

IFYE REPORT FROM GWYNETH MacMURTRIE –
2009 IFYE REPRESENTATIVE VIRGINIA TO GERMANY

GREETINGS FROM GERMANY!

Finland and my free time were fantastic! I love all of my Finnish families and want to thank them SO much for showing me all the best parts of their country like Kuopio, Russia, Reindeer, the Ice Age, and of course SAUNA!

I had a great time during my two weeks on my own. I was able to travel to Ireland, England, and Greece. In Greece I was able to meet up with two other girls from the states who are also doing the IFYE program. We had a great time talking about our experience so far and relaxing by the Mediterranean Sea.

I have now been in Germany for a month and it has gone by so quickly. My very first impression of the country was how much faster people seem to move here than in Finland. I had to catch 2 trains before arriving at my Orientation near Hamburg. The stations in Finland are very calm and people are not racing to catch trains. Here in Germany the stations have shopping malls inside them! So, not only do you have lots of people trying to catch trains, you have others who are just going shopping for the day!

My orientation was great. I met the other IFYE who will be in Germany for the fall. Her name is Yanis and is from Costa Rica. It will be nice because our families are usually friends, and we will always be in the same area. That means we can take the same trains together when changing families and might even see each other through the month. I was also able to travel to Hamburg and Berlin!

My first family was the Rose-Borsums, who live in Plötzkau, a small town in former Eastern Germany. There are 5 people in the family: parents Cord (pronounced CorT) and Annette, plus their 3 girls, Laura (15), Justina (12), and Gesa (7). They are all so friendly, and we have gotten along very well. During my stay here the family has shown me the results from the DDR (or GDR for English speakers). The DDR stands for Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (or the German Democratic Republic) and was the Communist Party controlling the East until 1989. This year is very important for the German people because it has been 20 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall.

I have learned great things from Annette and Cord about the separation of Germany. They were both originally from Western Germany, and when the wall came down they moved east because the farm land is better here. Many of the towns here have homes without color. This is because the DDR wanted everyone to be the same. You can see this still in the small single-family homes that have been built during this time. Many are made with concrete and without color, and they look very worn out. Now that the wall has come down, people can use color on their homes, but cannot afford it. This is because many of the people in Former East Germany are now unemployed. During the DDR everyone had a job and all the children could go to Kindergarten (more like day care or preschools for us). Now that many of the factories are gone, many people are without jobs.

I have learned a lot about the DDR and how East and West were different. I do not want to say too much, because I am afraid I will not be able to explain well enough. I will say that East Germany is not as bad as most Americans may think. In school we are often taught that West Germany is good and East is bad since they were communist, but this is just not so.

While I have been here I have had many firsts! One day I went to work with Cord on his farm and got to ride in the tractor that was spraying the fields. Cord is growing Rapeseed (Canola) right now, and he has just finished his harvest of corn and grains. I also got to DRIVE Annette's brother's John Deere tractor! He lives on a hog farm, and I helped him move a few objects! It was great, and I had so much fun!

Several times I was able to go to work with Annette. She works at what we would call a Vocational School and teaches Home Economics. I was able to speak to both her class and to a few English classes about America and my experiences. The students had many questions. Many of the things they wanted to know were about drivers license, holidays, what I think of Obama, and if I had ever been to the World Trade Center before September 11th. All of her students were so nice. I really enjoyed talking with them.

As many of you know, I studied Art History in college and love 20th Century German art. I have only been here a month, but so far I have seen wonderful works by many of the artists I studied in class. The two best experiences I had were: first, I was able to travel to Wittenberg where Martin Luther nailed his 95 Thesis to the church door. While I was there I found an exhibit of 20th Century artists and their religious works. It was part of a private collection and was only 2€! I could not believe that I was seeing AMAZING works by well known artists (Picasso, Herring, Dix..etc) for so little! Second, I was able to go to the Bauhaus in Dessau! The Bauhaus was an arts school that combined both fine art and the crafts movement. It was started by the architect Walter Gropius in 1919 and lasted until 1933 when the Nazi Party shut it down. It has seen a revival and is once again a functioning arts school. It was amazing to be in a place that helped change the course of both German art and Art around the world.

Today is my last day with the family before I move to the state of Baden-Württemberg. I will be there for 25 days and will then move to my last family.

Till then!
-Gwyneth