

# Young foreigners love America

By Dieter Krieg

Without exception, American schools were described as being a "snap" and "so easy it's unbelievable," by foreign exchange students visiting in Lititz last week.

When Elsa Scheitl of Austria was asked if schools here were easier, she answered: "Are you kidding? In Austria I took 13 courses per year, here I only had five." She commented that in her country 15 years of school are required, boys and girls go to separate schools and elective courses are unheard of.

Andreas Hufnagel, an exchange student from Germany, described the American educational system as being "totally different." He had spent the past year in Illinois, attending a small school there as a senior. "School here is a snap," he said. "In Germany we have only essay exams which do not leave students with a theoretical chance of receiving a perfect score, as is possible with multiple choice tests even if the student does not know the subject matter." Even though he graduated from high school (in the U.S.) he still has two years of studying to do in Germany.

In all, 41 foreign exchange students, sponsored by the American Field Service (AFS), arrived in Lititz last week while on route to New York. The group stayed for several days with host families in the area and took part in the community's Fourth of July celebrations. The big holiday hadn't arrived yet, but the show of patriotism — not just this month, but throughout his visit — turned out to be one of the most impressive things about America as far as Hufnagel was concerned.

"I have only heard the German anthem at Olympic games when Germany placed among the top three competitors," the 17-year-old explained, "but here the 'Star Spangled Banner' is played prior to every sporting event."

He was surprised to find the American flag flying "everywhere," including churches, and added he did not think a place of worship was the proper place for the national colors. "The German flag is only flown at official buildings," he remarked.

A young Argentinian, German Braillard, expressed disappointment over the lack of participation he witnessed at the voting polls in this country, pointing out that in his native country everyone is required to vote. Displaying a friendly smile, the slender, dark-haired youth said he learned a lot about himself and the United States during the past year. "You have poor people here too, not everyone drives a Cadillac," he chuckled.

Hearing the South American's comments, Hilda Van Der Merwe, a pretty blonde from a country which has the same initials as ours (Union of South Africa) chimed in: "Oh, yes, I thought my family would have two cars, an airplane, swimming pool, and huge house, but actually we have a bigger home in South Africa."

When first asked to list what impressed her most about the United States, she and a companion, Wendy Law Ah Kee, responded simultaneously that the two USA's were very similar, "there's nothing really different except we drive on the left side of the road."

## Not So Rich

"Everybody is real friendly," the petite Wendy remarked. Were you disappointed with anything? we asked the young Chinese girl who lives in South Africa. "No," she answered, "but everybody isn't as rich as I thought they'd be." The impression of Americans being rich was a common one among the young foreigners, as was the more realistic and factual observation that this country holds vast amounts of potential wealth in its resources.

Although none of the 41 students, representing 27 countries from around the world, said they got homesick during their 12 month stay in America, there were some things which they missed, such as soccer, the beach, mountains, and traditional holiday customs.

Hufnagel, a friendly, sandy haired fellow who stands 6 feet 3 inches tall, said he missed German black bread and German beer. "American beer tastes like soap water," he said matter-of-factly.



Phil Landis (right), a senior at Warwick High School, with exchange student, Andreas Hufnagel from Reinheim, Germany.

While in Lititz the group took part in Fourth of July celebrations, treating thousands of spectators to a talent show presented at the band shell in Lititz Springs Park. Their performances stressed friendship between countries of the world and appreciation for the country and organization (American Field Service) which made their visit to the States possible.

To offer spectators a glimpse of life in their own respective countries, the young foreigners sang, danced, and modeled national costumes. A friendly group, all of whom spoke excellent English, the visitors captured the audience's applause and approval throughout the hour-long presentation.

The "organization of convenience" is what impressed Norwegian Kjetil Vangsnes more than anything else. Friendly, gregarious, and highly observant, "K.J.," as he liked to be called, commented on subjects ranging from economics to ecology, politics to education, and living standards to geography.

Going into a little more detail on what he meant by the "organization of convenience," such as doing your banking from within your car, Miss Van Der Merwe enthusiastically added: "Oh, yes, definitely, we didn't have all that jazz in our country." The "jazz" she and "K.J." referred to were all the cars, bigger cars, dishwashers, reclining chairs, cheap gas, "those radar things which open garage doors," remote control TV, electrical appliances, ready to eat foods, and "all the kids have access to cars."



Foreign exchange students visiting the Lititz area last week included these young people representing Venezuela, Argentina, Peru, and Costa Rica.

Miss Van Der Merwe, a farm girl, says her family owns between 4,000 and 5,000 acres in South Africa, with fruit, wheat, sheep, ostriches, and a small herd of cows making up the bulk of the farming enterprise. "By South African standards, it's just a small farm, really, because we have a lot of mountains there," she remarked.

