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Austrian Way of Life

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Austrian Way of Life

I interviewed a friend I made out here back in September, Jesse. By day he is a food delivery driver, but in just about every free chance he has he is working on coding for up and coming video games. When I first met him, I believed him to be from an English speaking country because his accent was so good. After getting to know him, I learned that he was from a province within Austria, Vorarlberg. This province is the farthest west in Austria. What is fascinating to learn from him is all the dialect differences simply between Austrians based on geography. There have been many instances this semester where I try to speak with him in his native tongue and he laughs; either it is the German way of saying a German word, or it is very “Vienna.” Coming from the U.S. this is something that should not have come as such a surprise, but in a country as small as Austria (roughly equivalent to the size of Maine) I did not think much about this before speaking. Another thing I found interesting about him was that he chose not to attend university. Higher education out here is very easy to acquire as the price is nonexistent in comparison to what we expect to pay back at home. He did not learn his (flawless) English from a program, as said above; he learned by watching shows in English and various YouTube tutorials. He chose not to attend university as he felt he could make a name for himself on his own. If I had to write a longer piece on him, it would be the first quarter in a biography outlining a motivating tale of a truly self-made man. Once again, the way in which education is at his fingertips and is in fact a cultural norm, but he denies it and is making connections is a surprise to me.

Some general differences between Austria and life back at home are simultaneously vast and so blurred sometimes you can trick yourself that you are in a German speaking section of America. The politics are obviously structured in the style of European democracy,

parliament, chancellor, president and so on. The outlook on politics is much like the U.S.; with dividing views on how the country should function and so on. What is amazingly different is that they are not trapped in a simple-minded two-part system. Parties in Parliament are diverse with varying agendas. What is more inspiring is that these parties will create a coalition with one another to perpetuate their own agendas. They work together for a higher purpose! The city of Vienna can be cynically perceived as yet another city. But the architecture that is just casually around is so different. The amount of times I have heard; “this building is older than your constitution” is amazing! And the craftsmanship that goes into the structure will never cease to amaze me. On an entirely different note and generally speaking, Austrians do not eat spicy food as we are used to back home. Sure, you can get a mouth scorching pepper here and there, but it is simply not common. Similarity in condiments are favored by the public. I have not seen a simple yellow mustard out here and mayonnaise on a chicken sandwich is confusing to the public, once again speaking very generally. They use chili sauce?! Fascinating. I wouldn't recommend it if the first is your favorite back in the states.

Interviewing Jesse was just another conversation between us. We have hung out only a couple times in the past two months but most of the time our conversations consist of something comparing our homelands. After being here for this extended period, this interview did little to change how I perceive the nation I am in and how I reflect on my home (excluding my envy with their acceptance of multiple active political parties). Overall, everywhere you go is going to be different, whether it be driving from Portland up into Washington or Vienna to Eisenstadt. Understanding that ethnocentrism is a thought process to avoid will make this simple statement easy to comprehend. The beautiful part about being in a country so heavily influenced by home, and really vice versa, is that we overlap on so many miniscule things that relating to a total stranger and beginning a life-long friendship is effortless.