

We are all
made of stories

Americans of Tübingen: *Carolyn*

“What a privilege, to be born in Detroit, Michigan, to live 50 years in Tübingen, and to be able to continue participating in both cultures!

I was born in Detroit, Michigan, in the Midwest of the U.S. Today people say it’s a place to fly over. Back then it wasn’t. The state of Michigan was very present to us with its many lakes, large automobile factories, terrific peaches, cherries, and sweet corn, and its wonderful brick-and-mortar schools. Edison Elementary was one of those schools. I remember saying the Pledge of Allegiance out on the large front lawn as the flag was being raised.



Redford High School was a large brick building housing four grades and 5,000 students. The school had the typical commercial and college prep courses, and, after the success of Sputnik by the Russians in 1957, ‘honors courses,’ with teachers who had doctorates in math and physics. The road was open to get a good education and get accepted at one of the in-state colleges.

The University of Michigan in Ann Arbor was my choice! After having to learn German for a two-year living-language requirement, spending a year in Germany on a Junior Year Abroad program and finishing a bachelor’s and master’s degree, I took a job as teacher of German in Ann Arbor’s Pioneer High School. Following anti-Vietnam protests and the closing of the school for a week for a strike by Black students, the students of Pioneer were taken on an 8-day trip to the country whose language they were learning.

My senior colleague and I accompanied the students learning German to Munich and to Tübingen, Ann Arbor’s sister city. There I met my future family!

A tall white-haired professor came to the parked student bus and treated me to a wonderful welcoming dinner at the Hotel Krone. Since I was an American, he claimed I would certainly like a steak, a salad, and a Manhattan. Halfway through the meal, my host excused himself. Sometime later a much younger man with a beard, long hair, and a pair of large, round glasses appeared, having been asked to come and help his father with the German teacher. He was an architect.

That summer, with the encouragement of the professor’s son, I returned to Tübingen – and to the beginning of a wonderful friendship! We married, had a family and I was able to keep up my contact with young Americans as coordinator of the English language program at the German American Institute in Tübingen. Through my children I got to know the German school system and meet other parents. I was fascinated by my new friends, their commitment to Democracy, their interest in coming to terms with their history, and, I was fascinated with having to do everything in another language!

Tübingen and Ann Arbor were destined to be partner cities. In Tübingen there are many outdoor markets and Ann Arbor has the Farmers Market. The Neckar River, filled with punting boats, flows through Tübingen and the Huron River, filled with canoes, flows through Ann Arbor. Our organization ‘Friends of the City Partnership Tübingen – Ann Arbor,’ founded in 2005, has worked to keep the communication between the two cities alive through exchanges of high school students and travel and music groups. In our latest Zoom ‘Conversation with Ann Arbor,’ one participant was amazed at how similar our concerns and reactions were to the COVID-19 pandemic and to the protests of Black Lives Matter.

I am so grateful to be able to share and compare these experiences, and, thus, feel a part, after so many years, of both cultures.”