



Germany... Not a pleasant place

By: Jordan Welborn

It was supposed to be the greatest summer of my life. I was to spend a month in Germany as an exchange student and bring back a girl who was to stay with me for a month. All I had to pay for was the plane ticket and fill out a few hundred forms about myself.

The goal of the program was to match personalities and interests in order to ensure a successful exchange. In my essays about myself, I expressed a dislike for alcohol, parties, biking, and sports in general. Granted, this made me a difficult candidate, but I decided to give it a shot anyway.

I was matched with a girl two years younger than I in a small village about 45 minutes away from Frankfurt. Bags were packed, flight arrangements made, and I found myself alone in a German airport searching for a family I had never seen before.

After about an hour, I was united with my host family. An awkwardly quiet car ride followed. Little did I know that it would be my last. Upon arrival at their house, we had a breakfast of fresh bread and homemade marmalade. I asked for water to drink and was handed a glass bottle. Somewhat dehydrated from the flight, I hastily gulped down half the bottle before I realized what I'd done. It was carbonated water. I quickly ran to the sink to rid my mouth of its putrid taste. The tap water was refreshing. It also made me sick.

Through the time changes, I had lost an entire night of sleep, so I thought it best to try to rest. Later that day I awoke with every sort of physical ailment known to man. Every bit of food I had ingested in the preceding 12 hours resurfaced for a second run. My body shook, all the while alternating from extreme warmth to cold. My head ached and I barely had enough energy to walk from the bed to the bathroom. I could go on, but you get the point. All of this lasted for about 3 days.

Having recuperated to about 50%, I attempted to settle into the daily routine of my host family. Bike 3 miles to school. Sit through endless lectures in a language I didn't understand. Bike 3 miles home. Nap for an hour. Jog for an hour. Change clothes. Bike 3 miles to town. Watch people get drunk. Bike 3 miles home.

It was at this point when I began to question why I was even there. Obviously, my personality profile had been completely disregarded. The girl I was staying with (we'll call her Ann) and I were coming to the quick realization that we had absolutely nothing in common. And I was still unable to keep any food down. Also: What was I doing back in High School???

Several more days of this went by. Ann and I became blatantly hostile. I mistook a trashcan for a mailbox and threw my letters away. The machine at the bank rejected my American dollars, so I was unable to change my money. I broke their family computer. I proved to yet another country what a dreadful putt-putt player I was. And I was constantly given the advice by Ann's parents, that if I got drunk, just once, I'd feel better about the whole ordeal.

I opted to come home instead. I went to another country to learn about another culture. But, all I really learned about was the life of a teenager that parties too much. I found myself in the middle of a situation that I had for years tried so hard to avoid.... And with people that I had always chosen not to associate with. Everyone around me, not only lived in a different culture, but by a different set of values, morals, and ideas about the world. I was without kindred spirits, and feeling very alone. Yet from this, I learned one very valuable lesson: There are some things in life that you just can't prepare yourself for. This was one.

