

Der kürzeste Weg zu sich selbst führt um die Welt

An experience away from all that is familiar and comforting is one that makes a person grow in ways they could not possibly dream of. This year in Germany has taught me things about my lifestyle, my country, my past, my limits, my culture, and so much more.

On first arriving, I was very nervous because I had the equivalent to one year of German language study and had no idea how I was going to pass my courses or how I was going to talk to anyone. The program, fortunately, was very organized so it was practically impossible not to get to know people within the first month or even week of arrival. The first three months I would say were the most difficult in terms of anxiety speaking German because I just wasn't equipped enough to express myself. I would feel pretty stupid every time I opened my mouth. After forcing myself consistently to ignore that feeling of inadequacy and just speak, I gained confidence in not only fluency of the language, but also in myself. I still say things incorrectly and sometimes don't know how to express myself, but it's all a process in learning. I can only stay positive knowing that what I have built as a foundation in Germany, I can continue to let blossom when I return to Canada.

Staying positive this year was crucial in my experience and growth as a person. There were definite ups and downs in my journey, and I discovered the balance and lifestyle that best suits me. I learned to stay happy by keeping my mind and body busy; traveling with friends and socializing on a regular basis; staying in the present, not

regretting but learning from the past, and not dwelling on the people and experiences I will miss when this year comes to an end. When you are out of your element, around people you might not normally think to be friends with, your eyes open up to great possibilities. I have done everything this year from camping in the wilderness, to relaxing in thermal spas, to hiking the Alps of Bavaria, to playing the organ Mozart once played, to cliff-jumping in Croatia, and the list continues. I have had so much fun testing my limits and taking risks; I don't intend on letting go of that certain self-drive I have discovered here in Germany. I didn't know I was missing anything before I left home, but fortunately I was curious to find out. This year, I really learned how to live.

I would like to whole-heartedly thank the OBW program for this absolutely life-changing opportunity. People use the phrase "life-changing" often casually, merely to express enthusiasm, but my life has truly been transformed. I have opened myself up to more types of personalities, my life goals have drastically changed, I've experienced such richness in culture, and I have stories and experiences that will be forever ingrained in my memory. To cram all that life experience into one year is astounding and it has surely been the best year (by any stretch) of my 22 on earth.