

## Keeping the light on: Our shared future as British-German friends

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**Age: 18**

**School: Gymnasium Mellendorf**

*\*name was changed for data protection purposes*

Due to the very limited given number of words, the following contains snippets of my personal experiences with British-German friendship:

*The favourite food of British society is Chicken Tikka Masala* was the first thing I learned about Great Britain in school, maybe 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

Shortly after, my school offered an opportunity to take part in an exchange programme between my school and their partner school in England.

*Allergic to Penicillin, sensitive skin on lips* was written on the profile of the English exchange student I was assigned to: Molly James\*. Her profile also said that she likes to draw. Since I am an artistic person myself, I guess this was the reason the two of us were paired up by our teachers.

*Why is it a taboo to talk about periods?* Was one of the major topics we discussed on Molly's first night in Germany. Among other important teenage girl topics like crushes and annoying little brothers, we immediately found common ground despite our very different places and styles of upbringing.

*The first night I spent in England, I had the best night's sleep of my entire life.* Molly has three younger brothers. One of them let me use his room for the week. I vividly remember his red bedding; I believe it was plaid. After a long day of travel, I was so exhausted, but at the same time excited for the week that I fell dead asleep in the bed of Molly's little brother.

*Do you like Fish and Chips?* Is what Molly's parents asked me one day. They actually got it at a diner as takeout. It was one of the best foods I've ever tried. Soaked in brown vinegar. Delicious. So good, that we had it for dinner twice during that one week. After that, I desperately tried to find a comparable Fish and Chips anywhere else, but I've only been disappointed so far. English Fish and Chips: You have my heart.

*Today in school, all of us are getting vaccinated* Megan told me one morning while we were packing our snacks for the day: A sandwich and ALWAYS a small bag of "crisps". I don't know what it is about the crisps but all my German friends staying in other English families brought a small bag of them to school as well. We were so confused. I spent one day in Molly's school where everyone was wearing school uniforms. I remember that the teachers were nicer than in Germany and I even befriended the math teacher, he was so interested to hear about teaching techniques and subject matters in Germany. Every student got a vaccine that day. Molly was so scared of it and started crying. Deep down, in that moment I was so lucky us exchange students didn't have to get the vaccine because I would've cried even more than Molly did. But it also amazed me that schools provide vaccines, I never knew schools could do that; I guessed just not in Germany.

After my exchange experience in England, my childhood dream of doing an exchange year abroad really started to become a solid plan: I spent the school year 2019/20 in Vermont, USA with the CBYX programme. My host family was Indian but to this day, I've never eaten *Chicken Tikka Masala*, in case you were wondering.

After I returned, I started working for my exchange organisation as a volunteer. We offer exchange programmes to four English speaking countries which England is one of.

Nowadays, it's my passion to facilitate exchange students on their path to a successful exchange programme. I want to strengthen friendships across state borders and empower young people to become cosmopolitans and view the world, not just their native country, as their home. I want to prevent political actions of separation like the Brexit. Exchange programmes have a long tradition

and were invented to ultimately create world peace. Anyone who's interested, no matter their financial situation, social status etc. should be able to make such beautiful memories as I have and gain a broader view on the world and society as a whole. And I will continue to dedicate myself to student exchanges. Going abroad as a young person is one of the best things one can do at that age. It really changes you forever. And for me, this journey started with my school's little exchange programme to England.