if I had a drink. I must have responded inappropriately because he responded in English, that I needed a drink. An exchange occurred, to which I swear I must have been a third party to, because at the next stop, I got off the street train with him, and walked to the grocery store across the street. There he proceeded to buy juice and some alcohol, and returning to the platform, he made me a drink in his cup. It was in all ways the most unusual encounter, and although I swiftly copied his phone number before getting on the next train, never accepted his offer to hang out with him and his friends. Perhaps I was scared they might be druggies, or into odd things, perhaps it was that I knew I would be moving shortly, or maybe it was just my inner Schweinhund<sup>7</sup> that held me back. In all cases, I never saw or spoke with that kind stranger again.

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<sup>7</sup> Literally translated: Pig-dog. It is a German phrase used to describe the inner voice which holds a person back from doing something.

Had I continued in Cologne I should have eventually found my way over every part of that city, and perhaps eventually found the courage to find that guy who showed me friendliness when most would have avoided me.

## Chapter 5

### Your New Home is East

Moving to Dresden from Cologne represented a cultural change that many foreigners might not realize. Cologne is the epitome of western Germany; with its diverse people, sprawling city, and booming capitalist economy. Dresden could be considered an eastern antithesis. To the untrained traveler, they are not obviously different, minute details about how they vary come with cultural understanding. Before the reunification of Germany in 1990, Dresden was a part of the USSR. During that time, the city was left in a state of disrepair from the fire bombings of WWII. After reunification, the east had a great deal of economic catch up to do. But more on that later.

The train ride to Dresden was long. By the time I was approaching Dresden it was dark. I referenced my progress from the stops listed for the trip, and between listening for the announcements of which stop the train was approaching spent my time staring out the window attempting to make out details. Before the second to last stop, as we rolled into the outskirts of the city, all at once my reality shifted. I saw a lit-up sports arena. It was small, but well kept, like a decent high school football field in the US. There, under the bright lights, a game of American Football was being played. I had to look twice to make sure my mind did not play a trick on me, and after the confirmation, was completely flabbergasted. All I could do was make jokes to myself about accidentally taking a train back to America.

After stepping off the train, the program regional director and my future roommate met me at the station. Misha, as I would come to call him, stood slightly shorter than myself, with short curly dirty-blond hair. He thought himself quite funny, and unfortunately for me would make jokes that my second-rate German comprehension could not grasp to the point of humor. We drove from the station to the shared apartment, or *Wohngemeinschaft* as it is properly called in German. Most Germans usually just say WG (V-eh G-eh) for short. On the way there, Misha pointed out a tall circular glass building, Dresden's World Trade Center. He then proceeded to make the distinction clear between it and the two towers from the US which befell tragedy.

The street on which our building sat was old. It was in an area of Dresden untouched by the fire bombings. During the day the building's façade is rather smart, not so grandiose as some

European city buildings, nor as sterile as newer structures. At night however, the unlit street casts the front in shadows. My first impression was much less appealing. The doors to the building, which represent my first idea of the place I was to live, were old wooden doors that in some previous life were as smart as the stone around it. In truth, they were anything but; not being able to fully close or lock, they merely pretended to keep out any weather. Entering into the main hallway everything is dark and made of cold concrete. Leaves were strewn about the place, and graffiti, cobwebs, and miscellaneous household objects decorated the common space of the building. Our WG was on the fourth floor, which for anyone familiar with the ground floor that every German structure is built with, actually means I lived on the fifth floor. Misha, in a stunning feat of determination, managed to haul my laden suitcase up the staircase of the building in one go. In no way was this residence handicap accessible. Through all this, I had my doubts about my future home. The inside of the WG, for all its quirks and faults, did not bear the charming decorations of the stairwell. Instead, it contained rather modest accommodations and decorations.

## Chapter 6

### Sachsen

The city of Dresden was once the fortified residence of August the Strong, and the heart of the Sachsen Kingdom. The region is known as much for its rich history and culture, as it is for its dialect and PEGIDA demonstrations. There seem some contradictions to an outside viewer, but I have found Sachsen to be lighthearted and proud. Of all the German dialects I became most familiar with Sachsisch. It is goofy to hear, and in my opinion, a lazy dialect. It only contains eighteen characters in its alphabet, and has a tendency to abridge words. Fertig<sup>8</sup>, meaning complete or finished, contains three syllables in Hochdeutsch. In Sachsische on the other hand, only one-ish syllables are required in saying, Fertch<sup>9</sup>. More still, rather than using “ja”<sup>10</sup>, the word “nu” is employed to say yes. While working construction, I became accustomed to hearing and using “nu”. A favorite phrase of mine was “nu-nu”, said quickly in succession, which best translates to yeah-yeah. It was the perfect dialect for me, I am naturally a somewhat lazy speaker in casual conversation, and due to my own shortcomings with respect to proper usage of the gendered der, die, and das, took refuge in the Sachsisch mumble.