Ostrich eggs are certainly something Americans don't get to see every day — if ever. Miss Van Der Merwe explained that one of the big bird's eggs is equivalent to 24 chicken eggs and so strong that a person can stand on it without breaking it.

Miss Kee laughed, twirled her finger in front of her face in a circular motion, and commented that American teenagers "go riding around town" for their kicks. "In America you never walk," "K.J." grinned.

When we commented about their keen and thorough observations of life in the United States, the two South African girls explained: "We take notice of what's around us because our time to learn here is limited. Also we have learned a lot about our own country while being here."

Similar comments were made by the other visiting students, all of whom seemed to be genuinely and deeply

interested in America and Americans. "You have to be observant and try to get as much out of the visit as possible," commented Hufnagel, "otherwise you get no profit out of it."

The friendliness of Americans rated high with everyone interviewed. Miss Kee was in fact somewhat homesick for Illinois, whose flat, land-locked terrain differs sharply from the rugged mountains and warm beaches she knew in her native Port Elizabeth, South Africa. "There were so many fantastic people, I could go back," she said excitedly.

"I generally like people better here than at home," remarked Luzian Ruch, from Switzerland, whose trademark seemed to be the ever present beret parked on top of his medium-length dark curly hair. "You're accepted immediately," the amiable traveler said. "By comparison the Swiss are very reserved."

## Likes American Girls

Girls are what interested and impressed young Rob Hawkins the most. "You have some really nice girls here," he remarked with an Australian accent, the only clue to his being a foreigner.

He was also impressed by the number of youth programs offered through schools and the community. "There are no youth programs in Australia," he said, while "K.J." and the South Africans nodded to indicate similar shortcomings in their countries.

"American students spend a fantastic amount of time to practice in athletics," the Australian said.

Levent Kuey, a well-mannered outgoing young man from Turkey, who spent some of his time in Illinois writing for the local paper, said he believes American schools put major emphasis on music, sports, and other areas, while serious studies are the "real extracurricular" activities in comparison to the educational system in his country.

Wilnorie (Willie) Rasay, from the Phillipine Islands, agreed with Hawkins, saying schools in his country are much harder and strict. He emphasized "strict" as though he had just received a paddling, which was definitely not the case because the group was having a quiet party at the home of John Tomlinson, one of the host families. "Things are more relaxed here," he grinned. "At home we have to wear uniforms to school."

Hufnagel, however, was disappointed by the lack of social programs available to American youths, claiming that in his country every community provides facilities for its young people where they can play ping pong, billiards, or hold dances. He said the young people themselves are responsible for keeping the recreation area clean and neat.

In explaining the AFS program briefly, Hufnagel said it includes youths from all over the world, except Communist countries, and the price charged to participating students varies according to the economic status of the country.

Students from developing nations paid considerably less than those from advanced parts of the world such as western Europe.

"My father and I paid about \$1,200 for the opportunity to come over here for a year," Hufnagel explained, adding that host families do their part on a strictly voluntary basis and are parents to the student while he or she is a guest in their home.

## 33 Host Families

While the group stayed in Lititz, 33 families served as hosts. Miss Van Der Merwe added that four families must be signed up as hosts for each student to assure compatibility. She pointed out that 85 percent of the students and host parents are matched successfully, but it is beneficial to all concerned if an alternative is available.

"The AFS program is wonderful," Miss Van Der Merwe and "K.J." agreed, while other students within the conversation circle gave spontaneous nods and expressions of approval. "A person can learn so much about himself and others," the thoughtful Norwegian remarked, "all the understanding that comes out of this, it can't be fathomed immediately — you become a new person and learn to handle people."

The program, as students described it, provides transportation and insurance expenses, as well as an allowance, and is operated as a non-profit service.

American television met with some criticism, particularly the commercialization of it. "K.J." opined that Ralph Nader still had a lot to accomplish yet as far as commercials on television are concerned. Hufnagel observed that it wasn't just TV advertising which bothered him, but the entire advertising spectrum, which is not nearly as widespread in Germany. Moving light chains and billboards, for example, are uncommon in his native country. TV game shows came off as being 'phony.'

Aside from being very favorably impressed by the hospitality of the people, availability of consumer goods, patriotism, and freedoms of the United States, Hufnagel came to realize through his experiences that a person can't have a stereotype image of a foreign country or foreigner. He admitted to having had misunderstandings and misconceptions of the United States and its people. Miss Van Der Merwe announced that she was asked quite a few questions about her country which revealed wrong impressions, such as "Do you ride elephants? Do you eat people? Do you wear clothes at home or grass skirts?"

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