The early bird gets the worm

Having fully adjusted to my move down to North Carolina from Canada, I was really looking forward to my impending summer adventure to Europe. I had just finished my sophomore year of high school and had made it to the age of adulthood; I was sixteen! Well at least that is how I saw it. I was embarking on an opportunity of a lifetime. Not only was I going to work the vineyards of Germany I was going to be able to do all this and enjoy being able to officially, and legally I may add, drink beer. Just the prospect of this seemed somewhat directly linked to the increased facial hair that had been revealed on my otherwise baby face. What I did not realize was that the German people had a very strong work ethic and I was in for quite the challenge. They really take to heart that it is okay to play hard as long as you work twice as hard.

When I first arrived in Germany the culture difference came as quite the shock. The language that was being spoken all around me was completely foreign. Except for my Aunt Marri and my Uncle Willy (the story book definition of a German farmer), I had really no way to communicate with the others on the farm. Willy’s parents did not speak a lick of English and my only way to talk with them was through very creative and time-consuming hand gestures. I was never quite sure if they understood me or waved their heads back to make me feel better. It is entirely possible that the hand gestures that were returned were telling a completely different story than what I was.

Besides my initial cursory glance of the German people offered through the observations of the occupants of the farm, I had no real clue on what the rest of Germany had to offer, but I would soon find out. My first day involved an exciting drive on the Autobahn exceeding speeds of 140 km, an introduction to the family at the farm and a snack to tide me over until morning since I had arrived so late at night. I was exhausted already and ready to call it a night. I went to my Uncle to offer my appreciation for having me and bid him a good night. He was very welcoming and returned my bid good night. He then followed up with “Make sure to get a good rest because we are getting up at sunrise to go up to work the Vineyards!”. Whoa, I thought to myself. What did he mean, sunrise? Didn’t he get that I was on vacation from school and I had plans of relaxation? The whole work thing was not in the least bit an entertaining concept. I wanted to see German Castles, shop local shops, meet a local German girl. There was so much I wanted to get done and work was no-where on my to-do list. Mixed with jet lag and utter disappointment, I spent much of the night lying in bed staring into the shadows of the ceiling. By the time sunrise came, not only was I dreading the work but was in a half zombie trance by my lack of sleep.

I begrudgingly made my way down to the kitchen to an already wake and able work force. Apparently German farmers did not like to eat breakfast either. “The early bird gets the worm!”, my uncle belched out. “Get some coffee so that we can be on our way!”, followed his early morning lesson with the worm. The morning fog slowly lifted as the caffeine entered my veins and the sleepiness creeped out. The drive out to the Vineyard was very surreal. I was amazed at the architecture, the beauty of the mountains and stunned by the Vineyards. These things combined lifted my spirits quite well. I decided to give the whole work thing a chance.

The work itself was not overcomplicated. It just consisted of a monotonous decision process of finding new grapes to remove from the vine so that the older more mature grapes would be left to make the wine. The hours were long and heat was high. The day lasted from sunrise to sundown and then some. By the end of our first day we had driven to four different vineyards and had thrown away about three truckloads of grapes. I was thoroughly exhausted yet again, having never recovered from my endless stare into the ceiling from the night before. Then the magical words flowed from my uncle’s mouth: “We are done for the day! Now we will go eat and have some beer.”. Those words were like music to my ears.

Finally, we made it to the small town of Kleinbottwar a little trek away from the farm and made our way to the local eatery. There was only one so it was not like we had any choice in the matter. We were quickly greeted by the staff and an array of local patrons. Everyone knew each other. I did not even need to ask: a beer was served. I felt instantly accepted. I quickly forgot about the long hours of work and my tired bones were rejuvenated with a second life. The local people knew a lot of English and could probably speak it better than some people I had met in North Carolina. At this point I fully appreciated my day of labor, my acceptance with my new set of peers, the feel of the cold beer flowing down my parched throat, and it hit me that yes, the early bird does indeed get the worm!