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Bard Early College Summer Intensive at Bard College Berlin

My summer away from home

Slowly walking past the lines of people waiting for their passports to be checked, I stood there, waiting for my new freedom—a freedom that ultimately changed my perspective on life. With my boarding pass in one hand and my passport in the other, I carried a big gray backpack stuffed with school supplies, snacks, and the one thing I needed most—*Christopher Isherwood's The Berlin Stories* novel. Yet, I couldn't stand still—my hands were shaking, and my eyes widened. I was genuinely nervous being away from my mother and sisters, as we had never been separated before. Instead of coming home after school each day, I would be in an entirely different country, taking new classes, and experiencing a new environment. Three whole weeks away from them. But... this was my moment to become independent, to recognize what I was truly capable of.

And so, there I was in Berlin, Germany—a city known for its political, cultural, and impactful center in Europe. But this time, it was different. Instead of imagining myself with my mother and sisters, I found myself surrounded by various people from diverse backgrounds, each representing a different Bard Early College: Baltimore, New Orleans, Manhattan, and much more. I started to create relationships, connections, and meaningful conversations with others I never thought I would make. Building upon this, I shared dorms with others, ate at the same dining table, laughed and giggled, and discussed our classes together—*Berlin Graphic Novel* and *Screenwriting*. Each conversation felt like each part of me had been rediscovered, but more importantly, it felt truly like home.

Walking to class was not my usual commute like it was in NYC. Instead of an hour-long commute, transferring from the J to the E, I was now walking to class, approximately 5 minutes away from my dorm. No headphones blasting music this time to trap out the chaos of the trains—instead, I wanted to absorb the serene atmosphere of Berlin, smell the breezy air, surround myself with nature, and most importantly I wanted to hear the German Language.

Hearing words like “Danke, Bitte, and Halo” was very different for me, yet it was something I found interesting, as I wanted to do more with the language. Walking to the Rewe supermarket to grab some key German essentials like sparkling water, twisters, and German snacks, I'd greet the cashier with “Hallo” instead of “hello,” and when I asked for something, “Bitte” replaced “please”. Little by little, German culture became a part of me.

However, that was not all, walking toward the Sunday flea market in Berlin, the vibrant city's culture surrounded me. The air was not only surrounded by the German language but also by the diverse people. As I moved closer to the crowded area, I could see all types of jewelry, artifacts, and even wood-crafted pencils on the tables. In the midst of it all, I spotted a guy wearing a large, sparkling helmet, singing and dancing in the middle of the crowd. I, too, joined that crowd, recording, and singing, being a part of that culture.

As I strolled along the long sidewalk through the market, trying to reach my destination, “Excuse me” in German became my go-to phrase. I had a mission: to buy my friends and family souvenirs, as it was my

final days in Berlin. But more than this, I discovered a new excitement: Bargaining. Speaking to the vendors was comforting to me, although I did not even fully understand or know them. I was able to build conversations with them, as it gave me a sense of control over what I wanted and why I wanted it. In the end, I picked up plenty of souvenirs for my family—a Berlin jersey, a Berlin fridge magnet, and the one item that captured all the memories of Berlin with my friends: a camera I bargained for just 40 euros.

As our flea market adventure came to an end, my friends and I traveled back to our dorm. Although we did not fully understand the language, we were able to return to what felt like my home away from my home.

My experience at the Bard Early College Summer Intensive in Berlin was truly life-changing for me. It opened my eyes to a new world, new perspectives, concepts, and new ideas, but most importantly the community formed at this program was something not like others. I felt safe, and comfortable, and felt like I had so much freedom in a world where sometimes freedom feels limited. I met new people, not just from NYC but from different parts of the world, which opened my eyes to the diversity of the world.