

## Golden Jubilee of the Schoenstatt Girls' Youth. 1981.

It is with a heart of gratitude that I reflect on some forty years ago when we were preparing and representing the Schoenstatt Girl's Youth in Germany for our Golden Jubilee in 1981.



Sister Helen, Sr. Mary Louise and I were chosen as the Australian delegation to attend along with 22 other nations the celebrations in Schoenstatt. It was such an honour and the entire Schoenstatt movement joined us in support by prayer and practical fund raising. Beautiful Sr. Lisette, always enthusiastic and creative in her approach with



working with the youth, even had us busking at Circular Quay. We learnt some basic German as well as some cultural pointers, we prepared a gift ( a beautiful carved wooden lily candle holder) to present in Germany, and along with many other youth we prepared to make our Youth Consecration.

On arrival in Schoenstatt Germany, I remember being made very welcome, but I also remember feeling extremely overwhelmed at the size of Schoenstatt, it was its own village, it felt huge, so many modern buildings in comparison to our own humble little shrine amongst the gum trees, kangaroos and rabbits.

Our time was busy, prayers, mass and song, in huge auditoriums we would wear earphones and listen to the English translations from many interesting speakers. During this time there was also pilgrimages to the Dachau concentration camp (Sr. Mary Louise and Sr. Helen



attended) and Cambrai France. I was fortunate enough to participate walking in the footsteps of Josef Engling who was a soldier living a spiritual and faithful life, he fought and died in the fields of Cambrai. This experience was both powerful and confronting, we walked and sat in the fields where WW1 was fought, we paid our respects to the fallen soldiers who were never

able to return home, the expanse of so many graves was a stark reminder of the devastating tragedy of war .

We celebrated the richness of so many diverse cultures, we celebrated in prayer, laughter, story- telling, dance and song. I will always remember the Chileans literally dancing up the hills in song, wonderful cultural nights and fabulous yodellers from Switzerland. I remember Sr Mary and I standing on the stage of a huge auditorium, nervously, presenting one of our cultural pieces which was “Wie das Kangaroo hupfte Lerne”. Yes, you did read that correctly , I’m not sure if it is grammatically correct but we somehow were standing in front of an entire auditorium telling the story of “How the Kangaroo Learnt to Hop” in German. I still think “wow! Did we really do that?”

Perhaps one of the most profound experiences for me was awaiting the arrival of some special guests. The place was buzzing daily, lots of energy and excitement, nations were gathering, rooms would be readied, and welcome signs adorned. Whilst there were language barriers to communication, a combined enthusiasm and creativity prevailed, and friendships were forged. I think we must have looked an oddity in the dining halls at mealtimes, as we used our modified English and minimal German, as well as our hands, legs and feet to communicate. Some experiences defy words and despite our language barriers and without any explanation or exchange of words, the whole dining hall spontaneously stood and loudly applauded and cheered. Our special guests had finally arrived, they were the youth representation from Poland. Their rooms had been readied for days, we were told, no one knew when they would arrive because they had to be cautious about their movements as they could find themselves in conflict with their government ( martial law was introduced to Poland soon after in December 1981 and peoples’ movement were severely restricted). They dared to be believers, follow their convictions and faith, participate in a celebration of life and joy.

Faith, transcends words, faith “moves mountains”, faith brought us together to celebrate, to challenge, to grow and transform. Faith is a beautiful gift, I will always be thankful to the wonderful Schoenstatt family for sharing and encouraging me to walk in faith, for it has sustained me in all things.

Love and blessings

Doreen Abrahamse