



## CREATING LIFELONG CONNECTIONS IN HEIDELBERG

Like HAI, my connection with Germany has been around over the past 25 years, and has started in and always brought me back to Heidelberg. I have been so fortunate to make wonderful friends, now essentially family, through many visits, solidified by spending two years for a Master's in Physics at Heidelberg University.

I first touched down in Frankfurt 1996 to participate in a summer exchange program for high school students, I was a teenager who had never taken a plane trip alone, much less out of the country. The program started with an orientation weekend in Heidelberg with other high schoolers from the U.S. We stayed at the Jugendherberge, and, as I walked along the Hauptstraße and marveled at the Schloss and Alte Brücke, and knew I wanted to come back after my summer with my host family in nearby Limburg an der Lahn.

As luck would have it, I was able to attend graduate school at Heidelberg University with a scholarship for »immediate graduate education« from the U.S. Naval Academy (USNA), sponsored by Otto Zipf – a retired Navy Commander with roots in Heidelberg. Even though my major at USNA was engineering, my minor was German and I was able to learn enough physics to secure acceptance to the Heidelberg master's program. I was part of a small cohort of other international students. We were made to feel especially welcome by Prof. Jörg Hüfner, who hosted us for frequent discussions over coffee and tea, and even an evening dinner at his house. The students in my year formed a special bond, and we realized that we all hailed from different continents, but we all came for the education and curriculum that Heidelberg had to offer.

I have so many fond memories of over two years in that amazing city. Being in the Navy meant being able to afford my own top-floor apartment am Marktplatz with the view of the castle and the Alte

Brücke, a place where I welcomed other students and plenty of visitors. My parents took their first trips overseas to come visit. I could stay with my host family as well as my host sister, who had stayed with my family in the U.S. for a year, during the holidays when I couldn't fly home. I especially loved hosting U.S. friends and visiting the homes of the friends I made: Poland, Italy, Spain, Croatia, Turkey, and Sri Lanka were just some of the places I traveled. Some of the best adventures were in and around Heidelberg; May Day on Thingstätte, Eurovision in Marstall, Fasching, burritos on Thanksgiving during trivia night at »Sean Og«, the view from Philosophenweg, just to name a few. I loved hearing the church bells from the Heiliggeistkirche, and even the crowds from Untere Straße after the bars closed on a particularly busy night.

When I later transferred communities in the Navy to one that placed more value on my advanced technical degree (engineering duty), I found out that the founder of the scholarship was also in the same specialty. Later, my host sister moved back to Germany for a job in Heidelberg, and we were meant to travel there for her wedding in 2020, a trip that I am looking forward to rescheduling so I can share the wonders of Heidelberg with my two young children. I know they will especially love the Bergbahn and exploring the castle grounds, but I'll probably also make sure they take the stairs at least once.

The #25HAI celebrations have come at a special time that reminds us no matter how far away we are, there are still special places and memories that can connect us.

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