

## **UF in Munich Program—Thanksgiving 2008 Comments from Students' Journals**

### **Travel**

In Atlanta airport we sat down and waited for our connection to Munich. Over the loudspeaker a Delta employee announced that the flight was overbooked. They called for volunteers to go on the next flight. We had that announcement a couple more times. When we were boarding, one of the employees called my name, telling me that there would be a change. I began to panic. Was I going to be moved to another flight? No. My seat was changed—to Business Class! I stumbled into the elite section giddy with excitement. The smile showed that I was clearly an outsider. The flight attendant offered me champagne, took my coat and began to chat with me. Being called “Mr. ...” made me feel important. I was fed, pampered, and fed some more.

### **Munich**

I would like to say that Monday's walking tour helped to orient me, but in truth all it did was get me more turned around as we traversed the city by foot, tram and train. I was so caught up in taking pictures and listening to the history behind this and that building that I could not tell if we walked the span of the city, or just explored the city center. I do know that I fell in love with Munich that day, with the cold streets and warm interiors, with the mix of traditional Bavaria and swanky European city.

Today was a busy walking tour day. We saw so much and definitely got our exercise. Today I learned that Dr. Giles is one of the fastest walkers on the planet! Very impressed.

The first church that we popped inside took my breath away. We made our way to the crypt which was the resting place of King Ludwig II, and I was able to fall back from the group in order to be alone for a moment inside an ancient place of worship. The intricacy of the sculptures and columns was amazing. The paintings on the ceiling were beautifully framed by the molding stretching from the top of the red marble columns.

Standing in the crypt of St. Michael's Church, it seemed odd that ordinary people could so easily stand so close to the caskets of dead kings. It was hard to believe that I was standing in a room full of people who had once been royalty.

We had another walking tour today. My absolute favorite thing we saw, hands down, was the church built by the Asam brothers. As soon as we got back I emailed my parents and boyfriend about it. To put it simply, that church will blow your mind. It is really tiny, just a small room, but it is so ornate and has such attention to detail that you do not know where to even look! Everything looks so rich and beautiful.

A visit to the Munich Palace of Justice, a large and intimidating structure, was an interesting, if slightly disturbing, experience (the theme for the day). It was in this building that right-wing, and later Nazi-sympathetic, judges handed out an excessive number of death sentences. The memorial to the White Rose students,

located in the court room where several were tried and sentenced to death, was quite sobering. A private tour of the two Nazi Party headquarters buildings (now an art and music college, not open to the public), which were camouflaged during the bombings and remained thus nearly undamaged, was certainly the highlight of the day. Our guide gave incredible insight into the building's past, and took us deep into the basement and tunnels underground to reveal some reminders of its history: Nazi fireproof file cabinets, placards on doors, and original furniture from Hitler's office (that was used in the movie "Downfall"), are preserved down there safely out of the public eye.

We saw where the White Rose students were put on trial for "crimes against the state" in 1943. It's crazy to imagine that they were about my age and were executed for standing up for their beliefs.

In addition, we were shown more swastikas today. This city seems to be quite stained from its recent past—it is as if the older, more innocent past of Munich's history competes in the eye of the contemporary visitor with the newer, more sinister part. I will not speculate as to why the city seems on one hand to try to repress these bad memories apologetically, while on the other seemingly acknowledging somewhat nonchalantly that these events took place. The re-use of buildings constructed for and by Nazis (of course in much more reasonable ways) seems justified, but the apparent attitude prevailing when old Nazi iconography is left to hang on these buildings is puzzling.

The new BMW Museum was fascinating because of its modern design as well as its corporate history. I was unaware that concentration camp prisoners were among those forced to work for BMW during the war. I was pleased that BMW acknowledged this tragic but important part of its past, and that they further condemned the forced labor practices of World War II as the "darkest chapter of their corporate history."

