



The view from their windows at Altmunster: across the lake to the mountain called Traunstein.



This Spring Semester's BC group poses for a group picture with a backdrop that looks as if it's right out of "The Sound of Music."

Austria -- what an experience!

by Susan Budan and Mylene Thomas
Special to the Clarion

Grussogott! Wie gent's dir?

Hi there! How are you doing? We're here to tell you about our experience in Austria. We learned more about ourselves, each other and the life and culture of another country.

First of all, we'd like to tell you about our "college" life this past semester. We were required to take 18 credit hours. We lived in an apartment building, not dormitories, and we didn't eat in a cafeteria.

We were given the equivalent of \$70 every Monday to buy our groceries. If we didn't know how to cook, we learned fast.

We also learned that living in Austria in an apartment, eating, studying and basically always being together is much closer than living in dorm life.

Our classes were not in a classroom but were taught in our teacher's living room. Don't get us wrong, this was not a semester of play. We had two quizzes in German a day and homework every night. In addition to German, we also took Austrian history, taught by a native Austrian; ethics, taught by Maggi Zednik; Austrian life and culture, taught by Jennifer Phillipoff; and last but certainly not least, mountaineering.

All of our classes were a challenge but also fun. We managed to have fun with everything we did. We were sometimes reluctant to go on a 20-mile hike, but when we reached our final destination, the feeling of accomplishment was overwhelming.

If you come to college without a car, then you wouldn't think our lifestyle was too bad. But, for those of you who drive from BC to Ingles -- you're in for it.

We walked down a hill to all stores and back up with our purchases. The grocery stores were about the size of a lecture room. They were much more minimized than an Ingles or any other typical American grocery store. For example, in American grocery stores you can find at least five different cuts of green beans in at least five different brands. Not so in Austria. There is one style maybe two brands.

We also had to buy our meat fresh every couple of days from the butcher. For bread products, we could buy them freshly baked at the grocery store or at the bakery.

Excursions were the most wonderful part. Wednesdays and Saturdays were reserved for hikes and outings. However, if the weather happened to be exceptionally beautiful, classes were juggled or postponed until Saturday -- and off we went to a nearby mountain.

Many excursions were school-related. After studying Adolf Hitler extensively for three weeks, off we went to a nearby city called Mauthausen, which is also known as being one of only two WWII concentration camps in the country. It sounds very depressing, but we believe we should learn from the world's mistakes. We are certain that the moment a history teacher starts talking about a distant person in a far-off land, this is a student's cue to start dreaming.

You may find it hard to retain such information for a test...but with our history professor we went to the places we were learning about. This made it more interesting and easier to remember otherwise boring information. Besides Mauthausen, we also visited Hitler's summer home of Berchtesgaden in West Germany.

Another day we were to be found dressed as miners, sliding down the wooden slides in a working salt mine and riding a train back out. Other trips

included weekends in four major cities of Austria: Graz, Vienna, Innsbruck and Salzburg; and excursions into Italy and West Germany.

Also, several times we stayed overnight in mountain huts. This was an experience! We would pack our backpacks lightly, considering we had to carry them up and down a mountain. On one hike, when we reached the top, we were exhausted and famished.

All mountain huts are owned by families who cook and clean for those who hike up. After we had eaten, we were heading up to bed, but heard music and singing in another room. Intrigued, we went to investigate. It just so happened that a group from the Bavarian Red Cross were there and had brought two guitars and an accordion up the mountain -- and were having a grand time.

They invited us to join them, and we were more than happy to do so. We clapped and moved to the beat of Austrian folk songs and sang along with the American country songs they knew. We even sang for them "God Bless the U.S.A." by Lee Greenwood.

Our most challenging hike was on the glacier, Dachstein. It means "rooftop mountain." This hike was not a Sunday stroll. In fact, it took us two days and was 22-miles round trip. We hiked through rain on the lower part of the mountain and a blizzard at the top. The blizzard was no 12-inch storm, but thigh-deep, and we had rough hiking for the last 20 minutes -- but it was well worth the effort.

All mountain huts are similar in many ways. Everyone who attempts to climb a mountain is considered an equal, whether they are a doctor or a farmer, age 75 or 17. At these huts, there are huge dining tables and everyone eats together. This equality among hikers extends even to sleeping arrangements. There's usually only one huge bunk bed per room.

We're sure you're thinking how can 30-40 people sleep with such conditions? Well, each bunk holds 10-

20 people, and one only rents a space, like a hotel, with the exception that you may end up sleeping next to a total stranger -- male or female.

This seems very odd to an American, but to an Austrian, it is very natural.

The seating arrangements at cafes and pubs is similar. Here, one will not find a small, two-person cocktail table, but tables for 10 to 12 people. Believe it or not, it is very comfortable and a great way to meet people.

We found the Austrians to be a very friendly people. Everyone says hello to each other on the streets, even if they don't know one another. Whenever we walked into stores anywhere we went, the shop people said hello and goodbye.

We met some of our new friends this way, including our closest friends by the sharing of one of those common tables at a cafe.

The Austrians have wonderful personalities. Our friends were open, honest people. They taught us the typical ways of their lifestyles. They helped us see things we never took time to notice. We learned to appreciate and cherish friendships more than ever before. Our friends were very honest with us and sometimes it was hard to hear, but it showed they really cared.

Throughout our time in Austria, we managed to meet many wonderful people, see many beautiful places and learn things that otherwise we would not have. We believe the experiences we gathered in Austria will be with us for a long time.

We believe everyone should experience a semester abroad. Europeans believe that America is the land of opportunity and a truly wonderful place with exciting people. Let's not disappoint them. We also believe they could teach us a lot about ourselves.

If anyone would like information on Austria, please come by 157 W. Beam. We have lots of stories, pictures and memories to share. Auf Wiedersehen!

Ciao,

Mylene Thomas and Susan Budan