I have heard a few stories about the reputation of Sachsen from the time of Bismarck and the first unified German Kingdom. Bismarck, after politically and militaristically bringing together all the separate German states, immediately set about proving his strength by going to war with France. In one instance of an imminent battle where the French came across a Sachsen battalion, the Sachsisch soldiers told the French to wait, because a Prussian battalion would be coming soon, and they should fight them instead. Further contributing to the reputation of Sachsisch soldiers, a mantra held by the men was, “Ohne Kaffee, ohne Kämpfen!”<sup>11</sup> So important is coffee to Germans, that by volume, more coffee is consumed in Germany than beer. In fact, during a course I took at TU Dresden I learned that the first paper cone filter was

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<sup>8</sup> Pronounced “fair-tig”

<sup>9</sup> Pronounced “fair-ch” in the manner we say couch.

<sup>10</sup> Pronounced “yah”

<sup>11</sup> Translation: no coffee, no fighting

invented by a woman in Sachsen, who utilized her child's school paper to make coffee more easily.

Sachsen is also an important cultural hub for other reasons. August the Strong was fascinated by sciences and cultures. Many museums are in the Altstadt<sup>12</sup>, with collections including scientific and mathematical instruments, porcelain, indescribable treasures, and a Rafael masterpiece. So infatuated was August the Strong with Chinese and Japanese porcelain, that he commissioned alchemists to recreate it, and from their work the first European porcelain was created. The Altstadt and Neustadt<sup>13</sup> sit on opposite sides of the Elbe river. Altstadt is situated on the old fortress of the city, and contains many landmarks. Some landmarks, like the Hofkirche<sup>14</sup>, Semper Oper<sup>15</sup>, and Zwinger<sup>16</sup> managed to survive the British firebombing at the end of the second World War. Others, like the Frauenkirche, were completely destroyed. Although war is in nature destructive. Many people of Dresden firmly believe that the bombing of the Altstadt was a vengeance bombing for all the landmarks and cultural sites destroyed by the German bombings in the United Kingdom. Reasoning behind this theory, is that the American bombers all went toward the factory and strategic military targets to the north-west of the city, and there was no strategic value in targeting the inner city, because the war was reaching its final stages. Worse still is that the Soviets left the entire area in ruins after the war. It would not be until after the reunification of Germany in 1990 that the Frauenkirche and surrounding area would be rebuilt.

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<sup>12</sup> Literally translated: old-city, or old town. Many cities in Germany have places named as such, and refer to the oldest locations.

<sup>13</sup> Literally translated: new-city, for Dresden it refers to the less touristy and more hip side of town.

<sup>14</sup> Catholic Cathedral

<sup>15</sup> Opera House

<sup>16</sup> Baroque style Palace

## Chapter 7

### Katze oder Kater<sup>17</sup>

Germans are often considered humorless and orderly. I have found this conclusion to reflect a lack of understanding.

Humor is unique for Germans, in the way that American and British humor vary. Not everyone finds it funny, but if you do, it is hilarious. One form of German humor might come off offensive to Americans, and for good reason. In America there is a large cultural norm to be overly cautious about not offending people. America's history has been laden with racial strife since Europeans began their migration to the "new world". From that history, a certain sensitivity and political correctness has developed around poking fun at other groups of people. Germany does not have that problem. Most of Europe is used to interacting with other cultures, and perhaps due to the long history between countries there, different cultures interact more like a long rivalry between sports teams. Mutual respect, but a constant onslaught of witty retorts. As such, Germans can often make jokes at the cost of another specific groups or cultures, but no underlying cruelty exists. If you have not guessed already, there is an exception. Jokes about being Nazi, or jokes at the expense of Jews are not socially acceptable. Other forms of humor in Germany resemble the dryness and literal form of British humor more than the slapstick lowbrow humor of the United States. Puns and word play are important, as well as contextual humor. So wonderful and terrible is the German language, that in one word can be found numerous meanings all dependent on context. I learned this lesson over the course of the year, from several moments.

