

By Tim Devaney
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Dear Frank, Emily, and members of the board,

I want to thank you for sending me to Germany on the Arthur Burns fellowship. My time in Germany was one of the best experiences of my life, both professionally and personally, and I would highly recommend the Arthur Burns fellowship to other young journalists in the future.

You really couldn't have picked a better time to send a group of journalists to Germany. The elections, NSA surveillance scandal, negotiations for a U.S.-EU trade agreement. It was a great time to be a reporter there.

I lived in Munich, where I was assigned to the economics department at The Sueddeutsche Zeitung, the largest daily newspaper in Germany. I couldn't have asked for a better host newspaper. It was a bit overwhelming at first, because I don't speak German. They would invite me to the news meetings every morning, but I wouldn't understand a word they were saying. I went anyways, hoping to pick up the language. To their credit, they could have written me off because I didn't speak German but they didn't. I found the reporters and editors there to be friendly and more than willing to work with me and teach me about German politics and the media. I also tried to keep an open mind. I knew the best way I could contribute was by offering my American perspective and expertise about Wall Street. In the news meetings, I would listen for them to mention American companies, and then offer to help out with those stories. Usually, that meant calling my sources back home and getting quotes for other SZ reporters. Considering that I couldn't speak or write in German, I was happy to contribute to the team in anyway I could. I also wrote a few stories of my own for SZ, and they were willing to translate them from English to German. From talking to some of the other fellows, I learned this level of camaraderie wasn't always the case at other newspapers and magazines. Some of the fellows were told they couldn't participate, because they didn't speak German. On that note, I give a lot of credit to SZ for not letting my language barrier get in the way of the fellowship.

Granted, some of the SZ reporters and editors thought it was ironic that I was working there. Back home, I write for The Washington Times, which is editorially conservative, and so many people, both in Washington and Germany, assume I am a biased conservative journalist. SZ, on the other hand, is editorially quite liberal in the American sense of the word. But I thought it was the perfect spot for me to prove that I am not a conservative journalist or a liberal journalist. I am simply a journalist who tries to write fair and balanced stories. So I hope that working for SZ will, in fact, balance out my resume and show that.

The question was raised as to whether future fellows should be connected to a German newspaper, or simply write full-time as foreign correspondents for their home newspapers. I appreciated being connected to SZ for several reasons. First, it helped me stay focused by going into the office every morning. If I was writing from home, I'm not sure I would have the discipline to wake up every morning and write. It also helped to have an office to go to where I could make phone calls and surf the Web. Second, going to a new country can be quite confusing, but being around other reporters on a daily basis who could answer my questions definitely helped make for a smooth transition. Third, and possibly most importantly, working with SZ helped me develop connections with a number of journalists there, with whom I plan to stay in touch. For fellows who are interested in going back to Germany eventually, this is worthwhile, because they might be able to help you find a job over there someday.

That said, I spent most of my time writing as a foreign correspondent for my home newspaper, The Washington Times. This may not have been the case for other fellows, because I know some of their home newspapers were not interested in stories from Germany. But my newspaper wanted me to file stories about the German elections. Since there was no language barrier there, I spent more time writing for them. I tried to find short, but interesting stories on a daily basis that would read well on the Web, from politicians trying to create a vegetarian day once a week and ban sausages to polls showing that President Obama was more popular in Germany than Angela Merkel, even after the NSA spying scandal broke. From this perspective, I thought the fellowship went quite well.

From a professional standpoint, the fellowship helped me prove to my home newspaper, and to myself, that I can cover politics and foreign news. Since I graduated from college, I have been a business reporter, but the opportunity to cover the German elections gave me a chance to prove myself in another beat. This will come in handy as I'm based in Washington, D.C., and there is plenty of political news to write about here.

The fellowship also gave me a chance to build sources throughout Germany, which I hope will help cement me as a European expert at my home newspaper going forward. I spent a couple weeks traveling around Germany to meet with pollsters, economists, and other experts that I plan to stay in touch with. Of course, I could have called these people from Washington, but meeting them in person will make for a much stronger connection.

