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Arthur F. Burns Fellowship Report

**Berliner Burnsie:  
Adventures of an American journalist abroad**

Our American hearts all jumped a little when we read the one petrifying phrase in the introduction manual for the 2010 Burns Fellowship program: business dress. The words loomed over us as we panicked, scanning the wardrobes in our brains for appropriate, formal clothes, and behaviors to match. In fright of what lay ahead – formalisms and formalities – we prepared to trade the plumber chat and blue jeans trademarked to our American newsrooms, for dress pants and words like, *bitte*.

But it took no longer than our first bus-about in Washington to realize that the Burns program was not about formal behaviors, it was about learning about each others' cultures, news production styles, and about one another. In the Burns fellowship I got the opportunity to see firsthand how German TV news is produced, embark on fascinating stories about the German culture, and meet friends that I will keep for a lifetime.

Arlie and Washington proved one of my best weeks during the whole experience. Bonding at nights over a beer in a local dive bar, preparing one another for what to expect abroad, playing card games by the pool – these moments gave an important overview for what to expect, and gave us the opportunity to make friends with fellow fellows. Two nights was the perfect amount to spend in Arlie – one of the most peaceful places I've been.

The week of lectures in Washington provided a number of different viewpoints which were interesting to hear. However, most of the speakers were focused on geo-political news; it would have been nice to also hear some speakers on social and cultural issues. The hotel was well-located and comfortable and the food was yummy throughout. Speaking of delicious food, I really enjoyed visiting the Ambassador's house; it gave us a chance to meet and mingle with Burnsie alum, and the view was absolutely incredible. I also loved hearing

the Burns alum discuss her winning project and see what could be possible during our time with the right mindset. It was inspiring.

Once in Berlin, we began to understand and communicate across cultural and language barriers. We were lucky to have so many of the German Burns fellows from Berlin set us up with friends, so as to provide a smoother integration into German society. Also, reaching out to Burns alum has been invaluable, as we were able to learn from the experiences of others to aid in our own journeys, share contacts, and share a few German beers.

The language class experience was helpful for me. As I had only studied German previously through Rosetta Stone, this course gave me a better base for the language. Though I was in 1A, the beginner course, I do wish the class moved at a faster pace. The teacher oftentimes wouldn't answer questions unless they were in her immediate lesson plans, and we spent a lot of time playing games in class. Perhaps the course lagged because they enrolled us in the first 2 weeks of a 4 week intensive, instead of a 2 week intensive. But either way, it was a good way to make friends in the city and gain a base for the language. To get the most out of the experience, you might have fellows do one week of just language classes and acclimating, and the second week, split the time between language classes and work, until entering the workplace full-time the third week and for the remainder of the time.

While on the fellowship, I thought I was supposed to work at the Hauptstadtstudio and MorgenMagazin. When I arrived, however, I was escorted to the Landesstudio, where I was told by the staff I would stay for 2 weeks (I kept correcting them, I'm with ZDF 7 weeks, but they told me I was with them only 2 weeks). I enjoyed the LandesStudio. They quickly welcomed me, and helped me with story contacts and translations. At the LandesStudio I was seated with the interns, but everyone made it clear they knew I was a real journalist. Unfortunately, just as I was starting to build relationships and work on projects with the

Landesstudio, I was told I would be relocating to MorgenMagazin.

My fellowship contact, Andrea Halte from MorgenMagazin, responded early with housing tips, but once I arrived at ZDF, was nowhere to be found for weeks. In my attempts to meet Andrea, however, I met several other MorgenMagazin employees who helped me get sorted there. Everyone was also very nice at the MorgenMagazin and welcomed me the best they could, but there weren't many ways to participate without fluent German, and with show production only every other week. They did help me sort through my own pitches and translate interviews. However, after 2 weeks ended in the MorgenMagazin, I sought Andrea and asked if I was meant to move to the HauptstadtStudio as originally listed, but the Hauptstadtstudio said they weren't in the market for a fellow, so I stayed at the MorgenMagazin another 3 weeks. By the end, I mostly ended up using the desk as a work station, while I worked on independent pitches and attempted to navigate the world of freelance.

I had the rare opportunity to interview primatologist Jane Goodall at her Berlin movie premiere, before sending the video to CNN Atlanta to package. It ran on our features show "Inside Africa" and on CNN.com. I also pitched story ideas to a variety of different stateside publications, on everything from currywurst to gentrification to an anti-discrimination German YouTube campaign. I intend to follow up on several of these stories when I return to the states. CNN.com also accepted a pitch for an article on Tempelhof Airport's role in Berlin today, which will appear on the site in the coming week or two.

Though my experience at ZDF proved a difficult placement for me, I quite enjoyed seeing how a German newsroom operated. I liked the way they built PKGs the opposite way as in the U.S.-- building a story with images first, and then writing the words to match, before voicing their own projects. There's much greater personal ownership of German news stories, and this was a refreshing sight compared to the U.S. factory line method of TV-journalism. If

you were to place someone at ZDF again, I think it would be most beneficial to stay in one studio the whole time. That way, it's possible to get your feet wet in one area, instead of skimming the surface across several.

The Burns reunion was excellent. It was a great opportunity to get together, touch base, and get to know Berlin and each other more. Potsdam was gorgeous, and I really wish we had been able to see the last tour of the day. After 45 minutes waiting in the cold for a cab that never came, and several unsuccessful phone call attempts to our potential guide, we returned to Berlin, but not without great disappointment. We were all tired and hungry by that point, so that may have dwindled our will to trudge forward, but we really, really felt awful about missing it. Some said too many tours for one day, but I think it was a good amount. I'm thankful we had the chance to see these places I would never have seen otherwise.

In all, I loved my experience in Berlin, got to see a new style of TV production, a new culture and gained new insight into the freelance marketplace. My deepest gratitude to the fellowship for the wonderful opportunity. From Ben Cannon's mustache to Jane Goodall's stuffed monkey to Adolf Hitler's airport, I saw things I never knew existed on this trip, and I grew as a person and a journalist. I know Germany will continue to inform my journalism career in the years to come.