In the fall, the three of us living in Dresden often went on hikes in the Sachsische Schweiz<sup>18</sup>. During one trip Ian, Lara, their host families, and myself all went hiking together. The trails themselves are well hiked, nothing like the narrow rocky trails found in the Rocky Mountains. At one-point Lara's Falk (because both Ian and Lara's host dads were named Falk), saw mushrooms on the side of the trail. He proceeded to evaluate if they were edible or not, and

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<sup>17</sup> Literally translated: Cat or Cat

<sup>18</sup> The Sachsen Switzerland: a beautiful national park with indescribable sandstone formations.

told us that they were poisonous, but he hoped to find some wild edible ones on the trail. Ian's Falk immediately after replied, "Die einzige Pilz ich mag ist Bier<sup>19</sup>". I had to laugh when he said this, because it was beautiful word play. Pilz, pronounced "pil-ts", means mushroom in German. But said aloud, it sounds almost identical to the word Pils, a common abbreviation for the German beer, Pilsner. The double meaning, and wordplay is an example of excellent German humor. Although it took me good deal of time to engage with and understand how subtle German humor can be, I found it a perfect fit with my own fondness for puns. The problem with puns though, is that they do not translate well, a firm grasp of a language is necessary.

For example, in the United States, the 14<sup>th</sup> of March is pi<sup>20</sup> day. This is because when written as a numerical date in the US, it makes the value of pi; 3.14. Given that pi day is a beloved holiday by mathematicians and engineers alike, I thought I would bring a pie with me to work. Surely the German engineering staff at TU Dresden would appreciate a pie with the pi symbol carved in the top. I was sadly mistaken. Pi day, in all its witty numeric and wordplay humor, does not translate. First, there is the date. In the US our nomenclature places the month before the day. In Germany this is reversed; meaning on March 14<sup>th</sup>, the nomenclature is 14.3. While my colleagues had heard of the holiday, the date for pi day cannot exist in Germany, because there are only 12 months. The numeric humor was lost in translation, but that was only part of the failed wit. Germans pronounce pi differently too. Instead of saying it "p-eye" they say it "p-ee". And to top of the list, while pie is a specific kind of baked dish in the United states, German has less variation in baked goods nomenclature. My pie, to my colleagues was nothing more than another Kuchen, or cake. Although, the pie itself was a delicious apple dessert, the disappointment at my failed attempt at humor soured my celebrations. Nothing takes the fun out of a pun more than having to explain definitions and translations.

Other humorous aspects of German wit can be found in slag; which for better or worse, has its own rules. A particular term that I enjoyed, was der Kater. Die Katze is "the cat", but if the female gendered die is swapped for a male der, the word changes what would officially be a male cat. However, properly that is not correct; even if a cat is male, it will be called die Katze. Der Kater is used colloquially to mean a hangover. When I first learned this, I did not really believe it, but as a postcard I would later find confirmed this information to be correct. To

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<sup>19</sup> Literally translated: the only mushroom I like is beer.

<sup>20</sup> Pi being the spelling of the Greek letter  $\pi$ .

understand why a postcard would use slang, it must be said that cafes and coffee shops commonly have postcards which are free to customers. These postcards are advertisement postings for concerts, local events, and the occasional safe-sex campaign. This particular card had an image of a scared cat and said, “Das letzte Bier war Schlecht. Meint mein Kater<sup>21</sup>”. It was part of a safe drinking campaign. Many Germans have postcard collections of witty, artistic, and political aspects, I myself began a collection while there. I thought the idea of post cards was a great way to advertise; they are a good size, can be used for practical purposes if needed, and can be accessed and taken as desired.

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<sup>21</sup> Translated: The last beer was bad. The opinion of my Cat (Hangover).

## Chapter 8

### Photographs from My Travels



*Der Dom, Cologne.:* Scaffolding can be seen all over the cathedral. The light sandstone, like that in the front left, has been repaired, while the dark sandstone is old and dirty.

*Breakfast at the Floßbach's, Zündorf<sup>22</sup>, Cologne.:* Wolfgang, myself, Nils, Kathy, Erik, Eduardo, and Claudia (behind the camera).



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<sup>22</sup> Zündorf is the small village on the outskirts of Cologne where I lived during language school.



*Elbe River Looking South, Dresden.:* A shot taken during a winter walk, the third spire from the right is the Frauenkirche, the center of Altstadt.

*Overgrown Path, Schwarzwald.:* The narrow break in the growth and trees were the only markers of the direction in which to continue hiking.



