

I want to tell you everything...

Unfortunately, I can't entirely. There are details, events, feelings, memories, and decisions that cannot boil down into words without losing some element of what defined them. However, the meaning can still be preserved, and when its story is told to others, the imagination becomes the dominant medium. Imagination can recreate and portray anything, anywhere, at any time, but inevitably the only imagination we can soundly rely on is our own, personalizing our experience subjectively. It is imperative then to not only read and learn about experiences, but also experience them ourselves in some form, if they move us or touch us. This way, we might come as close as we can to understanding almost everything.

What I will tell you then, is a story. This is a story about an adventurous college girl in search of something more in this world, more than what her Film and Asian Studies could provide in her compelling but routine city of New Orleans. She already lived in Japan before to expand on her Japanese, and she held the opportunity to return again for the 2010 summer, but something else arose out of simplicity, out of opportunity:

A simple sheet of paper, denoting some film scholarship of some kind to travel... Harburg? Hamden? Something like this?

She realized then that learning about the world, finding something more, required doing more and not just returning to what she knew she loved. So, despite knowing nearly nothing, she stepped forward, eager for change.

This girl is me, at least in the past. I've changed so rapidly in my own perceptions, thanks to my exchange semester at Hamburg University of Applied Sciences (HAW) in Germany and now I hardly feel like I left.

I went through the process and the paperwork, which is an inevitable part of the exchange student idea, even if most of it seems senseless. Ultimately, forms filled out to exchange abroad are far more exciting and compelling to fill out than say, taxes. I think context is important for everything, including forms.

The piece of paper I found which my journey began detailed a housing scholarship which would be awarded to one Film student applying for HAW for the 2010 Spring semester year. Serious applicants only. What began as a notion for me grew into a lengthy series of talks with my international advisor and good friend, Mary Hicks. She was instrumental in helping me along the entire process, and when the date began to approach, I realized I was now competing with one other person who made it this far in the process for the same award, a colleague I knew as William Addison. For a while, it was somewhat nerve-racking to find out just who would be selected, but we were both later informed that HAW had generously allowed two awards for the both of us to go, seeing as they must've liked our applications greatly. I much preferred this choice in the end, because working and bonding with William was invaluable to me, as we were there to support each other when we needed it.

We left for Hamburg towards the end of February. An important difference to note I realized almost immediately is that European school dates are shifted to different times through the year; Spring semester and Fall semester both start about two months later, effectively making the academic year more Summer-Winter than Spring-Fall.

I said my goodbyes, departing for the complete unknown. Besides HAW and a map of the subways, I tried to avoid being too informed about Hamburg, because I wanted to learn about Hamburg in my own peculiar way, through personal experience and not a bunch of guidebooks or websites. I had seen a total of three pictures of Hamburg before I went there. I did enough research about the university to find it was right for me, and that its film program would be a worthy learning experience.

And surprised I was. After a weary twenty hours of flying and transferring planes, travelling through security checks and queue lines alike, I stepped into Hamburg air, which had a cool, wet taste to it. The air clung to my skin and my lungs. It was strange at first but I could already tell Hamburg didn't want me to leave. After being picked up by Caro, Chris' friend, I lugged my single overweight back onto S-bahns and gravel roads leading into my first moments in Hamburg.

To backtrack, Chris plays an instrumental role during my time in Hamburg for several reasons. Chris, Chris Horn in full, is a student in HAW for *Medientechnik* and is originally from Frankfurt, where his parents currently reside. He is

the pioneer for our exchange program, namely the one which bridged Hamburg to the United States, because he came to the University of New Orleans first. I met him then and became very closely acquainted with him while he stayed. His finishing studies in New Orleans synced with my departure for Hamburg, so we were able to accompany each other in both places. I've jokingly accused him of internationally stalking me, although after he told me about his plans to return to New Orleans, I'm convinced it's true now.



After my initial adjustment, I met with Ramona to handle most of the paperwork I needed to do, not all of which I knew entirely how to do, or even where to go to do it. Ramona was a part of a small buddy program which gave the exchange students each their own German counterpart, so to speak, to help them with the process and be there for support, and Ramona was mine. She largely handled paperwork, otherwise I didn't see much of her as she seemed to be too busy for me, but I'm at least really grateful for her help through almost everything I needed to handle at first.

The semester wasn't due to start for a few weeks, which was intentional since I planned on attending The Colon Language Center to start on at least some German. HAW did not operate its own language resources unfortunately so we had to pay our own schooling if we wanted to learn German, although they were at least discounted a little. I, having no German experience before coming to Hamburg, saw this as essential as I probably couldn't handle learning it on my own. Looking back, I learned I was largely wrong about this.

