

Living on More than one Continent

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Most all of us reading Facets are either non-Germans/ English speakers living in the Freiburg area or married to one. Many of us have been around for a while and are used to juggling lives on two continents. It is September and many of us went back to the US in August. I haven't been back for two years-which I think are outside healthy limits-for "home leave". But it seemed to take more time to get my feet on the ground this trip. It sounded like a long vacation (five weeks) -which it is- t be away from my real life and work, but it is the end of my trip in the US and I just begin to feel like I have landed. It was all too fast and too short.

The re-connecting process is probably slower the longer you live away and the older you get. My daughter can still get off an all night flight-arrive with a 9 hour time difference (west coast) and go out with friends to a party. Those days are gone for me. I am a zombie for two days and need to be taken care of. Then I can interact and step into this world which feels more and more I like it is on another planet. I enjoy it immensely-seeing things that were are a part of my personal biography and who I am. As we all know, things do change and the updating process takes awhile to process. Everything is familiar but at the same time more distant and different. I have used to be someone who had lived out of the country for a long time, became an expatriate, Sort of a Brazilian (since my daughter Was born in Fortaleza and we lived there for 14 years) to a member of the European Community. I am a fascinated visitor to my "old hunting grounds". Only something is odd. Things have changed as they do in slow waves and then suddenly they are different. This generates in me a sense of being a bit disoriented. The regular stuff on the street-I used a technique I discovered recently in Germany. I just said I was a foreigner and needed that they spoke more slowly and explained things to me. I discovered this trick sometime in the last two years in Germany that by switching into English and I got better service in the role of a US Tourist. Is this confusing to your sense of identity- well yes. Only I have gotten better at knowing that my identity is multi-faceted and adapts itself to where I am-to a degree. Mostly I am more comfortable being and outsider everywhere - with my islands (you know those places to have where you are at home) and being a concerned citizen of the world.

One of the things which was different for me being in the US -this time -was the surge of Patriotism and the number of flags being flown. I can't seem to generate this feeling anymore. Flag waving is also not very highly regarded in Germany (we did see a few around the time of the World Cup Championship), but it was skeptically commented upon. Naturally we know that nobody-except the most crazy or desperate-support terrorist activities and suicidal displays of opposition. And most of us know in our hearts that violence only generates more violence and this will move us deeper into a negative spiral. Our world seems explosive and fragile enough as it is. One friend told me that she saw a bumper sticker which said "Peace is Patriotic"- that sounds good to me. Others said that "we Americans" can't let the twin towers go unavenged, the media has constant stories of Sudam Hussain and Anthrax, but I was assured that the first amendment of the constitution still stands firm and I felt a bit more relieved that a new McCarthy era is not beginning. There are coming out more editorials which seem to understand that the US although a powerful democratic empire , has policies are not appreciated everywhere in the world and that working unilaterally is not necessarily the best foreign policy strategy. Also the some family psychology is being talked about with regard to President Bush's his relationship to his father . We all repeat family patterns and have unfinished business we take care of for our parent, but most of us are not affecting the whole world while working this out. I must say, however, that the Europeans tend to be slow in making their positions clear (complicated by their new challenge to work together as a European Community) and, I find they often take a back seat-glad to have the US do something and then tend to complain. We were and are all a bit frightened by how the "white men in suits"* are running our world .I guess the fact is human nature still has a few areas where our inter-being mindfulness needs to be developed.

Well it was an interesting visit-great to see old friends, eat ,drink, enjoy nature, go to museums and have quality time with my daughter. I hope you all enjoyed your August and I am curious to see what happens when I return to my life in Freiburg. I know all ready it will be somewhat disorienting and jet lag is harder going east.