## Chapter 9

### Der Schwarzwald<sup>23</sup>

At the end of the program we are given two weeks to do with as we please. Some participants chose to continue working, others chose to travel around Europe, I had other ideas in mind. Originally, I thought about biking the length of the border which divided the USSR from the rest of Europe. If you are wondering how, there is now a hiking trail the entire length of what used to be the Iron Curtain. After realizing I was not properly equipped for such an undertaking, and would not have time to travel even the portion of the trail which divided east and west Germany, I opted for another option; a tour of Germany. Though I had been to many places in Germany already, I chose to travel around Germany to places I had not been before; specifically, south-west and northern Germany. I even managed to hit the Netherlands with the help of Claudia and Wolfgang. Of the roughly 8 places I travelled to, the Schwarzwald was the best experience.

I chose a fairly remote village to stay at, it had a campground for tents, and I wanted to backpack the area. Although public transit reaches this village by bus travel, I opted instead to take the train as close as I could, then hike the rest of the distance. My planned route took me through the forest, but at the halfway point there was another village. The marked trails on the map I purchased all went into, and then out of that village, so I could not go around it even if I wanted to. As I set out with my pack and gear, I was very attentive to road signs and if the path matched the curvature marked on the map. If I failed to find the right trailhead, then I would not make it to the camp on time. I found the trail up a dirt road, and questioned myself for a second, because it seemed relatively untraveled, and was not labelled. But from the map, and the shape of the road, it had to be the right one, so I ploughed forward. Initially the trail became thicker with weeds and less than a mile in, although the path was still clear, among the trees, it was completely grown over, and at times I felt as though I was bushwhacking my way through. I could not help but laugh. Even at that point, where the trail seemed conquered by the forest, my doubt lost the battle to my directional instinct, and I knew that I would be fine. A few things

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<sup>23</sup> Translated: the black forest

helped me keep calm. First, I knew that this was the trail on the map, there were no other options, and I was very attentive to navigating roadways. Second, I could realistically set up camp anywhere and waited till morning to find my way out. But most importantly, I was in Germany, if I kept walking in any direction long enough I would stumble upon civilization quickly enough. It was nothing like the vast wilderness of places in the United States.

Sure enough, I came out into an open hillside, I could see in the valley below me a town which had I taken the bus, I would have driven through. Better still, I quickly came across a flock of sheep, being tended by a young lady. We smiled and waved at each other and after snapping a photo, I carried on my way. One aspect of Germany and much of Europe that I came to appreciate, was how traditional agriculture has remained. Raising livestock is starkly different from the mass industry found in the United States. At that moment, seeing a Shepard and her flock, was a sight not possible in the United States. Most of Europe has organic and small-scale farming, but rather than being the result of popular trends like it is in America, it is the remnants of a lifestyle passed down over generations. European countries often have food standards which are healthier than those found in the United States, but they are less about modern health trends, and more about long standing traditions. Meat may be more expensive in Europe, but as an industry standard, it was the closest to matching the quality of flavor found from my Grandparents pasture raised beef.

Returning from a digression of thought matching that of my mind on the trail, I soon came upon the halfway point village. Having made good progress thus far, I decided that I should take a rest and grab some lunch at a café or restaurant. I came into the town from a side street, and for a warm and sunny day, the town was strangely deserted. I wandered around some, up streets that seemed to aim for the center of town, and finally stumbled upon an open restaurant. The only people there were the cook and one waitress. They seemed somewhat surprised to see me, but we happy to receive me. I learned from the waitress that the next German match for the men's Euro-Cup football game was that night, and they were setting up an outdoor viewing area. The menu was more limited do to the event as well, but that was of little bother, I got a bratwurst and a beer and sat outside. Shortly after I sat down, the cook came out and started grilling some of the food for the match, and we began to talk.

We spoke about some minor things; the town, the game, and where I was hiking. Then, the cook asked me where I came from in Germany. As a second language speaker there is no

better complement than to have your language ability be recognized by a native speaker. The fact that he asked where in Germany was significant for a couple of reasons. One, Germans are generally well versed in the 33 dialects of German found in their country (more exist around the globe), but mine was not distinctly identifiable. Second, the question implied I came from Germany, meaning my German was adequate enough to be sound native; although certainly my physical appearance helped my case. The cook was surprised to hear then, that I am an American. We then spoke some about myself and the exchange program, but then he asked another question; why would I want to hike in the Schwarzwald? He suggested, I hike the Rocky Mountains instead. I laughed at his comment, and told him that I am from the Rockies, and have hiked them many a time, but I had never hiked the Schwarzwald. Little more was exchanged thereafter. Perhaps he felt there was not much more for him to say, or perhaps he needed to focus on his work, but it was of no avail. I had finished my meal and needed to proceed on my way to make it to the camp before nightfall.

