

# (B) Logging On

Text: Anna Howard

**How more and more expats in Germany are sharing their voice on the web.**

**Jen, an American, writes her weblog (blog) 'Heisse Scheisse' from Darmstadt where she has lived for the last two years with her German husband. Blogging has given her back her voice. "Back home, I was the girl in class that the teacher had to tell to shut up. Here in Germany, because there is so much I don't understand, I'm silent most the time. Stuff is always flying around my head, but is hard to verbalise. Blogging gives me that outlet."**

As Jen says, "It's hard to be charming in a foreign language. It's hard to translate humour".

Living in a new country often throws up a myriad of daily challenges that aren't always easily understood by friends and family back home. "My family only understands the 'Living in Europe' that translates to worldliness, eating éclairs and drinking delicious wines. They don't see me standing in front of a Tierarzt with a sick cat, not understanding the sign that says to push the buzzer to open the door".

Whilst some bloggers in Germany may have first used their blog to keep connected with everyone back at home, others have found another advantage in the semi-anonymity of the web by using it to help them put their opinions about living in Germany out to a new wider online community.

"Culture Shock and the Blonde Librarian" is a blog created by Renée, an American living outside Munich. She explains, "At first it was a great way to rant (and still is)... it has since become a way for me to let my friends and family back home know what I am up to."

Renée's posts have included tips of what she wished she'd known before she moved to Germany including "bringing plenty of underwear, unless you're partial to thongs" and "don't be surprised when you learn stores aren't open on Sundays. (Not even Wal-Mart!). This type of daily entertaining journal has "received many comments from other expats telling me that they are happy to know the adjustments they are making to life abroad are not unique".

That is certainly something that Christina, who lives in a small town just south of Hannover,

would agree with. A "love immigrant", who moved from Canada to be with her German husband in 1990, she started her own blog earlier this year after reading other people's. Having made a lot of new friends through her blog "Just Call Me Mausi", she says that she now feels "I'm not alone in the expat adventure".

Neil an Englishman who lives in Baden-Württemberg near Stuttgart started his first blog in January last year because he noticed that, as he was starting to speak more German than English, his vocabulary was shrinking, "When I was no longer able to even do the simple crossword of the Guardian, I decided to write something, anything, on a regular basis just to make me use English more regularly."

Neil, thinks that "there's no typical Expat Blog in Germany – although any newcomer to Germany will have a 'the first time I visited a T-Punkt and tried to get a phone line' post or a comment about Deutsche Bahn: if the expat is British it will be gushing

in its admiration, if the expat is Swiss, it will be along the lines of 'the train I was meant to catch to Berlin yesterday was three minutes late, I suppose it's symptomatic of the country –everyone here is unpunctual' ". His own irreverent take on life in Germany, reflected in his own blog, is clear from his self-description: I'm English, I live in Germany. Sometimes I like it, sometimes I'm er, well, aware that no country can be completely perfect. As I often hear "I am thinking you understand, yes?

Nate, who has been living in Lüneburg for the past four years, started writing his Chill Most blog two years ago. His friends and family in the States regularly read the blog that he describes as



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For Nate, the number of readers he has isn't important, "I do this mainly for my family and friends", but he has found himself contacted for some unusual requests. "I helped an American find a copy shop in Hamburg and last week I helped an American band set up a show here in Lüneburg on their European tour. These things are normally very easy if you can speak the language so if it isn't too much trouble, I'll help where I can."

Whilst occasionally friendships have also extended into the 'offline' world, blogs are clearly proving a great unofficial community to both new and older expats. For fairly recent arrivals like Jen, she now finds that "once you have a friend or two, taking on a different culture isn't so daunting" and for the older hand, Neil, who arrived nine years ago, "I find it interesting to read other peoples' opinions, especially newcomers who notice all the things that astounded me when I first arrived... but now think of as normal, well, sort of normal."