The language center, operating in what was once a full apartment complex, had the touch of modesty to its somewhat unassuming design. I went there five days a week for two weeks with two different language teachers. One acted as the pure English instructor, while the other played the part of what I'd like to call "TDSL" (Teaching Deutsch as a Second Language) through the means of pure immersion, using minimal English if any. I call it TDSL because it's similar to the TEFL and TESL teaching styles used for teaching English around the world. I know this mainly due to my passion for the "art" of TEFL teaching; I plan on pursuing this career path in addition to a path in film production, for both some additional security as well as a tool which will allow me to travel where I want to, if the need exists.

The classes themselves were fairly decent – good professors with some very general materials – but the most valuable experience from taking the additional German courses were the numerous friends that I made from this

very early, initial connection. It was the first time I was present inside a truly international classroom; every student came from some different corner of the globe. I think, being immersed inside this classroom, really began to warp my perceptions of what my world really was like. I found this extended even further into my curriculum, and the first experience caught me and didn't let go.

I met and socialized with everyone in the class, but a few particular classmates stood out that I began spending a lot of my free time with. I would find much later how close I came with all of them, and how they made it that much harder to leave Hamburg.

There was the bubbly Sunny, who came from Shanghai, China to study Illustration at HAW. She's quite a reserved most of the time, but with her friends, she can become excited and exuberant. I never spent a dull moment with her. Our conversations first began on a mutual interest in Japanese, and I told her about the time I lived in Japan. She had been there for a short week visit, but had always wanted to go back, and I expressed a similar desire that burned in my heart for the past half year since I lived there. From this, we cooked together, travelled together, connected and began sharing many of our stories back at home... what was waiting for us in the future, and how Hamburg slowly changed us both. I could easily call her one of my best friends, and I have every intention to see her again, in one year.



Next came Erica, who also came from Shanghai (although a different school I believe, and she didn't know Sunny before) but she also studied Illustration. She had a charming, possibly devious aura to her and her artwork reflected her equally intriguing talent. I began knowing her after Sunny and Erica spent more time together, and before long I spent a few nights over at her dorm cooking with her. There was something about her that never let me be upset around her... I suppose it's the kind of aura she commands. Many smiles and fancy pictures on her camera later, we found even her aura couldn't keep the looming end from approaching, but I had the feeling I would see her again as well.

Then there was Nir Alon, the Israeli man who, again, was an Illustrator, and quirky is a powerful way to describe him, but definitely never in a way that was dissatisfying. His humor was off-beat, his knowledge was random, and his character was larger than life in a lot of ways. I found he was well informed and he inspired a lot of thoughts within me about many other places in the world, especially his home country. We spent many hours talking away

the structure of our global society, our place in it, what it meant and how it felt. On the surface, we spent plenty of time screwing around and goofing off with Sunny and Erica.

The four of us became inseparable throughout our half-year in Hamburg. I treasured many others of course and I could write an entire prolonged report solely on the people I met, but I have to say that my connection with these three brought me closer to our mutual bewilderment with Hamburg and our mutual connection in our friendships. I have to say that, learning from those I've met, study abroad truly becomes an experience about the people. You inevitably become a part of world through those you befriend and those you work with. What you learn, what you fail to do, what you triumph in... people show you the many ways to personal enrichment, multicultural bilateralism, and a repertory of knowledge and experience unmatched by those who refuse to expand their own borders.



Classes began, and my heart was racing. Even to this day, on the first day of classes (I suppose week would be more appropriate for college scheduling) I still become a little nervous and excited at the same time. New students, new teachers, new materials, new everything... everything has a sense of novelty and richness to it, but the fact I was also in Hamburg in classes that spoke mostly in German expanded my normally timid feelings to the point of excitement overload.

My first class was **Video Technology II Production** with Prof. Schmidt. The class was almost entirely in German but Chris also had the same class and he described to me the basics of what the class was about: we were going to divide into various groups based on various categories of applied video technologies and work within that group to create a full presentation with pictures, video, demonstrations, or whatever was appropriate for said category. Prof. Schmidt was kind enough afterwards to help further explain the idea behind the class, and while I grasped the idea, it completely challenged my assumptions of anything resembling a typical classroom in America. I would soon realize this applied to nearly every class in my curriculum, but specific to this class, I enjoyed the prospect of focusing all of my energy, research, and work to a single, cohesive goal which would count as the entirety of my grade. It gave the project I would work in a sense of true accomplishment, and I knew that nothing about the project could be mediocre if I didn't want to have a project that reflected such. It was overwhelming, but the challenge was welcome. I chose the category for underwater filmmaking because I knew it was an aspect of film production I knew nothing about, and it was an experience that I believe can rarely be gained in a college environ-

ment. Since the project was, eventually, generously funded partially by the international department, we were able to rent and use the equipment ourselves and learn through direct practice how underwater filming takes place, and what different techniques we could utilize and what challenges came as a result of underwater filming. It proved to be a difficult project that only increased in challenges as we progressed, but within the struggles I gained experience that I know I couldn't take trying to do blindly in the field.



