

# Heidelberg grad seeks a normal life in U.S.

## Manuel Bartsch a man (still) without a country

By JENNIFER FEEHAN  
BLADE STAFF WRITER

TIFFIN -- Seven years ago when he was thrown in jail and nearly deported, Manuel Bartsch was a young man without a country.

Next week, the 24-year-old student will be a college graduate without a country.

Mr. Bartsch, whose case garnered international media attention when just a few days before Christmas, 2005, he was arrested by immigration agents in Cleveland and nearly deported to Germany, is set to graduate May 13 from Heidelberg University with a bachelor's degree in political science.

Despite his proud achievement, the Putnam County man remains "undocumented" status, does not have a Social Security number or a driver's license, and quite frankly isn't sure what's next.

"I would love to [work]. I would love to contribute to this country, give back to it," he said during an interview on the Tiffin campus he has called home for the last five years. "I just don't understand why they would educate people in my situation and deport them back and let other countries reap the benefits of the education system here. That's just the biggest thing that startles me about it all."

David Leopold, a Cleveland immigration attorney who took on his case when Mr. Bartsch was jailed as a senior at Pandora-Gilboa High School, said the government has dropped its case against him. But he remains in a legal limbo unless and until Congress changes the law to enable people like Mr. Bartsch to apply for citizenship.

"The good news is they're not pursuing him in terms of removing him," Mr. Leopold said. "The bad news is there's no status. He's not in a position to put himself on a pathway to compliance, which he really wants to do."

The situation angers David Hogan, professor and chairman of the history department at Heidelberg.

"It is absolutely illogical that no one can sort this out for him," said Mr. Hogan, who has gotten to know Mr. Bartsch in recent years as a student and describes him as "in the top 2 percent" of students he has taught "in terms of brilliance, work ethic, personal qualities."

"He's very charismatic. He has everything going for him," Mr. Hogan said. "He is the kind of person we want in this country. He's the kind of person any country would want. Think of all the

people with citizenship who are far less worthy of it. Here's someone who wants it because it's the only country and culture he's ever known."

Mr. Bartsch was born in Germany where he was raised by his maternal grandmother and her husband, Toby Deal, a Putnam County native. Mr. Bartsch said Mr. Deal, whom he calls Dad, met his grandmother in Germany, where he was taken for treatment after being wounded during the Vietnam War.

His grandmother was killed in an auto accident in 1993, and in 1997 -- when Mr. Bartsch was 10 -- Mr. Deal brought him to the United States on a 90-day visa waiver. Mr. Deal did not file any of the documents that could have allowed the youth to stay in the country legally, though that did not become apparent to Mr. Bartsch until he met with immigration officials in Cleveland in 2005 to try to straighten out his legal status. He wanted to get a driver's license and a Social Security number, but instead spent two weeks in jail wondering if he would ever be free again.

To Mr. Hogan, the student everyone calls "Manny" is not free.

"He can't work. He can't marry. He can't drive. He is literally about to become a nonperson. How can one exist?" he asked.

Although Mr. Bartsch has been in a long-term relationship with his high school sweetheart -- and she is talking marriage, he said -- he agreed, as part of the terms of his release, that he would not marry a U.S. citizen in order to stay in the country legally.

"The other option is to go into the military," Mr. Hogan said. "Let him prove his American-ness. He's all for that, but he can't do that either. There are so many positive things this kid could actually do, but he's forbidden from doing any of them. As much as I joke with him, I'm just kind of worried sick about him."

As someone who has not gotten summer jobs and who cannot jump in a car and drive where he likes, Mr. Bartsch does not seem angry about his situation. He thrived in college, served two terms as president of his fraternity, and made several trips to Washington, where he once testified in support of the Dream Act -- a bill that would enable immigrants with good moral character who came to the United States as children, lived here continuously, graduated from high school, and completed either two years of college or military service to obtain legal status.

Mr. Bartsch is frustrated by his situation but seems resigned to it for now. Asked what he'll do after he accepts his bachelor's degree at 2 p.m. May 13 in Seiberling Gymnasium at Heidelberg, he shook his head.

"That's up in the air. Hopefully I can get some work authorization that can occupy me for now," he said. "I would love to go to grad school, but I don't think that's a possibility due to the funds. That's extremely expensive. I'm kind of in limbo."

He said he'd love to work in local government, work for a state legislator or congressman though he knows he'd never get the clearance to do so.

"I'd like to get out there and be in the fight for things, especially on immigration," he said. "I would love to advocate for immigration and reform and passage of the Dream Act -- just the passion I have for that area."

Mr. Bartsch said he's extremely grateful to Heidelberg, which provided him with a special-circumstance scholarship that covered his tuition, and to the anonymous benefactor who paid for his room and board, making his upcoming graduation possible.

He doesn't know who helped him.

"Whoever did, I thank them with all my heart," he said, adding that he remains hopeful things will work out. "I love this country through and through -- the opportunities it has given me. Just to have the opportunity one day just to give back and be a citizen. That would be the most meaningful thing in the world to me."

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