

BOSTON



Newsletter from Boston/Cambridge

8 June 2008

TIME FLIES – DON'T FORGET TO LIVE!

Hey again,

first of all I'd like to apologise for the long period since I wrote the last news update. The last two months have been... slightly eventful.

One thing I realise more and more during my time here is the extreme cultural difference between Austria and the US. Everybody knows (and talks) about the stereotypical perception of Americans as ignorant, not very far-sighted or open to the world, and creating a nationalist melting pot of segregation. But I'd like to look at US society from another point of view.

What I admire about people here is that they do things with 100% dedication. From my experience, many people in Austria try to do many things at the same time without full commitment to any of those. (this is of course a generalised stereotypical and not generally applicable view)

Reasons for this may be manifold. One could be that the social system in Austria is "too good". People know that they can never fall in life because there's a network below, catching them in case something goes wrong. My hypothesis: the consequence – and this might be particularly Austrian peculiarity – is that people start to complain about banal things instead of pushing ahead. It seems to me that we're a slightly lazy, sarcastic, but often not too target-oriented country.

Why I think this? One very striking and eye-opening example is the discussion following this article: <http://futurezone.orf.at/hardcore/stories/273898>. It's unfortunately in German. The pattern is that one person makes a statement or expresses a new idea and the main strength of most people answering is to put it down; and this applies to other big Austrian newspapers or forums as well: being negative about everything, judging other's ideas as crap, but not being able to offer any alternative or creative addition to a problem solution. The consequence is that it's actually hard to come up with a new idea and get it accepted because feedback will not often be a constructive

and fostering appreciation, but more a destructive, “envy-driven” or even derogative dismissing brickbat.

In contrast, US-people continuously strive for being the best in whatever they do not looking aside. The primary reason for this is probably that there are huge social discrepancies and a lacking network of social security. In other words, people have to cover their own back (with a lot of money and a good insurance) in case they struggle in their lives. A highly questionable reason for being ambitious and eager!

In the end, I would not like to compare the two systems, and I definitely know that we’re better off in Austria than in most countries – even in Europe. But in my opinion, the cost of the well-established social system coupled with Austrian sarcasm and lacking self-identification is that people don’t appreciate.

A very contrasting example is Sweden, where people know who they are and don’t try to be somebody else; work “nine-to-five”, but do it with 100% focus. They are just enough being themselves, as well in professional as in private life. And this makes Swedish society very honest and straight-forward.



New York again – just an amazing city full of surprises. Pics at http://www.berndresch.com/pictures/0805_new_york.



Hongkong, a great experience. Lots of good/interesting food, amazingly friendly people, but a luggage-wise odyssey (received my bag two weeks after my flight). More pics at http://www.berndresch.com/pictures/0803_hongkong.

My 2-week stay in Austria was unfortunately totally consumed by working long hours. However, the fondue on Easter Sunday and skiing the day after compensated for a lot! Especially after my brutal 40-hour trip Hongkong – New York – Boston – Zurich – Munich – Salzburg – Tamsweg. The biggest problem arose from my airline's inability to deliver my luggage on time. A week after my flight I was told that my bag was actually in Japan... and in Anchorage the day before!! Hilarious, these guys!

Finally: more buzzword-like news:

- Volleyball: everything good, won two leagues (intramural A and intramural coed league) and played the US Open National Volleyball Championships (s. pic at the right)
- current weather conditions: muggy 32° (not Fahrenheit, but Celsius!!)
- next AUT stay: approx. 26 June to 10 July

All the best from the other side of the pond, Bernd.