## Chapter 10

### Where to Go from There

Life is strange. We as humans are indescribably complex beings, but belonging is something we all seek. Belonging can vary from person to person. Some seek a family, others similarly minded people, or any number of other qualifiers. For myself, belonging takes many forms. In people, I dislike uniformity and value diverse ideas and perspectives, and the governing rule is that others reciprocate the same quality of loyalty and friendship. But with bigger concepts like home, identity, and community, everything gets more complicated.

Belonging to a large group carries with it privileges and burdens. Even choosing a sports team matters. Consider it, the way we introduce ourselves, and where our loyalties lie can have profound implications on how other see us. Some labels are a part of us; our sex, our genetic appearance, whether we are right or left handed. Others are given to us; our gender, our citizenship, where and how we were raised. But others still, we may choose for ourselves; our job, our home, our affiliations. Who we are in the eyes of others can be influenced by these identities. For better or worse, some can change easily, and some are more permanent.

When I returned from Germany, I brought back with me a years' worth of experiences. I created a different life, with different people, and became a part of another culture. None of those would leave me. In a way I had become more, grown and changed, but not in a way visible to others. I am American, I will always be American; even if I changed citizenship, it would always be a part of me. But even after my time in Germany, I am not German. I do not have the right to claim that identity. I want to. I love Germany and felt at home amongst the language and the culture, and Germany will always be a part of me. But for all of those very reasons, it would be wrong of me to say I am German; that right is reserved for those granted it at birth and those who earn it. Instead, I will accept the cleavage between how I feel and who I am. I am genetically German. That is as far as I can take my identity in the direction of the land of my forefathers.

I am okay with that. The connection I have to Germany is not confined by my outward identity. Rather, the mark left on my heart and in my being, that is what makes Germany a part of me. That part cannot be taken or damaged, it has forever become a part of what makes me the person I am.

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## Notes for Further Writing

This section is not a part of the book, and does not count toward my page requirement. It is just for me. I want to continue writing this book, and maybe one day get it published.

The chapters are loosely chronological, but not strictly so. Ultimately the text needs to tie together the idea of cultures and people. But I want my story to be interwoven into the narrative. Ultimately, there are two intertwined stories, connected by the numerous stories from that year.

- Stories told (but is there enough detail?):
  - Arrival, The Hosts, Exploring the City, Der Dom, Cologne, Moving to Dresden, Sächsische Dialect, Pi Day, and its lack of translation, Originally, but Now..., Tour around Germany, The Black Forest, Rowing (serious fun).
- Stories not yet told (how might they connect? Do they add to the overall story, or just ramble? What am I forgetting?):
  - First day of Language School (Sprachschule), Journal excerpts, Class field trips, Research for School, Schreckenskammer, A Lesson in Paying Attention, Wedding weekend back Home, Real Oktoberfest, Meeting the roommates, First day of wandering in Dresden, German placement test, Orientation day, Journal excerpts, Finding a Lost Cat, Mini Oktoberfest and how most Germans see lederhosen, Friendsgiving, Memorial and New Beginnings, Homemade Schnapps, Roommates, Christmas Markets, Paris, Getting sick in Munich, Interviews, Technische Universität Research, On peeling Oranges, Construction Work, and the commute (homeless), Roommates and stereotypes, Beethoven and Hitler, Regular Wurst (what did I mean with this?), 4<sup>th</sup> Degree Knighting, Neuschwanstein, Brussels, The Purple Tourist Spot, Netherlands, Rostock, Leaving for certain, Farewells, Returning “Home”, Challenges Leaving, usw...

For the ending, there are several directions I could take it, but I want to bring it home with how connected I feel to Germany and its people. To talk about how Germany will always be a part of me, and that although I cannot claim to be German, I still feel a connection to the identity of being German. This is somewhat of a contradiction but still relevant for myself. I want to make

those feelings clear, but retain relevance in the story. I want to make the emotions apparent the way Herrer does as he describes his departure from Tibet.

If I retain the preface on how my personality construct works, I will need to integrate that better into the narrative, and draw it into the conclusion. Not to mention the fact that I need to make it more clear and understandable.