

Liebe Grüße aus Deutschland!!

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Halli Hallo!

Now it is time for a little update from my new home in Göttingen.

I would like to introduce guest family #2, Familie Huneke. Irene, host mother, is a teacher for the special and problem children, and just about one of the nicest women I've ever met (second only to Nancy, that is). Reinhold, host father, is also a teacher, but doesn't live at home because he got a new job in Leipzig, so he only comes home once for holidays (fishy, I know, and I think there may be a divorce in the making). Karina, the only host sister that still lives at home, is an extremely sweet 17 year old. She is a girl scout leader for a group of younger girls, plays the piano, and loves to bake. There are 3 other children that are all older and not living at home. Also in the house with Irene, Karina and I is another girl from Karina's class named Elizabeth. Elizabeth comes from a city about 2 hours away is now renting a room with the Huneke's because the high school here in Göttingen is better than her home school. She is a devout Muslim, ridiculously intelligent, and always tries to speak English with me on the sly since Irene has forbidden her to speak English with me. It's kind of funny, really. Oh and Janko, I cant forget Janko, the dog. I like him a lot.

"It's not good, it's not bad, it's just different! ☺" This is one of the mottos of our program, something we should strive to keep in mind during our year here in Germany so that we are not constantly making comparisons and judging and just taking things as different.

Well, different is definitely an adequate word to describe my situation here. Familie Huneke is very religious, they go to church regularly, pray before meals, have pictures of saints and crosses in the house. Normally that wouldn't strike me as so weird, I did go to school in the bible belt, however they are actually the first religious Germans I have met in my three months here. They have no alcohol in the house, and they are vegetarian and crazy healthy. Irene bakes bread every week and they have a compost heap. Their CD collection consists of only classical music, I know because I looked at every single cd just to make sure. They are very quiet people, our conversations are definitely quality over quantity, but god are they nice, and we get along well. (They went on vacation for a couple days, and boy did I take advantage and throw a crazy party! I went to the grocery store and bought wine, chicken, chocolate and chips. I played their

cd's really loud, and me and Janko had a dance party. But I cleaned up all the evidence, they will never know of the mischief I got into while they were away.)

And last but not least, Familie Huneke live on the mountain. They don't live in Göttingen, rather in a village called Nickolausberg. It is a quaint little place, with one church, one mini supermarket, and absolutely gorgeous scenery in every direction. There is even a little restaurant where everyone knows everyone by name and that looks like it was decorated by Goodwill home department and someone's grandma. It is so cute I can't take it, what a homey place. The surrounding mountains and forest are really breathtaking, especially now in Fall when the colors are so bold. I don't see this type of beauty in Florida or Georgia.

The only problem is that the location is not very convenient, to say the least. I can only get into the city with a bus, and the bus schedule is absolutely horrible. The bus stop is a ten minute walk from my house, and then the trip takes around a half and hour, so I go and I stay for the whole day with my whole life in a big, heavy backpack. At night there is only one ever hour, and they stop around 11-ish. Not very conducive to a good social life. I am missing out on lots of great opportunities to meet with people and make friends. Many people have said, Hello lazy, why don't you ride a bike? Now, I love sports, I was even a collegiate athlete, but there is no way that I will ride my bike up that mountain everyday. In the cold. With a hundred pounds on my back. That is not what I call fun. So after a couple weeks of doing this commuting, it has gotten kind of old and kind of stressful. As nice as my family is, I am currently looking for a new place, because I can't imagine 3 more months of this.

Ok, complaining done, now back to the positive. Göttingen is a great city! It is a university city for sure, with a beautiful campus, lots of students riding around everywhere on their bikes, relatively small but with lots of character. Here are some links if you are interested in checking out the city or the university.

-- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Göttingen>

-- <http://www.goettingen-tourismus.de/>

-- <http://www.uni-goettingen.de/>

My first week of Uni was definitely an experience. It is so weird to be a college graduate and yet feel like a lost, little freshman again! I was very lucky that my program sets us up with "Tutors" who are other Uni-Göttingen students and who help us with getting set

up. The University also offers something that is called the O-Phase, Orientation Phase, which was crazy. Each faculty has its own, and I attended the Economics O-Phase. We started early on Monday morning the 15th all in the huge lecture hall, where the president and a few faculty members spoke to us, the normal welcome to our wonderful university stuff. Then a math professor came up on stage and said in order to follow the first classes, you must take a test to prove you have a certain math level. Then he started doing an problem on the projector to give an example before he gave the test to us. The problem was ridiculously hard, and all I could do was laugh as I sat and listened to him in German describing this. I *just* learned the past tense in German, by the way, so following an advanced math problem's description was... impossible? Yep, that's the perfect word. However, when I starting hearing the murmuring and the looks of stress/fear on the other student's faces, I felt better because it was obvious that the other students did not understand the problem either. The Professor called on a few students to answer the problem, and they all sheepishly answered with an I don't know.

Showing disgust for the group's stupidity, he said fine I will just solve it myself. The answer he wrote was something to this affect " You have just been punked! Don't worry, you are gonna love it here. Have a great O-Phase!" And then secret O-Phase leaders jumped up from different seats around the lecture hall, pulled off their jackets to reveal O-Phase t-shirts, and then started splitting the couple hundred of students into different groups. It was so funny! When we were assigned to a group we left and went into the foyer, where tons of tables were set up with apple-flavoured licquor (nice apple juice for the morning) and champagne, and the leaders led us in cheers and passed the alcohol around and we were all so stunned we didn't know what to do.

Basically O-Woche is a week of partying, with a couple meetings here and there to talk about the official business. Some of the events of the week were: playing silly games on campus (flashback to R.A. training days) playing drinking games on campus, a bar-hopping tour, a crazy rally in the city square with hundreds of students which included lots of chanting, drinking and a congo line, and a night in club rented out just for the O-Phasers. Can you imagine this happening on any U.S. University? Not in a frat house, but on campus? No way, José. But it was fun, and it really was a great way to meet people. I also had an International Student orientation, which was not quite as crazy but also fun and great for meeting people.

Now to talk the more serious side of the University ☺ So apparently here in Deutschland you do not register for your classes, you just look up the schedule and go. Towards the end of the semester you sign up to take the exam. I just don't quite understand this system, considering how organized and efficient Germany is. In two classes I attended, I had to either stand in the back or sit on the floor, there were so many students. I attempted to attend three other classes that seemed quite interesting was sadly disappointed when I got to an empty classroom or even worse got up in the middle of another class that was definitely not the one I wanted. Turns out they were quite interesting, but they were interesting last semester, not this semester. Whoops. Another class I wanted to take I was not allowed to as an auditor. At the end of it all, I decided to just take language courses here, 4 German and 1 Spanish. The other classes weren't working so well, there seemed to be a different problem with each one, and I felt like that was a kind of a sign. Some may say that is taking the easy way out, but I don't. The way I see it is the classes don't count for anything anyways, I would just audit, and I would rather concentrate on improving my German and trying to recuperate my quickly-fading Spanish. I feel that at the moment that is most important.

Other interesting German University facts... at the end of class, the students all knock on the desk to show thanks to the teacher for a good class. Weird huh? Also you can't bring your backpack into the library with you. You have to put it in a locker and then clumsily carry your stack of books, notebooks, pens and highlighters all around. The cafeteria called the Mensa, is super cheap (about 2 Euros) and very yummy. The Germans even made menschen a verb. Specific to my university, there is big excitement on campus because Georg-Auguste Universität Göttingen just received elite-university status. Folks, I am now an Ivy-leaguer!

No more apologies for long e-mails, looks like they will always be like this ☺ I hope you all are doing great!

Love,

Katie

WOW! Only 1 Album this time☺

Pics from my beautiful mountain home:

<http://valdosta.facebook.com/album.php?aid=2079230&l=29d42&id=46202101>