My next class was **Practice Dramaturgy** with the unforgettable Prof. Willaschek. Honestly, before I saw the course listing in the catalogue, I had never even heard of the term “Dramaturgy” but I eventually came to learn dramaturgy is the art of ideas, essentially, and being able to come up with them as well as administer them. Prof. Willaschek definitely fits the ideal version of this philosophy, because his very nature teems with an eccentric, dramatic tone. Everything is big to him, and he holds a smile which always gives the air that he enjoys his life like a play. His class had many different ideas and tasks which dealt with a variety of themes, from cooperation to planning, from finding passion to applying passion. We read Macbeth aloud on the first day of class (which would become a long-standing tradition) and we simply gathered together and talked about all of the ideas and possibilities we as a class could pursue. I loved Dramaturgy primarily for this sense of freedom... ideas of various projects were presented and students as a group would decide what they felt like would be the most practical, entertaining, and beneficial project(s) to attempt for class. Prof. Willaschek was right in saying that he feels less like a teacher and more like a guide; he watches over the class and makes judgments but ultimately the students as a single group are making the important decisions, being responsible for their own contribution, and demonstrate leadership.

Then there was **Camera Acting** which was also taught by Prof. Willaschek but also contained various figures of the sound and video labs as well as their assistants. We didn't have such a formal class but instead I met with a pre-existing group of students assembled to film and edit a story which had been discussed, created, and organized the semester before. Our particular project was called, “Manipulation”: an ideally realistic recreation of a shooting

using a news-style type to give to the effect of an actual shooting that had taken place. I realized this particular class was more for beginner's level, so a lot of the material was redundant but I enjoyed the prospect of working on a more traditional student film project and being able to offer advice from my own experience. We were able to pick various different branches of film production... video, sound, etc. ... and throughout the semester there were various workshops and training sessions for each. I went with sound and we met continuously on our own as well as meeting with the various lab administrators.



**Perception** came a week later because we were forced to skip it for Camera Acting for one class, which was taught by Prof. Kapp. His class by far was one of the more traditional film class lectures from my previous experience, because he taught weekly using video clips and presentations to help illustrate his ideas and concepts in addition to his usual discussions. The various topics of emotional perception in video and sound were very informative; the class extended on my awareness of how stimuli are affected by various techniques, patterns, and figures as well as how they affect our internalization of these responses. Unfortunately, Prof. Kapp, while he was able to speak English easily, had more difficulty explaining the deeper emotional themes and values of many of our class discussions, so I had to do some of our own research to keep up with the class. He was very helpful in trying to provide English resources and he did his best to explain questions that I had, but I do wish some of the deeper points made in the class were in English or at least a slower German. Still, I was not disappointed and I took away a lot from the class, and I would have to say his enthusiasm in being well-informed made him a professor to remember.

**Sound Design**, taught by Prof. Goerne, was a class that offered a unique connection to another division of HAW – the Illustration and Design Department. I loved being able to take the U-bahn to Uhlandstrasse early every Tuesday morning, and after I made more friends and connections in the Design building, I spent increasingly more time there. The building reeked with art, fashion, and design on every floor, and I fell in love with its charm. Our class was inside a large, well-lit conference-style room with large windows, and the big screen served as the viewing panel for many of the example sound designs we would watch and interpret throughout the semester. The class itself had a very well balanced amount of English and German, and the German wasn't too fast, so I felt like I had a clear grasp on the course material and the discussions were lively for participation. I learned vast amounts about

sound design, both in application and in critical interpretation, and learning the Cubase software became essential for creating our own sound design projects. Assignments in the class were usually done with a small group, and the sound studio was almost always utilized. Learning how to record in the sound studio became not only practical knowledge but expanded to learning the various techniques used to record sounds and how they might be used in a sound design. The course as a whole felt entirely comprehensive, and it's easy for me to say that I walked away knowing what a sound designer does in their many different aspects.

