



Interview with German Expat Mareen F.

Q: What brought you to Alabama?

A: *On coming to the U.S.:* "I came as an au pair directly after finishing my Abitur... I fell in love with this country"

On coming to Alabama: "A job offer actually... and [The University of] Alabama had an opening"

Q: Had you always wanted to live in the U.S.?

A: "I never thought that I would live here or end up here or do what I'm doing right now... Life has a way, you know, it throws funny curveballs... While I had never considered studying in Germany, I liked the way that college was in the U.S."

Q: What challenges have you faced as an expat?

A: "I didn't have troubles with visa issues[, but] [y]ou're never in control of your own status and you never know what's going to happen, and it's up to the government and other people, and you just hope and pray... You're giving up a little bit of control because you are not a citizen of that country"

Q: How do you keep German influence in your life in America?

A: "I try to go back every year [to Dresden], but sometimes it doesn't work out.... On Christmas Eve, I have the traditional Christmas meal that we have at home in Germany"

On German clichés: "There are certain things I refuse to give up: I can't be late, I'm very organized, I'm in the category of... rule-follower, I try not to be wasteful (recycling and environmental consciousness)"

On celebrating October 3rd and November 9th: "If that had not happened, I would not be here... It's coming up on 30 years [for] Fall of the Wall"

Q: What have you learned by coming to Alabama?

A: "[Before coming to Alabama] I reserve[d] my judgement, I [hadn't] been there... the department [for German at the University of Alabama] is really great... I came at a very good time when it really started growing"

On the south: "the culture... you get used to it... I still don't drink sweet tea. I've said y'all a few times... less people, more nature, more calm... I step out of the plane in Birmingham and there is an air of calmness"

Q: Has anything been different than your expectations?

A: "I came to the U.S. and to Alabama without any expectations... Put everything you've heard or seen in the movies away... Not everyone in the U.S. wears what you see in the movies... that's not true"

Q: Do you have any advice for Germans coming to Alabama?

A: "people here really are really friendly. I think more so than in other states... get used to the heat... A lot of people make fun of how Alabama shuts down in the snow, but it's a different mentality... don't stick with the other Germans that live in Alabama, branch out... go to different activities"

Q: If you could change one thing about your experience here, what would it be and why?

A: "I probably should explore the state of Alabama more... there are still areas I've never seen... [in the small towns] it's like a different world... you see that sometimes in the U.S. movies, but it's real, I've seen it... the U.S. is such a diverse country, some of the national parks are at the top of my list"