At the Deutsches Museum of Science and Technology, I descended into the basement of the Marine Navigation section, where along the back wall I saw an object that looked eerily familiar. As I came closer, I recognized it as a U-Boat. But that was impossible, since I thought I knew the location of all U-Boats still in existence. I began to read the placard, and after discovering the U-1, the first U-Boat ever built, was standing before me, I immediately went into cardiac arrest due to shock. The museum staff brought out the defibrillators, but they were of no use. I was in such a serious state of disbelief, I would only recover with long, deep breaths. After some time, I was able to stand on my own two feet again, but I was still short of breath. I later discovered that, due to my own naïve thinking, I had not known that this U-Boat still existed. The U-1, as far as I knew, is still listed as missing in action. We think she may have struck a mine, but nobody knows for certain what happened to her. But alas! That was the U-1 from World War *Two*. I never thought in all my years to research the U-1 from World War *One*, and there it stood right before my eyes! I cannot describe how I felt while I walked the length of U-1. My mouth was stuck in a constant state of smiling. I felt as though I had come home—this was where I belonged. I next wandered upstairs to the Aviation section, and what did I find but an ME-262, the first German jet fighter aircraft! I gasped so loudly that the

entire museum thought I was choking on something. In fact I was—I was choking on an overdose of ‘awesome.’ First U-1, now an ME-262? I could not handle such excitement, I was in a state of bliss. For years, I have read, seen pictures, and watched documentaries about this aircraft. And now here it was, right in front of me! I stood still for a few minutes, knowing that nothing would recreate this scene. Eventually I left this aircraft, but only to encounter a Ju-52. I died! I simply just could not handle this constant bombardment of awesome history. With all the reading I have done on Stalingrad, I have become very familiar with the plan to supply the Sixth Army by air. The main aircraft for this ill-fated transport mission was the Ju-52, and here was one sitting right in front of my face. My joy and elation went through the roof when I discovered that I could actually go inside the aircraft. I imagined this plane stacked full of frozen, wounded soldiers desperately trying to escape the lethal Kessel. I was simply overwhelmed. I cannot express how grateful I am to have been able to see this piece of history. I was in heaven.

### **Castles and Palaces**

Today was probably the coldest day I have ever experienced in my life but it was so worth it. We visited the royal castles of Hohenschwangau and Neuschwanstein. The mountains were gorgeous! All the snow-covered treetops were just so pretty and Christmassy! I couldn’t imagine actually living in a place like that! To be able to look out my bedroom window and have that view!

All I can say is once we reached the upper mountain area I was completely amazed, because, when I looked up, I saw the exquisite mountain range of the Alps. As I looked around me, the fairy tale continued, because there sitting nicely in the mountains were the two castles, which looked small to the eye, but I knew that they were going to be mammoth in size.

The castle visit ended in an epic snowball fight that reached its climax when Dr. Giles tricked the group into heading for our bus, and then proceeded to stuff snow down the back of the shirt of someone who had dared to throw a snowball at him! I never knew he was such a trickster!

After leaving the castles, some students and I had the most epic snowball fight the world has even seen! Dr. Giles even joined in at one point, scoring a few nice hits.

I think the most interesting part of the Residenz royal palace in Munich, outside its grandness, was its relic room. Not only were there bones and shrines made of body parts, but full skeletons of babies. It was morbid, to say the least, but I can understand why they would want to honor these saintly relics.

In the park at Nymphenburg we also got to see the hunting cottage, which even in its small state was just as glorious as the palace. Even the dogs had their own room, which was bigger than my room back in Gainesville. We also saw the playhouse for the children of the palace. Now when I think of a playhouse, I think of a small structure where maybe four kids can fit. This playhouse was two storeys high, and came even with its own water pump. I couldn’t believe that even the playhouse was so big—it was as big as a regular-size house.

## **Dachau**

This was the hardest day but also the most important thing to see. I think everyone should go to a concentration camp at least once in their lifetime. It gave me a whole new appreciation for the life that I have. I'm really glad we went there in the winter. I was wearing a hat, gloves, a scarf, boots, tights, jeans, long underwear, a sweater and a jacket, and even with all that I was still cold! I cannot imagine being out there for hours in the roll call area, with the hard gravel and ice on the ground, wearing what was basically a thick set of pajamas. At first I thought it was a little bit morbid that we were going to Dachau on Thanksgiving, but in hindsight I am really glad we did. It truly brought home to me how thankful I ought to be for everything I have, for my family, my friends, and all the opportunities that I have open to me.

“Thanksgiving in Munich” is the title of this program and a good descriptor for my present time and location. Gone were the turkey, family and warmth—replaced by early morning frigid temperatures (according to the archivist the coldest day of the year so far), dreary skies, and a concentration camp. I have always heard it was an emotionally draining experience to visit one of these sites, but it really is impossible to prepare for it until you actually arrive. The large barren trees seemed to betray the horrors of the past that took place there, and walking the same path that arriving prisoners walked some seventy years ago was disturbing. The entrance gate and gigantic administration building survive nearly entirely intact (the infamous falsehood immortalized in the ironwork of the gate—“Work makes you free”—included), but the most draining part of the experience was most certainly the “bunker” prison building. It was within these walls (again, disturbingly preserved) that hundreds suffered, were tortured, and were killed at the hands of the merciless SS guards. I simply cannot comprehend, with everything I have, how human beings could ever do any of this.

