

Exchange students reflect on year-long visit to United States

BY TIM TYLER

It's a mission where you must seek out new life and new civilization. You must boldly go where no one has gone before (well, sort of). It's the mission of a foreign exchange student.

Rockcastle County High School hosted two foreign exchange students, both from Germany, throughout the 2001-2002 school year. These students were seniors Doris Bismarck and Jens Strietzel. The following is an interview that took place with Doris and Jens concerning everything from the lifestyle of a foreign exchange student to the way girls from Germany compare to girls from Rockcastle. **Jens, Doris, why did you want to come to the U.S. as a foreign exchange student?**

Jens: "I'd say first of all, it's because you would want to improve your English and probably want to have the experience of going to another continent and another country."

Doris: "First of all to learn English, the American life-style--and to get away from home."

Jens: "America is the country that everyone looks up to and it has always been that way."

Doris: "It's just that America just has everything. That's where everything comes from."

What are some of the benefits of being a foreign exchange student?

Jens: "In Germany, knowing English is very important in any kind of job. To have a job where you

will be well paid you usually have to be able to speak English."

Doris: "You have the experience to know that you can do something by yourself and you know that you're ready for the world."

What was your opinion of Americans before you came?

Jens: "I really thought that they would be a lot like the people in Germany. Except the people here are a lot more polite, you can talk with them about everything."

Doris: "In Germany, we don't have all the small talk. We don't talk about the weather and that kind of stuff."

What did you expect to see in the U.S.?

Jens: "I actually expected to see a big city. What I meant was, from one city to the other, the distance is very big. People don't say or think it's big they just drive it. In Germany, people don't spend that much time on the roads either, because the cities are probably just 5 miles apart."

Doris: "I thought it would be bigger, too. Not small like Rockcastle County. Like in the movies where you always see the houses next to each other and they are all the same, and the big cities with skyscrapers, even something like the Brady Bunch where everyone has the same yard. I was even surprised by all the rocks and mountains you have here. I thought it would be flat."

How much did it cost you to come to the U.S. as an exchange stu-

dent?

Doris: "It cost me about \$5,000 or \$6,000 to come."

Jens: "Yeah, it's about \$6,000 plus the money you need while you're here. The money is to pay the different organizations that save your place in the high schools over here. They also pay for your flight, and for having somebody close to you that you can talk to when you have any problems. They find you a host family."

Do you pay all the money or do you get sponsored?

Jens: "You can have sponsors."

Doris: "You can, but it's only if you are doing really good in school, but you have to be really poor for that, too."

What's the biggest change you had to overcome?

Jens: "The food. I would say that since I have been here I have eaten a lot more fast food."

What's it like to be away from your family and friends for so long?

Doris: "I don't really miss my family that much. I mean I know that probably sounds bad, but over here we don't have the time. It's not like I sit in the corner and cry because I have a family over here that I stay with, even though they aren't the same as my family at home. Everything here just keeps me so busy that I don't have time to miss anybody."

What do you do in your spare time?

Doris: "I have lots of sports to play--well, I try at least. I play volleyball, basketball, and track. I also play with my host family, oh and go to Wal-Mart."

Jens: "Wal-Mart in Germany is a little different. It's not as big."

Are friendships and the relationships the same in Germany as they are here?

Jens: "Yeah, you usually have friends who you hang out with. The relationships, it all depends on how close they are."

Doris: "In Germany, it's a little different because you have the same class and the same people throughout your whole school life. You have a class of like 20 people and you stay with them the whole time."

Jens: "You can get to know more people over here."

How do German guys compare to guys around here?

Jens: "Guys here try to take more care of their body."

Doris: "In Germany they are all skinny. As a female, I think they should look a little bit better. Here the guys seem to act older, but I don't know if that's all true



Senior Doris Bismarck has taken full advantage of the sports programs offered at RCHS by playing volleyball and track. Above, she tosses the shot put at a track meet May 14.

though."

Jens: "I would say so, too."

How do German girls compare to girls around here?

Jens: "Actually, it's seems pretty much the same. I think girls here are a little more competitive and I think they probably do a lot more sport here."

Doris: "If you're a little bit bigger here, nobody cares. In Germany, if you're my size then... girls around here just don't worry about it as much, I guess. They don't try to hide it. It's like if you have a belly then you have a belly."

Is P.D.A. (public displays of affection) displayed the same here as in Germany?

Jens: "Yeah, it's normal. At school in Germany you don't have a dress code so girls, especially in the summer, wear the really short skirts; and the shirts with the spaghetti strap things."

Doris: "They wear it if they have the right figure."

Was the change in the dress code a big change for you when you came here?

Doris: "Not for me because I don't dress like that. If I was to run around everybody would stare at me, but I think..."

Jens: "Yeah, I miss wearing my skirts."

Do people here kiss the same?

Doris: "I've never kissed anybody."

Jens: (chuckles) "I would say that people in America, well, the girls I

guess, they kiss better, otherwise I would get in trouble."

Who or what do you think you will miss the most from America, or even from Rockcastle?

Doris: "That's a hard one. Umm... my family and everyone from school. Just everything."

How would you describe your experience here to someone back home?

Jens: "I think it can not really be described. It's just awesome. I think it's the kind of experience that you just can't tell anyone about."

Doris: "You would have to make this experience by yourself. And all the movies and stuff you see, I can understand them now. Like all the football games, but when someone asks 'what's it like?' I won't be able to explain it."

How do schools in Germany compare to schools in America?

Jens: "The school system is different."

Doris: "It's harder. We go to school for thirteen years, but if you're not that smart you can go for shorter times."

Jens: (laughs) "Umm... yeah, that's right."

Doris: "I don't want to be mean but in schools here I can go to class and just sleep and still get the 'A'. In Germany you could never do that."

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Senior Jens Strietzel fulfilled his goal of reaching the state football finals, but he also received an honor he may not have thought possible...Homecoming Frog. (file photo)