The **Studio Hamburg Project of 2010**: more than just a class. It was unlike any class or project I had ever worked on before, and the idea commanded uniquely to a concept never previously attempted as far as I've ever known; one screenplay would be interpreted by two different directors, under the guise of comedy and tragedy, while the entire making-of production of both films would be documented live by "*Studentenfutter*", a live television show investigating the filmmaking process in a part documentary, part stylized presentation which would broadcast and stream live on the internet. My position was *Aufnahmeleitung* (production manager) for the *Studentenfutter* side of the project, and it was the first time I ever had worked with a television set up, as well as my first time working in and being responsible for a full-fledged professional studio. I felt like I could take everything I learned about the filmmaking process including my previous films working in administration and leadership and apply it towards a test that would demonstrate my abilities. The studio invigorated me and gave me the first-hand experience; it was simply exciting to be in, thrilling to work in a true professional environment. I feel this project will be what future filmmakers will look up to me for, having the kind of accomplishment that many students in film are not capable of having otherwise. In this project, I achieved - thousands of viewers each day overwhelmed the servers with bustling activity, and knowing a part of my work was now out there, exposed and free, made this project a project I could truly feel proud about.



Overall, with the warm welcome received and the widely available information provided, I felt like the faculty and staff of HAW cared about my progress and many did their best to help me with whatever needs I might've had. From the professors offering personal time to meet with the exchange students, Ingrid Weatherall working indefinitely behind the scenes to ensure and guide my transition, to the janitor who let me get in the video lab for a

few minutes to copy video files, HAW is a unique and friendly campus environment to say the least. I made so many important connections, meaningful experiences, and valuable friends from simply the time I spent on campus. When the crunch time came close in July, while the work loads were heavy I never felt like the campus put obstacles between me and the successful completion of my work. Classes were fairly paced and our studies combined demonstrations and classroom lectures with practical, hands-on experience, which is only one of many reasons why I miss having class at HAW.



The term has finished, the final projects were completed and presented, and I said my optimistic, heart-felt temporary see-you-laters. I watched Hamburg sink out of the sky, but even as I write this, I know in my heart Hamburg has yet to sink anywhere. I can't stop thinking about the moments which now live on within me. I know for most study abroad students, they talk about how beautiful everything was and how it changed their outlook on their life; I don't deny their claims, but for me, this experience did more than change a few philosophies and give me some new insights. I experienced a world out there, a world of people and feelings, a world of desires and ambitions. I never felt so invested with potential and dedication in my life. Now, I spend every day working towards my future, a future that will bring me back into that world again, the world outside what I've known merely as my home. New Orleans is a city that has taught me some of my greatest life lessons, but now I know there is more for me outside the comfort zones of my born-and-raised grounds. I can feel it in my heart – it is time to move on, and now I slowly prepare for the next step.



I think it's possible to experience this world without study abroad student exchange; it's not a necessity to see the majesty of our global macrocosm. However, it takes more than just a short vacation to experience and truly live inside a place; study abroad pushes the boundaries by giving students the ability to exist, breath, work, and play in the structure of their new world through like-aged peers and shared educational goals. Study abroad challenges students to reflect and critically analyze their own ideas, reservations, and assumptions... to feel and breathe the wonder of a place, hidden inside more than just its revered monuments or tourist photo points. I don't know if all study abroad students take away so much of this, but I know I did, and any exchange student willing to push beyond their boundaries will discover a world waiting beyond them.

HAW gave me this chance. It redefined my expectations and challenged my drive, but truly HAW opened many new paths towards my future – paths I may have not gained if I hadn't have gone. I did have the opportunity to return to Japan again for the summer of 2010, and some of my initial conversations with Mary Hicks of the international department were discussing the weight between there and the possibility of Hamburg. I knew I loved Japan; I still do, and my next step will take me there once again. However, my ultimate justification for choosing Hamburg was specifically because I didn't know about it, and I wanted to challenge myself – why didn't I know something about Hamburg? If I would've returned to Japan, then I would've been successful in gaining a Japanese-American perception of the world, not a world perception. In order to learn about this world, to understand what I didn't know, then I would have to go beyond what I knew I loved, because there might've been more to love in this world that I didn't know about. Now that I know there is an entire world I've found, I want to become settled and devoted to an international career. A career in the international market means I'll always be immersed inside the movement of the world – a feeling I touched briefly on and lived a part of in Hamburg.

I have to thank HAW and the city of Hamburg for giving me all of these things. I owe them a great gratitude to where my life has come today. I thank especially Ingrid Weatherall, the international coordinator, for giving me so much useful advice and spending time to get to know me (unfortunately not enough, but I aspire to change that in

the future.) Knowing what Mary Hicks goes through, I realize the position of an international coordinator is neither an easy job nor a job that gets the full credit it deserves, and so I give her my warm thoughts for doing the best she could for all of us, including myself.

What I've told is only a small part of the incalculable experiences that lead to this story. I could tell my story, in more and more detail, with greater and more powerful emphasis, but the story still will never replace the moments. In order to understand the perhaps deeper meanings of this story, it takes an effort to experience part of the story individually. Then, when the experience has been gain and the revolutions take hold...

... I want you to tell everything.

By  
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