



Americans of Tübingen: *Jenna*

“I never actually expected that I would end up living in Germany. I always wanted to live in another country and speak another language as a child.

My friend Benjamin, a German exchange student who had been at my high school, offered me the opportunity to live with his family for a year in NRW.

I packed my bags and went off to live my dream and was brought back down to earth with a big thump. Living in another country and not knowing any more German than *Gesundheit*, *Sauerkraut*, and *Kindergarten* was really hard! My school in upstate New York offered French and Spanish, and I chose to learn French. In the end, I decided to open up my mouth and speak as much as I could, even if I sounded a bit dumb.



After I returned to the US, I studied German and Political Science. During this time, I got a job at my college’s International Office and helped exchange students from all around the world to find their way when they arrived in Charleston. Three years later, my college had a new exchange program set up between the College of Charleston and Uni Tübingen. Off I went back to Germany, only to once again find myself a bit lost. But at least this time I could speak the language!

One exchange year turned into two. During the second year I started going out with Martin, who I met in the foyer of my dorm in Lustnau. After I decided to stay, I told the International Office in Charleston to give new exchange students my e-mail address. If they contacted me, I would do my best to help them settle in, as I had to figure out so much on my own. This involved everything from picking them up from the airport in Stuttgart, getting their dorm keys, and helping them to open a bank account. I loved living here and just wanted to help others settle in.

I returned briefly to Charleston to finish my degree. After that, I decided to see how it would work out with Martin and I guess you could say that I emigrated permanently. We got married in 2007 and had two boys in 2012 and 2015. I like to call them my little Germicans, because they have dual citizenship.

As for me, in 2017 I took German citizenship. It was important for me to be able to vote in Germany on issues that would affect my family. It was a strange feeling the first time I entered Germany using my German passport, but it certainly made me feel like I was coming home.

Now, I work at an institute in Tübingen in an International Office. I am back doing what I loved doing all those years ago in Charleston and Tübingen – helping people to come to a new country and settle in. I love living in Germany and have a really wonderful life here. At the age of 18 my plans were not that I would move to Germany, but I am so glad that I gave it a chance. I wouldn’t trade my experiences for anything else in the world.”