I arrived in Oldenburg after a fairly “easy” flight from Johannesburg via Frankfurt and was unexpectedly met by Ben Khumalo-Seegelken at the Bremen airport. This was good news as I was rather apprehensive about the tram-train-bus trip that lay ahead. Ben was an excellent guide, sharing with me some of the history of Bremen and Oldenburg as we travelled. It was also good to speak to someone who had a clear concept of the politics, education, socio-demographic and economic issues of (South) Africa and obviously also of Germany. Ben was the leader of the team that would interact with us over the next three weeks.

My hosts were Hilbert and Christa Meyer. Due to Hilbert’s workload and my schedule, we only met on the Wednesday, approximately forty eight hours after my arrival. However, Christa was the perfect hostess, and ensured that I was quickly settled in and comfortable. I lived on the 5th floor (the attic) of their multi-storey home – there were 54 steps to my room, I counted them – and I had my own en suite bathroom. And there was a rose on the desk in my room – such a nice touch!

That afternoon we had an orientation meeting, where I met Astrid & Bjorn.

Later that evening Mary-Grace & I decided to visit Lappan, where there are many Bistro’s & Brauhausen. This was where I had my first German bagel & kaffee. And, of course, the obligatory German beer! Then I got lost, trying to go home…

Rule # 1 – When you get lost …
... you must find an elderly lady walking her tiny dog with her daughter. They will not only take you home by car, but they will first take you to their flat for kaffee. Ask NR! Great Oldenburg hospitality!

Great view from my attic bedroom window

Prof. Hilbert & Christa Meyer
People who made a difference …

Ben Khumalo-Seegelken – always around, always probing …

Bjorn – my guide and assistant

Bjorn was a great help. Within no time at all, he had me set up at a desk & arranged for the IT folk to set up my internet connection. Bjorn also knows how to select a good Bavarian beer! Along with Astrid, Jane, Karin, Marin, Christian, Tobias, Sarah and Verena, they really took good care of me. This is such a crucial part of the programme, as one is not left wondering what happens next.

Astrid – who helped in so many ways … guide, interpreter, handy-sorter Outer, friend, etc.

Sarah – our birthday girl!

Head of Chair, Karin

Tobias and Maren – great times, great guides!

Verena, Christian and Jane

A big thank you to all of these folk!
The fun begins …

Hilbert Meyer invited me to join him on his weekly sauna outing. We cycled for about 20 minutes before we arrived at the gymnasium.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rule # 2 – Sauna–beware!</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If you are invited to a session at the sauna, remember the following: Es ist ein gemeinschaftservarungen für damen und herren tuzamen – ’nuf said! Ask NR!</td>
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The work begins …

On Thursday, I did my presentation on “Self-Efficacy and the Recognition of Prior Learning.” I enjoyed the presentation and the discussion that followed was worthwhile. At one point the topic of discussion shifted to the problems regarding OBE in SA and it was interesting to hear that Germany were experiencing similar problems. There was a strong sense that continuous teacher development should be regarded as a collective (whole-staff) process, rather than “saving the clams, one at a time.”

The campus … 4 ‘first impressions’

My first impression was that I was in the original “bicycle city” – everyone from 4 to 95 owned a bicycle and rode with great skill.

My second impression was gleaned from a very powerful memorial in the memory of Carl von Ossietzky, whose name Oldenburg University carries: the poignant words which appear on the plaque below plead that humanity be put back into science and technology.

Thirdly the Oldenburg campus is an “open” campus, with no boom gates or security. This in itself was comforting – a comment on the community we had joined.

And finally, the people are extremely receptive to visitors and very friendly!
Reflection: of great leaders …

The staff and students of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan and the Carl von Ossietzky Universities are quite fortunate to be associated with two remarkable men. Both Carl von Ossietzky and Nelson Mandela were imprisoned (Von Ossietzky in 1933 and Mandela in 1956) by their country’s ruling party for their critique and activism against their state’s repressive policies and regimes. