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### Bread in Deutschland

When I decided to study in the US, I thought that it would be an easy transition for me coming from Germany. With this creative piece, I want to share my story about how the differences were more shocking than I expected; but, I learned to deal with them and adapted to my surroundings, coming to like and enjoy the differences.

I.

I am a twenty-seven-year-old man who has been able to fend for himself since the age of twelve, and I think I have figured out America. Five years of American literature convinces me that I know everything needed, that I will adapt right away to a novel culture. I think it will be easy considering that I am from Germany and believe my world to be similar.

But, on my second day in the US, an advisor takes us on a shopping trip to Walmart. Upon entering the immense building, I am immediately disabused. I feel like an ant amongst giants.

I wander just to find myself again in the garden section, or tire section, or *gun* section, or even in a bathroom. I am lost among car accessories, clothes, and plants. Lesson number one: German supermarkets are big; American supermarkets are gigantic.

I only plan on buying the most important items to survive the first week: butter, jam, ham, and bread, and there is lesson number two. Bread in Germany is crunchy, sugarless, dark or white, and big, medium, or small. I fail to find that in the US, an impossible task. Every bread contains sugar and is soft.

My frustration leads me to the baker, who is just about to take out a new batch of freshly baked bread. I ask him to keep one of the pieces of bread in the oven for another fifteen minutes to make sure that it gets crunchy.

His expression is priceless when he asks his supervisor whether he is allowed to do that. The supervisor obviously does not know and calls her manager, who approaches the scene shortly afterward.

An interrogation begins. *Where are you from? What are your intentions with our bread? Why would you want it burned?* My accent gives me away, a non-American, just wanting his bread to be crunchy, a novelty. I wait another ten minutes to get the bread and leave the bakery. When I am back at my apartment, I take out the warm loaf, hoping to bite into a piece of crunchy bread. It is still soft but I like it.

II.

"How are you?"

In Germany, these questions start a conversation.

Upon entering my first American shop, I am immediately asked how I am. At first, I'm irritated, asking myself why a stranger wants to know this.

I decide to be open to the novelty, so, I answer that I am well but overwhelmed because I have just arrived in the US. I tell the vendor that I'm excited to start my new adventure. Her expression is shocked. She smiles, slowly tiptoes away from me, approaches her colleague, and tells her all about our encounter.

*Did I say something wrong? Was I being rude?*

The following day, and after a night of contemplation, I'm ready to try again.

I enter a different shop just to experience the whole situation anew. Upon my entrance, I am asked, “How are you?”

Before I can answer, the person just leaves, leaving me stranded amidst cultural differences. Frustration gradually boiling up within me, I exit the shop to meet with my American colleague for lunch.

Agitated, I sit down to eat just to find my colleague regarding me and asking, “How have you been doing?”

Seismographs could likely detect my inner earthquakes. I beg him to explain to me why Americans keep asking me about my health but disappear. “It is a polite, superficial greeting Americans use.”

I demand more of the explanation. I have to learn to just smile and walk the other way too.

### III.

I go out to find a post office since my family loves to receive postcards. I walk, thinking about how I need to buy some stamps and postcards and enjoy wandering around Newark, getting to know my new home.

I find myself amongst trees in a park. I continue walking in the attempt to find my way. I take out my phone to try to search for my way back. My phone has no reception.

My last resort: I have to ask someone, something that does not come naturally to me.

I approach the first person I see and ask, “Where is the closest post office?” Of course, it does not occur to me to ask for the Main Street, a point of direction. The young woman looks at me in awe hiding her laughter behind her kindness.

“Just cross that small hill and follow this path for another half a mile.” I am five minutes north of the nearest post office.

I buy three cards, am asked: “How are you?” but I understand this time.