

begin drinking the moment you lift your glass from the bar, often starting as you walk back to your table, because your pint is filled to the brim and there's no foam to prevent the beer from sloshing out over you or anyone else standing close by.

Believe it or not, though, being told you're a pig for drinking before you're officially allowed to is not the worst thing that could happen to you. If you forget to look someone in the eyes while clinking glasses — and no, we don't even have a proper word for *anstoßen* in English — you will be cursed with seven years' bad sex. Seven years! Is that not a little long? I thought seven years' bad luck was reserved for people who break mirrors.

Who came up with this bad-sex curse? There must be more to this tradition! I reckon some lazy lover somewhere came up with it as a sort of get-out-of-prison card, a joker if you will, for boring sex:  
Helmut: (exhaling cigarette smoke) How was it for you, mein Schatz?  
Schatz: (avoiding eye contact) Eh... fine, I guess.

Helmut: Ah, when you say it like that, you don't mean "fine". You mean "not good".

Schatz: You can read me like a book, Helmut.

Helmut: Maybe it's because you didn't look at me that one time when we were *anstoßing*.

Schatz: Helmut, that was 12 years ago. The curse only lasts seven years.

Helmut: Yes, that's true. How time flies!

Schatz: Hmm!

It's quite clever to make drinking etiquette the excuse, if you ask me. It's just a little unfair if you don't know the rules. But don't worry. Someone's sure to put you right.

## SIZE MATTERS

Houses and flats in the UK aren't sold by the square metre or square foot. Living accommodation is sold or let according to the number of rooms. You'll see property advertised as a "four-bedroom house" or a "two-bed flat". Nothing tells you how big it is, at least not until much further down in the description, or only in tiny print on the floor plan. A four-bedroom house may have 80 square metres or 280 square metres; it's still a four-bedroom house.

So, not being used to precise information when it came to accommodation, I wasn't really aware that the exact size of my living space was something I was expected to know in Germany. It became clear to me that size mattered only when I was trying to make small talk. At one particular party, after answering questions about where I came from and what I did, and why I had a German name, I remember someone asking me where I lived.

"I live in a WG," I said. (WG is another German word that English doesn't have an equivalent for. We'd say something like: "I share a flat with two friends.")

Anyway, the next question was: "How big is your room?"

"I don't know," I answered.

"What do you mean, you don't know? How can you not know how big your room is?" my conversation partner asked incredulously.

"Well, I haven't measured it," I laughed.

"I didn't expect you to have measured it, but it must say how big it is in your rental agreement," came the guy's response, together with an irritated look.

"I don't remember. I don't think I read it," I told him. "I walked in, liked the room, thought it was big enough and signed whatever was put in front of me."

"I see," the man said. He clearly did not like this devil-may-care way of doing things. He thought for a moment, "Does it have polished wooden floors?"

"Yes, yes, it does," I replied, happy that I was getting at least one