

Winner AmCham Germany Airlift Contest 2018

About the Airlift Contest:

Seventy years ago, the Berlin Airlift sent an important signal for the post-war transatlantic friendship. At a time when this friendship is no longer taken for granted, today's young generation has a unique opportunity to shape the future of the German-American partnership. That's why AmCham Germany took this important anniversary for the city of Berlin as an opportunity to hold a contest for young people.

We wanted to hear from 16-to-26 year olds what the transatlantic partnership means to them and how they live and experience it today.

We received creative and inventive essays, reports, poems, short stories, video blogs, and podcasts. With their entries, all winners send a positive signal for the stability of our shared transatlantic values and the human connections that exist beyond the changing political landscape. They all frame the German-American friendship in terms of human connections that every one of us has the power to shape and take ownership of in our daily lives.

AmCham Germany is committed to instilling the next generation of decision-makers with a passion and an appreciation for what is still the world's most important economic and political partnership. The Berlin Airlift Contest is just one of the many ways we're doing this.

America Gives Me Wings

By Tim Oswald
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It was a cold winter day in Berlin sometime in January 1948. She had her two kids to feed and the rations ran out faster than she could see. "Fortunately, this winter is mild, and the Americans can fly more frequently," she thought, but the last couple of days have been getting rougher and supplies in the city haven't been getting lower. "What if they can't fly," she contemplated. All she wanted was for her children to grow up happy and have a decent future but with supplies running even lower, they would have to make a cut somewhere and would that be her or her kids? So, she sat there, anxiously waiting in her apartment, hoping that she would hear the roar of the Douglas C-54 Skymaster soon, which would indicate that there's new supplies and with that new hope for her and her children.

It was a cold winter day in a small town in the Southwest of Germany sometime in 2017. Here I was: It had been over 6 months since I had first applied for the Congress Bundestag Youth Exchange that would make my dream come true: to spend a high school year in America. After people at YFU had looked through my written application, I was invited to an interview in November. The room was filled with 13 other young students just as qualified and eager to make the best decision of their lives and hop across the pond to find their own wings. The interview was over quickly and I spent the next two and a half waiting with great anticipation for the letter that would tell me that my dream would come true. But it was well into January and some students had already been accepted, so I wondered: "What if it will never come?"

The last couple of days had been rough for her. NOW the supplies were running really low. Yesterday they had barley had any dinner because she assumed that they might have to live off what remained for the next couple of days till more supplies could be flown into the isolated metropolis. Especially her 12-year-old was getting extremely hungry and constantly complained about not having enough to

eat. "I wish I could give you more food, but your brother needs to eat too," she said, not even mentioning the fact that she hadn't eaten for two days now.

I had just finished writing a strenuous exam when I got home from school exhausted. As always, I grabbed the mail on my way in and as I flipped through the letters, advertisements and shopping catalogues I found this one letter from the German "Bundestag". I had to look twice because I couldn't believe my eyes. I ran upstairs getting ready to open it. But I was still far from feeling certain. After all, it could still be a rejection...

It was a cold night and she was finally able to shut her eyes for a couple of hours. Bundled up in numerous blankets, she was abruptly woken up by the roaring sound of the 4 x Pratt & Whitney R-2000-9 radial engines of the C-54 passing right over her home. "Essen, Mama," the kids kept on yelling while they ran towards her bed. She was a strong woman and had never cried in her whole life, not even during the war when she had left her husband because she knew she had to be strong for her kids, but this time it was different: it was only her and the kids and they were getting skinnier and skinnier from day to day. She was afraid they might not be able to make it, so she just sat there, after she was woken up by the airplane, unable to say a word with the tears of relief slowly running down her cheeks.

I opened the letter with shaking hands and clumsily unfolded the paper. "Und," asked my mom, "was steht drin?" I remember looking up from the letter to look her in the eyes and that moment I just started running towards her to hug her with tears gently rolling down my cheeks. "I DID IT," I yelled overcome with joy, "I DID IT, I AM GOING TO AMERICA!" But at that point I hardly had any idea what was ahead of me.

It is summer 1951: The days of the Berlin Blockade are long gone. Thanks to the efforts of the allied troops the supplies soon were restocked, so that she and her kids were saved from the ugly death of starvation. She is standing at Tegel Airport getting ready to say goodbye to her now 15-year-old son that was just selected as one of the 75 first participants in the YFU organized and State Department funded exchange program to Michigan in the United States of America. As she waves goodbye to her beloved son, she wonders if they would ever have ended up here if it weren't for those "Rosinenbomber" 3 years ago that would form the beginning of the German-American friendship.

Finally, summer came, and I was getting ready to take the trip of my life. There was nothing I had been anticipating more than the day of my departure. Sure, there were mixed feelings, but after all, this was what I had always dreamt of. Before I got ready to board my first flight from Frankfurt, notably the place where most planes of the Berlin Airlift took off, to Chicago on my journey to California. I waved goodbye to my parents thinking that without them and the CBYX program this dream of mine would have never come true.

So, here I am, just arrived from California and thinking about what the United States and the transatlantic relationship mean to me. The more I think about it, the more my thoughts revolve around one word: *freedom*. However, not the transfigured images of "freedom" most Germans have when they think of America, like cruising down Route 66 on a bike. No, when I think of *freedom* I think of wings. The wings America has given to the two million people of West Berlin and the wings America has given to me personally. Wings that allow people to be free individuals who have their own opinion, who pursue their own dreams and live a fulfilled and happy life. Wings that allowed the people of West Berlin to survive and be free to become whoever they wanted to be because they were able to LIVE. America gave those wings to Germany and the people of West Berlin 70 years ago. And those wings originated in Frankfurt, Germany in form of C-54 Skymasters filled with supplies direly needed. 70 years later, I received my wings to find my true self at the very same place at Frankfurt Airport when I boarded flight LH430 to Chicago O'Hare.

During times where the transatlantic relationship is subject to increasing criticism, experiences like mine should not be taken for granted. I was able to find a second home 6000 miles away from my home in Germany which is one of the most beautiful experiences I have had in my whole life. The United States gave the German people wings 70 years ago, so that they could strive. Today, both the United States and Germany are giving wings to people all over the world. People find their new homes in our countries, are being integrated into our communities or receive assistance when they direly need it. All those are wings of different shapes and sizes that eventually help those people to be free. What unites us on both sides of the Atlantic is the belief that if you give people wings to be free, no matter what they may look like, they will fly high and strive.

70 years have gone by. The way the wings look has certainly changed but they still exist. America to me? That is *freedom*. *Freedom* to spread my wings and fly...

About AmCham Germany:

The American Chamber of Commerce in Germany e.V. is the largest business organization in Europe representing the interests of American and German businesses. It strives to enhance global economic and trade relations built on a strong foundation of American and German partnership. It actively supports and promotes its members' interests through its global networks in business, politics and AmChams worldwide. AmCham Germany enables cross-cultural understanding, cooperation and new investment through its commitment to transparent dialogue, unrestricted trade and a competitive and open business climate.

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