

Christina Siller

A small American Dream

What does it mean when one speaks of a small American dream or of a big dream from America? Is it the dream of emigrating for ever? Or of living and working there for just five years? Or of just trying ones own luck there, not knowing whether one will ever return to ones native land.

My personal dream began more or less by accident. In 1999 I visited the USA for the first time, together with my best friend. Her parents had just bought a holiday home in Florida and so they invited me to join them and spend my holidays there. My boyfriend came out to see me and in just 11 days we drove up the East Coast from Key West as far as Washington D.C., and also visited a friend of mine who was studying in Charlottesville. During this first holiday we gained all kinds of impressions of America, and began dreaming about going back again.

An advertisement on television for "The American Dream" – the agency that provides help and advice with residence permits for the States – and quite spontaneously my boyfriend and I took part in the Green Card lottery. Separately of course, to increase the chances of winning. I won on my first try – we just couldn't believe it!

On April 28, 2001 at around 9 p.m. I was rung by an employee from "The American Dream" and told that I'd won! Since that time our dream gradually started becoming a reality. But there has to be done much paperwork on the way to America. That involved the following: waiting for original documentation from the USA (roughly 20 pages in English); filling out the forms in English (country of birth, origin, family, education, professional qualifications, diseases, planned activities in the States, and so forth); sending the documentation back to America; waiting for the appointment at the US embassy in Frankfurt; travelling to Berlin to the "American Dream" winners' seminar; travelling to the embassy physician in Munich for a medical examination; going to the embassy in Frankfurt in January 2002 for the appointment; applying for all the required documentation (birth certificates in German and English, certificate of good conduct, school reports, financial statements from banks and insurance companies, etc.); travelling to the USA within six months (our third holiday, this time on the West Coast: California, Utah, Arizona and Nevada), a compulsory trip because otherwise the Green Card would lose its validity; and finally, waiting for the original Green Card to be sent

to my friends' American address (it doesn't get sent abroad, so providing an American address is one of the conditions).

The whole procedure – from the day I heard I had won the lottery to the day I actually held the Green Card in my hand – took one and a half years. This not only meant a great deal of patience, hard work and bureaucracy but also expense. Today's American Dream costs roughly 1000 Euros in sum; the embassy appointment in Frankfurt cost around 420 Dollars alone, the medical examination a further 120 Euros, and there were also the travel costs. On top of all this there were the charges for passport photos, photocopies, official documentation, postage and also the application fee for the lottery.

Despite all this I can still say I am a very happy winner, and I'm eager to seize this unique opportunity. From 2006 onwards we plan to go to the States for good and try our luck there. By the way, I'm 27 years old, I live in Nuremberg-Fürth, I studied business administration and I work in the marketing department of a bank. My boyfriend works as a technician. We're naturally planning to do the same kind of work in the States, but it's also important to keep one's options open and be ready to do something entirely new. That's the kind of attitude that takes a person furthest in a new and strange country.

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