Greetings from Germany

Well, it is just about time for another update. Firstly I can't believe that my time here in Germany is already coming to a close because I am past halfway!! The time has simply disappeared. Today I spent a long time sitting at my computer looking through my photos trying to organise them in some logical sequence to help me remember all the things I have been doing in the past months. It's not that the events weren't important enough to remember, the trouble is that there have been too many. I guess I will just pick up from where I left off last time.

The first thing I must mention is the Fruhlings Festival. This is the "spring festival" and was held in my town. It was great fun, I got to dress up in my dirndl and I sat in the massive tent with my host mum and brother. The waitresses were walking around with the one litre mugs of beer and had whistles in their mouths so that they could make their way through the crowds of people! They were also selling gigantic pretzels, the size of the dinner plates that you get in really expensive restaurants. Not long after the Fruhlings Festival was the first of May which is a very special day in Bavaria. It is the "Mai Baum" festival and involves the raising of a new May Pole in the town or village. The pole is used to tell what shops can be found in the town and is very tall with blue and white stripes (typical Bavarian colours). This tradition only happens once in every 5 years so I was pretty lucky to be able to see it.

After that I had two weeks of holiday which I spent simply lazing around at home and making trips into Munich for sightseeing. I changed host families after the holiday and needed only a few days until I felt completely at home again. The district conference of the inbounds and outbound from Rotary was the next event. This was taken very seriously by the Rotary club and all the inbounds had to give a performance to the congregation. Bronnie (the other Australian in my district) and I decided to sing Waltzing Matilda together. It was really scary getting up on stage in front of all those people. First we had to introduce ourselves and say where we were from, etc. (in German of course) and then we had to sing the song but without any accompanying music. This was a big test for my nerves, but we did it well, and by the end most of the people sang along with the chorus.

Then I had only one more week at school before it was time for the Berlin Tour. This trip was organised by my school and was mainly for those who take part in the history and politics classes. The days were full of sightseeing and although it was very tiring I absolutely loved it. We saw checkpoint Charlie (the American Sector of Berlin), the French and German Cathedrals and walked between the division of western and eastern Berlin. We also visited the Brandenburg Tor which is the Famous gate that used to be joined to the wall which separated East and West Berlin. We were given a tour of the Parliamentary Quarter of Berlin and sat in the Plenary Chamber which is the heart of Parliamentary life in Germany. I'm really glad that I will be going back to Berlin in November with my rotary group. Then I will hopefully see and learn more about the cultural side instead of only politics.

After Berlin Tour I was kept busy with many farewells and parties for the departing inbounds and out bounds. I attended a farewell weekend for the inbound exchange students and it was a very sad occasion. We, as a group, have become so close, and saying goodbye when you know that it is unlikely that you will ever see those amazing people again is very hard. Anyway, the new group of exchange students come in September, and until then there are only a few Australians, newzealanders and some Argentinean people here in my district. Because of this I was

invited to go on the Europe Tour of another district because they had some places free. This tour goes for 4 whole weeks and we are travelling through some of the most well known places in Europe. Although I am really excited about this trip I am also a bit sad because it means that I will be a whole month away from my host family. I really value the time that we spend together because it is always so much fun, very different from my home life. I recently celebrated my 18th birthday which involved a whole week of eating cake and celebrating with my friends in school and my host families. All of my 4 host families chipped in to buy me a hot air balloon ride. We went out to lunch all together and it was the strangest feeling looking from one family to the next, thinking that all of them are, were or will be my host mum, dad, and siblings. I think I have all the support of family and friends, just like I had in Australia, so things are just about perfect. My German is progressing really well, and I have, for quite some time now, spoken only German with my families and friends. I even find myself thinking in German sometimes and I am just waiting for that one night when I will finally dream in German!!

I thought time would slow down after the first few months, when I settled in to my new life, but it seems like there is always something new to look forward to. Germany has an insane amount of festivals in the summer and if I really wanted to im sure I could go to one every weekend! Of course I am looking forward to the Oktoberfest and then after that the Berlin Tour. As soon as those two things are over, then I only have a few months left before I have to fly home! Because of this, I am living everything to the fullest, giving everything a go, because I will be packing up for home before I know it.

Servus,

Wendy Layther