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Home Media: Freelancer, Peachtree City, GA
Guest Media: Der Spiegel, Berlin

Eric Ulken spent four years at the *Los Angeles Times*, most recently as editor for interactive technology. In this role he guided the paper's development of new ways of collecting, organizing and presenting information through the use of database, mapping and visualization tools. Among the projects he led was the *Homicide Map*, an effort to illustrate demographic and geographic trends in homicides in Los Angeles County. He was previously managing editor for news at the *Times*' website, *latimes.com*.

Eric left the *Times* in November 2008 to spend a year studying effects of new technology on the practice of journalism around the world. He will use his time in Germany to further this research.

Eric holds a bachelor of journalism in broadcast news from the University of Missouri-Columbia, and a master's degree in communication management from the University of Southern California. He is originally from New Orleans.

Report by Eric Ulken

I am sitting in an Italian restaurant in Berlin Mitte, by myself, eating a panino and reading Wladimir Kaminer's *Russendisko*, a collection of humorous short stories about a Russian Jewish immigrant's experiences in post-reunification Berlin. The author pokes fun in equal measure at his fellow Ausländer -- foreigners -- and at the German society that surrounds them.

The restaurant's Italian proprietor walks past and, spying the book, stops to ask me how I like it. „It's very funny,“ I say, my accent giving me away as an Ausländer too. „That is the first book I ever read in German,“ he tells me, his smile conveying an understood kinship. There is something that binds foreigners together here.

The new Berlin is a city of Ausländer. You see this in the diversity of ethnic restaurants, of course, but also in the faces of the people. It looks entirely unlike the Germany I saw as a child on visits to relatives, when about the only foreigners I remember encountering were panhandlers in train stations and the occasional American GI. Everyone and everything seemed more, well, German then.

I probably was more German, too. My father, who was born and raised in Lower Saxony but has lived in the U.S. since college, brought me over during the summers to spend time with family. I was supposed to learn the language, which I did -- though after years of infrequent use, my Deutsch decayed to what I would describe as „haltin-gly conversational.“

Into this different Germany I descended on July 27, 2009, on a break from my career as an editor for American newspaper websites and bound for a two-month placement at Spiegel Online, the web edition of the country's leading newsweekly.

What am I doing here? I asked myself. I am a journalist, but I am not a reporter. I don't even like to write. What can I do on a journalism fellowship as a non-fluent non-reporting non-writer? (I'm what you'd call a non-traditional Burns Fellow.)

Quite a bit, it turned out: At Spiegel Online, I edited stories and interactive packages, translated interviews, built photo galleries and consulted with top editors on social media and search engine optimization. On Election Day, as voters selected a new parliament, I suggested doing live updates on the English site's Twitter feed. Daryl

Lindsey, editor of Spiegel International, gave me the go-ahead, and I spent the evening live-Tweeting the election results and reactions.

I also followed the trends and happenings in online journalism in Germany and wrote about them for a couple of blogs.

But what I found most rewarding was the experience of living and learning in Berlin. I steeped myself in German politics -- not hard to do with a national campaign in full force, and it helped that the roommate I found on Craigslist happened to work in the office of a member of parliament. I read up on the history of the city and then photographed places I'd read about. Living in what was once East Berlin, I came away with a much fuller understanding of the former East and its culture and lifestyle. And, thanks in part to the language training provided for Burns Fellows at the Goethe Institut, I finally acquired enough confidence with the language to use it in a professional setting.

In a city of *Ausländer*, I fit right in. I may be less German today, but I feel more at home there than ever before.

Some tips for Berlin-bound Burns Fellows

I am not a beer drinker. In my 10 weeks in Germany, though, I may have consumed more beer than in the preceding 10 years. And I even learned to like the taste. So that's tip number one: Go with the flow, and you might be pleasantly surprised by the result. Here are some more specific suggestions for future Burnsies in Berlin:

- Get a bicycle. I didn't, and I wish I had. Distances in Berlin are larger than they appear on a map, and even with a fully-functional public transit network (I was there during the Great S-Bahn Debacle of 2009), you'll find yourself spending a lot of time walking and waiting for trains and buses. Second-hand bicycles are readily available and relatively cheap.
- Don't bother going up to the top of the Fernsehturm. The experience is overrated, and the iconic East German television tower (designed by a Japanese architect) looks better from the outside anyway. Instead, for a spectacular view of the city, climb the stairs to the top of the Berliner Dom around sunset.
- Hang out with real Germans. There are so many anglophone expats in Berlin, it's easy to join that community and forget they're a small minority of the population. I met an American who'd lived in Berlin for five years and had never learned Ger-

man. It wouldn't be hard to do, but think how much you'd miss. (The Burns alumni network could help you locate a „real German“ or two.)

- If you are craving good Mexican food -- an exceedingly rare commodity anywhere in Europe -- make sure you get to Maria Bonita on Danziger Straße in Prenzlauer Berg. It's run by a Mexican, an American and an Australian, and the food is every bit as good as what I am used to in California. No joke.
- Enjoy the world-class culture. With three opera companies, seven symphony orchestras and more museums than you can count, Berlin is awash in arts. And because most institutions are government subsidized, enjoying all this culture is relatively cheap. I was in Berlin for the annual Lange Nacht der Museen (Long Night of Museums), when dozens of museums stay open late and a single ticket will get you into all of them.
- If your German is up to the task, pick up a copy of *Russendisko* -- it's a fairly easy read and a nice introduction to Berlin from the eyes of an immigrant (which you'll be, at least temporarily). Also check out the actual Russian Disco night at Kaffee Burger, where the author is a frequent DJ.
- It's not Berlin, but: If you get the chance to take in Munich's Oktoberfest celebrations, go -- even if you're not a beer fan.