

Diplomacy means Friendship

This year is a special one for the diplomatic relationship between Austria and the USA. It is time to celebrate! In the last 175 years these two countries have come a long way and managed to make the Atlantic seem a little less big.

Two years ago I had the tremendous chance to come to the USA – not just as a visitor, but as a discoverer. I spent the most exciting and challenging year of my life as an exchange student. It was great fun to truly get involved in a different culture - without prejudices and open eyes. Not only did I learn a lot about tolerance and valuing each other, I also got to know myself better. Every year there are Austrian students who leave their comfortable home to come to America as young ambassadors. These young diplomats speak to a different audience than the professional representatives in Washington and Vienna. These Austrians force their American acquaintances to think about this little country in the heart of Europe. Thinking leads to caring and this is what we are aiming for – a world that cares about each other – without considering borders!

We only dislike what we do not know; for me getting to know something or someone means giving love and respect a chance. My schoolmates cooked a pumpkin-pie with me and I showed them how to make an Apfelstrudel. Diplomacy does not just take place at the White House. Sometimes it is also happening in the kitchens and back yards of western Pennsylvania. Together we found out that Austria and America have a lot more in common than the A's in their name.

For me diplomatic relations between Austria and the USA are much more than a forced treaty. They are a promise – a promise by friends. In my opinion there are two ways of becoming friends: one is to highlight the things we have in common and the other way is to celebrate the differences. In my year abroad I discovered that it really is a combination of both that bonds best.

The diplomatic connections between the US and Austria gave me the opportunity to start a new life and to find a second place on earth that I can call home. I am not related to anyone in America, but I still have the privilege to call them family. It is true that we cannot choose who we are related to, but sometimes destiny helps us to find new brothers and sisters. 70 years ago our connections were troubled by a horrible war and now I can talk to my US-grandfathers about their experiences in Europe. I am incredibly grateful for the diplomats who laid the foundation for a flourishing Austrian-American relationship. Without these efforts my life would not be as rich as it is. My family and friends in the USA show me every day that it is possible to cross the Atlantic – for a true friendship no obstacle is too big.