Visiting Dachau was a numbing experience. After reading so much about the Holocaust and the concentration camps, I found it difficult to emote for most of the exhibit. Unusually, I separated from the group and walked around in quiet reflection. ...Later, when our group reached the crematorium, I finally broke from my unfeeling composure. Seeing the death contraptions was shocking, and I had to step away from the group for a moment to regain my poise.

We had lunch in a seminar room, and afterwards the archivist, also a personal friend of Dr. Giles, talked with us for a little over an hour. He showed us rare and even never-before-seen artifacts from Dachau. Herr Knoll explained how inmates sometimes remained hopeful in the camp and would create little toys or figurines to entertain themselves and demonstrate their perseverance. A wooden toy airplane had recently been acquired. A young boy living nearby had come to the fence at Dachau, where prisoners begged him for food. The next day he returned with slices of bread from his mother, and fed this through the fence to some of the inmates. In return, they made him this wooden toy airplane. He had kept it in his possession for over sixty years, and now as an old man, he had just donated it to the museum. It was very special to have a private presentation by Herr Knoll, because I will probably never again have such an opportunity.

By the time we stopped for lunch, I felt thoroughly miserable. If left to myself, I might have spent the afternoon brooding in a corner. Albert Knoll's presentation managed to snap me out of my ill humor. I was fascinated by everything he showed us, my favorite being the chess set.

The most rewarding part of this trip was listening to Albert Knoll and seeing the artifacts and stories he had to share with us. I think my favorite piece was the figurine made by a prisoner out of the bread rations given to him. It depicted a man in prison garb holding a skull. Although I missed turkey and family I learned so much about life and what I do have to be thankful about.

Though I have studied German history for a few years now, and have seen or read countless accounts of concentration camps, nothing can prepare an individual for the horrors of the reality of such a camp. The conditions which the prisoners had to endure were absolutely appalling. To see first-hand the sleeping and toilet arrangements made me realize that a video just cannot explain the plight these prisoners faced.

### **Nuremberg**

Nuremberg had the best museum of the trip. After perusing the Rally grounds, we entered the museum that is a history major's dream. Though I knew much of the material presented, the in-depth history of every aspect of the Nazi period was like taking a whole class with Dr. Giles in museum form!

### **Salzburg**

From the moment we came to the bridge to cross the river into the old town, I was entranced by the wonder of the place, a city that looked as if God himself had scooped out a valley and left a fairytale in its place. From wandering around the Christmas market to going through room after room of the Hohensalzburg Fortress, I found Salzburg to be a truly romantic city. Do not ask me about its historical significance, I can just tell you that it is beautiful.

### **Food**

For lunch we went to a special restaurant, famous for its veal "white sausage". We had to hurry, because you can only order them before midday, since they are made the same day and are no longer considered completely fresh after 12 noon. Dr. Giles, however, ordered suckling pig's brain. I was not brave enough to try, though I did get a picture.

Today for lunch the whole group was on their own at the Viktualienmarkt farmers' market. A few of us who had bought our lunch here earlier in the trip knew what we wanted immediately, despite the tempting horsemeat hotdogs that Dr. Giles was suggesting!

One of the things I am bringing back is a lot of chocolate. For some reason the chocolate here is sooo much better than in the States. No Hershey's here. As a true chocoholic, I am going to miss it.

### **Closing thoughts**

The reason I loved this trip so much was certainly because of the food, beer, historical sites, museums, cities, music, and U-Boat. But the most important, and most memorable, part of the trip was the people that I shared it with. And as I sat on the plane, I realized that even though I was leaving Munich behind, I was taking the most valuable part of it back with me, my new friends. This trip was made special to me because of them. I will never forget the many laughs we all shared together. I met some very unique and special people on this trip, and I know full well that our friendships will last a lifetime.

That was my favorite part about this trip: the people. I never thought I would make a friend on this trip, much less five or six! And even the people I wasn't close with were still nice, and everyone got along very well. My two roommates and I are going to be lifelong friends, and that's not something that you find every day. This was my first overseas trip, and I am already looking into where else I can travel to. It was comforting being with the professor, because otherwise on my first Euro-trip I would have been lost and confused, and would have missed out on so many life-changing things.