

The Tenth and Last Chapter of my German Adventures

My last two months in Germany have been jam-packed with big events. I attribute this hyperactive time to the end of the school year and the subsequent vacations in Austria and Denmark.

At first sight, the last weeks of school seemed similar here to what I am used to: a general lack of motivation on the part of the student and teaching bodies, final exams, report cards. However, there are several differences. In my class, we had our last essay exams 2 ½ weeks before the end of school, this year June 22. In the higher grades, two teachers usually evaluate the finals, which takes considerable time. There is also a “Zeugniskonferenz” (report card conference) where all the teachers of a given class of 20 or so discuss each student's grades. Therefore, during the last 2 weeks of the school year, not much instruction is going on. -- Now to the graduating class, the “Abiturienten”. Their semester ended on April 4, which was followed throughout the month by written exams, which two teachers plus the principal evaluate. Oral exams before a special in-school commission were given in mid-May. The candidates received the “Abitur” results in early June and finally graduated on June 17.



After the graduation ceremony: proud “Abiturient” Simon (2nd from right) with his family, including me – Oma couldn't come

As any US high school film will show, the climactic events of the year are the prom (here “Abiball”) and the senior prank (here “Abistreich”). In Germany, both are completely organized by a group of students and have no connection with the administration, but I have to say that they ran very smoothly and were very enjoyable. The “Abistreich” this year consisted of a school-wide festival with live music (performed by student bands) and fun

minigames. The students even ordered “Festivalbänder” which proclaimed the “Festival am Teich” (Festival on the Pond). At the end of the “Abistreich” it is traditional for all the “Abiturienten” to jump into the “Stadtgraben” (city moat).



The “Abiball” appears to be similar to prom and is a formal affair. However, it took place one week following graduation. After the families had mingled and dined, the “Abiturienten” danced the first dance, a waltz, during which I forgot the entirety of the dance class that had been offered in the preceding week but managed to escape the dance floor at the end with only a slightly dented dignity. A surprise dance by the teachers to “Greased Lightning” warmed up the dance floor for the mob of “Abiturienten” and guests to get their boogie on. Although our feet hurt and our legs were tired, my friends and I had many a laugh and a lot of fun that night.



With only a day to recuperate, Wolfgang, Simon and I headed off to Vienna. After an unexpected night in a luxurious hotel at the expense of Eurowings (our flight had been canceled), we arrived and were greeted by the wonderful Dorli, with whom we would stay. The first day we just walked around Vienna and visited the “Schloss” (palace) Schönbrunn, the royal houses of the former “Kaiser” (emperors) of Austria.



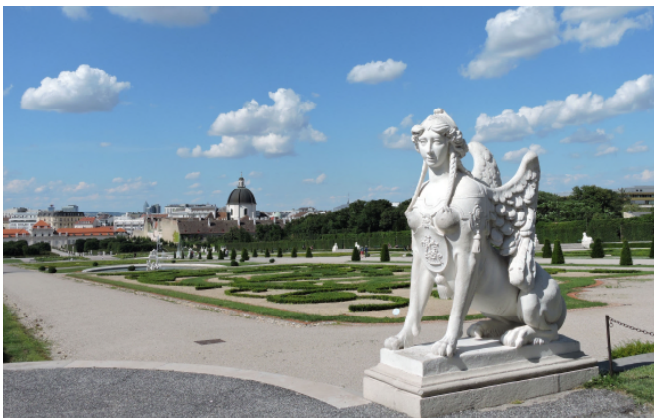
Schloss Schönbrunn in the rain and the Great Gallery

Relatives of Dorli own a vineyard and bistro; so each night we dined on great wine and sandwiches. There are a lot of wind turbines in Austria, and I mean A LOT, and we “Glückspilze” (literally: lucky mushrooms, similar to lucky ducks) got a guided tour of one to see the view from the top -- during a sunset no less.



Vineyard near Vienna – Can you see all those far-away wind turbines?

While we trekked across Vienna, I learned that students are admitted free of charge to its museums. This made me want to visit all the museums possible, but alas - I only managed to see the Belvedere... twice... and loved it both times. The world-renowned painting “The Kiss” by Gustav Klimt hangs here, but it was not Klimt that was the highlight for me, it was Egon Schiele that caught my attention and held it.



Schloss Belvedere and Schiele's “Vier Bäume”

Having seen these two wonderful pieces, only one thing could make the day better: soup, in this case a coconut curry dream. Not only did we visit the capital city but also some of the surrounding areas, including partially reconstructed Roman ruins at Carnuntum, and the house where Franz Joseph Haydn was born. After seeing Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's grave, exploring some of Vienna's catacombs, churches, museums, royal houses, and even the royal jewels, I

left Austria with quite a few trinkets and reminders.



Left: Haydn's birthplace; right: Mozart's grave

The day following our return to Hannover and Estorf, we had to pack for our next vacation in Denmark. But first, there was the Vainstream Rock festival in the city of Münster. Some friends and I found out getting into the festival grounds was the easy part of the day; figuring out which bands were the ones we wanted to see was another. Reaching the punk rock bands we liked involved evading the metal/scremo music and obtaining a good view. We achieved this for all the bands we wanted, and during the dry periods when we just wanted to avoid the type of music being played, we holed up in a record booth where I purchased some really good music... in vinyl... at a festival... not one of the smartest things but, hey, they came out of it without any damage. The car ride home was full of "Fußball" (soccer) talk because while we were at the festival, Simon and Melissa had been at a public viewing area for the quarterfinals of the "Europameisterschaft" (European Soccer Championship).



The white beaches and white-green dunes of Bokhus (Denmark)

Then off to Denmark! Wolfgang, Simon, Jasper (a friend from Estorf who'll be an exchange student in the US in 2016/17), Felix (a Lesemann family relative), and I arrived in Bokhus, a northern Danish town on the North Sea loved by German tourists for its white beaches. Just minutes after we had gotten into the vacation house and unpacked the car, we were off to the beach on bikes we found in the garage. While the water was cold and the wind blustery, we stayed for some time and had our fun. During this week we also went on day trips to Aalborg and Sweden. Alas, I

missed the trip to Sweden because I got sick and had to stay home. Almost every night we played our favorite “Siedler von Catan” (Settlers of Catan) and a card game, “Wizard”. Aside from various sunburns, a few ticks, and a couple of washed-up jellyfish, the week in Bokhus was great!



Top: The Five from Estorf in Bokhus – Bottom: The North Sea



I would like to thank all those who have made my wonderful exchange year possible, especially my host family, their relatives and friends; the Las Cruces-Nienburg Sister Cities Affiliation; the “Freundeskreis Las Cruces in Nienburg”; my German high school for ten months, Albert-Schweitzer-Schule; and last but not least my American family.