I appreciated the fact that the fellowship paid for us to take language classes, but I wish I had come in with a better grasp of German. I picked up a few phrases here and there, but I think I would have learned more if I had a basic grounding in German before I got there. Not to say that this should stop Americans who don't speak German from going, but I think it would be in their best interest to spend more time learning German before they go. That said, I was able to get around just fine, because everyone there speaks English.

The highlight of my fellowship came in late August, when my host newspaper asked me to join a team of investigative reporters that was working directly with American whistleblower Edward Snowden to expose the secrets of spy agencies around the world.

By that time, I had been at the Sueddeutsche Zeitung for about a month, and word spread that there was an American journalist in the newsroom. The investigative team, which was reporting on the latest batch of secret files from Snowden, tracked me down to help translate the story into English. Generally, the Sueddeutsche Zeitung, or SZ as the paper is known to locals, only writes for a German audience, but the editors felt the story was important enough that they wanted to share it with the rest of the world.

The Sueddeutsche Zeitung initially tried out another translator on the story, but the translation didn't read well. That's when they turned to me, so they could have an American writer translating the story into his native language. I spoke with the point man on the investigative team to get the gist of the story, and then wrote my own version, rather than translating word-for-word like the newspaper originally tried to do.

This wasn't the first Snowden story to hit the newsstands. The Guardian's Glenn Greenwald brought Snowden, a former NSA contractor turned whistleblower or traitor, depending on your interpretation, and the National Security Agency to the world's attention a few months earlier. But as the story

unfolded, reporters at the Sueddeutsche Zeitung got close to Snowden, presumably, in part, because it is the biggest daily newspaper in Germany, and Snowden wanted to work with a publication that had enough clout and scope to reach the entire country.

Even though most of the reporting happened before I was brought in, I felt privileged as a reporter to play just a small part in the biggest story of the year.

The Sueddeutsche Zeitung story took a break from focusing on the NSA to look at the involvement of its sister organization across the Atlantic, the British Government Communications Headquarters (BGCH), which is more relevant to Europeans.

In our report, we found that the BGCH had access to the majority of telephone and Internet communications flowing throughout Europe. The spy agency could listen to phone calls, read emails and text messages, and see which websites Internet users from all around the world were visiting.

Of course, this was just the latest in a long list of revelations from Snowden. But participating in even one Snowden story made me feel like I was part of the team and able to contribute to my host newspaper in at least a small way while I was there.

In the end, the two months I spent in Germany went by all too fast, but it gave me a chance to experience Germany, which piqued my interest in returning to the country at some point.

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Below are links to the 17 stories I wrote for The Washington Times while I was in Germany. I wasn't able to retrieve the stories I wrote for SZ, because they told me they didn't place them online.

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/aug/8/nsa-scandal-weakens-us-in-eu-trade-talks/>
<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/aug/8/german-bakery-honors-snowden-new-line-sweets/>
<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/aug/9/german-politicians-push-sausage-ban/>
<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/aug/12/furor-over-fuehrer-in-the-wine-aisle/>
<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/aug/20/ach-du-lager-german-brewers-face-massive-price-fix/>
<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/aug/25/germany-is-likely-to-forge-ahead-with-merkel-polic/>
<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/aug/27/germany-facing-increased-pressure-syria-crisis-bui/>
<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/aug/27/obama-messiah-would-give-german-chancellor-angela-/>
<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/aug/28/british-spy-group-european-web-phone-communication/>
<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/aug/28/german-firms-poach-email-business-after-nsa-snoop-/>
<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/sep/9/german-intel-assad-did-not-order-syria-gas-attack/>
<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/sep/10/greeces-economy-plays-role-in-german-election/>
<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/sep/17/bird-hand-proves-costly-german-challenger/>
<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/sep/19/merkel-cruising-coalition-to-govern-germany-in-que/>
<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/sep/22/german-chancellor-angela-merkel-wins-third->

term/

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/sep/23/merkel-reaches-out-rivals-coalition/>

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/oct/1/merkels-party-looks-to-social-democrats-for-ruling/>