



VATERSPRACHE
KIRSTEN S. TRAYNOR

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We slipped our way into the small stone church, swirling in an eddy of locals. The small gothic spire rose high above. The seven of us mixed with nearby residents, all seeking a resting place. We funneled into the array of pews on Christmas Eve. My mother and I channeled into one pew; my father and family friends diverted a few rows back. I settled on the cold wooden bench, its curved lip smoothed by centuries of worshippers. Feet in thin leather boots, a heavy down coat over my dress, I nested into my spot, pulling warmth from the stranger on my other side. It had taken a bit of delicate coaxing to convince my mom to join us. She doesn't like Christianity forced on her when we're in Germany, clinging tightly to the rope of her Jewish faith, a buoy against a flood of whispers.

To the right of the altar, a giant fir filled the church with long sweeping arms, each fitted with flickering beeswax candles. The tree is much more sparsely branched than its American counterpart that twinkles with electric lights. As the chorus voices reverberated off the massive stone walls, I glanced at my mother. The music transfixed her, along with the flickering beauty of the flames, the life breathed into this vaulted stone. She inched forward in her seat, pulled by the performance.

The voices rose around me, my *Vatersprache*, the first language I mastered at age two in Wiesbaden, then lost again. We had returned to the States when I was five. My thick German accent held tight for over a year, haunting me to this day if I think too hard when pronouncing three.

Enveloped in the warmth of this holiday, I ached to live in this country again. I had spent three years here as a toddler and another five as a teenager. That Christmas Eve, when we returned home to our family friend's home outside Berlin, I started my application for a junior fellowship at Wiko. Right before I caught my flight home to Maryland to sign my divorce papers, I pressed the send button.

Six months seems like a long time. We all arrived with ambitious plans. Mine was to craft the foundation for a book and gain time to think, reflect. Instead I rebuilt the footing of who I am. Or at least jerry-rigged it, while I pondered my options. I felt snuffed out by a marriage I let drag on too long and unsure of what I wanted.

Six months isn't a long time. Right when I was finally getting into a productive routine, it was over. But short, intense stints with creatives from a wide range of fields produce ripple effects and a change in perspective. I have a new dual appointment at the Global Biosocial Complexity Initiative of Arizona State University and will be starting the other halftime position this fall at a robotics lab at the Freie Universität Berlin.

I resigned from editing a beekeeping trade magazine when I realized the owners didn't value scientific accuracy. When told to "only edit for grammar unless it was fictional," I stepped down. It was a position I loved, because it melded my scientific training with my creative background in writing and design. Putting together each issue kept me widely engaged with beekeepers. It hurt to leave; I was abandoning readers to whom I have a deep loyalty. After I left, many reached out to let me know they had enjoyed how I transformed and reinvigorated the magazine, which has been published continuously since 1861.

While I often experience bouts of impostor syndrome in science, I knew I was good at editing and finding interesting stories for the bee journal. My stubbornness kicked in. I don't give up when I care deeply. So during that winter at Wiko I laid the groundwork for a new quarterly magazine, which I am launching in January 2020 called *2 Million Blossoms: Protecting Our Pollinators* (www.2millionblossoms.com). Broadening beyond honeybees, I have lined up some phenomenal contributors for the inaugural issue – giants in the bee world: Marla Spivak, Mark Winston, and Dave Goulson. A book recommendation by Fellow Joan Strassmann led me to discover Craig Childs. In the first few pages of

his book *The Secret Knowledge of Water*, he writes about following bees to a hidden water source in the Arizona desert. I tracked him down on Facebook and invited him to submit a longer piece about pinpointing unknown water sources by tracking bees. He agreed.

Craig Child's submission references a scientific paper by Tom Seeley's lab on water foraging in honeybees. Maddie Ostwald is first author, and my colleague Michael Smith, whom I invited to Wiko during my stay, is coauthor. I love such serendipitous connections. I invited them to write a brief infobox about their experiment and why they conducted it to accompany Child's sensuous piece on precious water resources. I've secured funding from generous beekeepers to print the first issue and am planning a Kickstarter campaign to enroll subscribers this fall.

Wiko works in wonderful and unexpected ways. It was Michael Smith who introduced me to the robotics lab where I will be starting this fall. He's using Landgraf's tracking system to study honeybee collective behavior down in Constance. I've coordinated a meeting this fall for our labs (Max Planck Institute of Animal Behavior, Constance, Freie Universität Berlin, and Arizona State University) to meet in Berlin.

This summer I sold my house and bee business, which frees me to take advantage of interesting opportunities like the dual appointment in Arizona and Berlin. The research I conducted on the varroa parasite while in Berlin has resulted in a large international collaboration, and we are finishing up a review paper.

While I didn't get to use my German as frequently as I hoped in international Berlin, I felt as if I rekindled an important friendship with a childhood friend. Living in Germany feels like I've come home. Memories bubble up. Together the city and I embarked on new adventures. We stopped to watch street artists, we strolled along markets, always stopping to purchase olives and cheese. From the double decker bus, I spotted a few honeybee colonies hidden in the city's private gardens.

Six months is much too short a visit. But like a true friend, we might not see each other every day. Regardless of how much time we spend apart, when we reconvene, we'll recommence right where we left off. Berlin knows that I've already penciled some dates into my calendar.

The friendships and connections made while at Wiko endure long beyond the Fellowship. I'm regularly in touch with several Fellows. It's hard to regain footing after a major life event like a divorce. Wiko – embedded in a neighborhood dotted with pollinator meadows, beehives beside the lake, and delightful *Wildbienen* hotels – provided the perfect habitat.