

Congress-Bundestag host-family letter
By [Brian Tomasik](#)
written late 2004 or early 2005

This letter was written as part of my application for a Congress-Bundestag scholarship to pay for a year-long exchange in Germany. Because I ultimately didn't get the scholarship, this letter was never sent.

Part E — Host Family Letter

Please compose a letter on the topic described below. Please limit your response to two (2) typed pages.

Think about what you would like to say to your future German host family and what you would like them to know about you, your family, community and life in the U.S. Keeping in mind that this will be the first impression they have of you, compose and type in English a letter to your German host family. If selected to participate on the program, this letter will be used to introduce you to your host family.

Dear Host Family,

Guten Tag! My name is Brian Tomasik, and I am currently seventeen years old (though I will be eighteen by the time you read this). I live in the town of Knox, New York, which is near Albany, the state capital.

When I was little, my parents grew much of their food themselves on an organic farm. I remember accompanying them to feed hay bales to the cows or to collect eggs from the chickens or to pick tomatoes for making sauce. [...] My only sibling is my sister, Michelle; she lived with me and my mother until she graduated from high school two years ago and is now an undergraduate at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania. My family's only pet is a gray and white cat named Herky.¹

I have gone to schools of the Guilderland Central School District throughout my educational career. Since entering 6th grade at Farnsworth Middle School, I have taken a foreign language. I chose to take German, rather than French or Spanish, because I have some German background: my maternal great grandparents came from Germany, and my maternal great grandfather was a language professor who wrote a German-English technical dictionary and several textbooks. Now that I have taken German for seven years, I am fairly good at it, but I am nevertheless very excited about becoming much more fluent during my stay.

I am currently a senior at Guilderland Central High School. I enjoy virtually all of my classes there (not just German), and I am particularly interested in math, physical science, and social science. Because I enjoy so many different things, I will be going to a liberal-arts college after I finish my year with you. My career path at this point is very uncertain; I may end up being a scientist, a lawyer, or anything in between. But whatever I ultimately choose to do, it will be something that improves the quality of people's lives and of the planet that sustains them.

¹ Note from 4 Aug. 2014: I now don't support getting cats, because they cause suffering by eating meat and mice.

Environmental protection is probably my greatest passion.² I have been concerned about the earth's ecological state ever since I was little, but I became especially interested in the political aspects of environmentalism in 8th grade, when I heard Ralph Nader speak at a local college a few weeks after the 2000 presidential election in which he ran as the candidate of the Green Party. (Since then, I have become very supportive of the Green Party, and I am especially excited to find out more about the German Greens!) I am now president of the Student Environmental Action Coalition at the high school. The club carries out recycling of cans and bottles, invites speakers to come talk to students, writes advocacy letters to governmental and corporate decision makers, and volunteers at the Albany Pine Bush—a globally rare ecosystem that is sustained by fire. Since tenth grade, I have been encouraging my school district to purchase recycled copy paper instead of virgin copy paper; I have not yet been successful, but the administration has at least agreed to request the prices for both types of paper in future bids.

Another environmental project that I have undertaken concerns water quality in the town of Guilderland. The local Watervliet Reservoir, which supplies the drinking water for most of the town's population, is overwhelmed by invasive plants during the summer. This not only harms native plants and animals, but the added organic matter also leads to higher levels of carcinogenic chemicals forming during disinfection. In most lakes and reservoirs, the single factor that determines the level of plant growth is the concentration of the element phosphorus in the water, and for that reason, I have on three separate occasions tested reservoir water samples for levels of phosphorus. I first did this during the spring of my tenth-grade year as an extensive project for chemistry class, and I continued my research during the following two summers. The results from the last study were good enough that I wrote up a report of my findings and submitted it to the Intel Science Talent Search, a national science competition.

The environment is not my only concern, however; I am also currently the president of Youth Ending Hunger at the high school. This club raises money to donate to hunger organizations, volunteers at the local soup kitchen and food bank, and holds “hunger banquets”—events at which people are randomly served disparate amounts of food in order to visually demonstrate inequality in the world. Additionally, I am a member of Guilderland High School's chapter of Kids Can Free the Children—which works to end sweatshop labor—and of the Political Activist Coalition—a club in which students debate current political topics.

Though I tend to focus my attention on environmental and political issues, I am interested in other things as well. I helped to found a Math Club at the high school; the group solves math puzzles for fun and participates in six statewide competitions every year. At home, I have a big chalkboard on which I try to derive formulas and solve problems that I invent. I also enjoy playing chess, tennis, and ping-pong with my father. I do not often listen to music or watch television; instead, I prefer to read and to talk with my family members and friends.

I'm very excited to meet you and get to know you. I am sure that my stay in Germany will be immensely enjoyable and rewarding, and I hope that you will feel the same way about having me as your guest!

Sincerely,

Brian Tomasik

² Note from 4 Aug. 2014: This has now changed. See “[Applied Welfare Biology and Why Wild-Animal Advocates Should Focus on Not Spreading Nature](#)”.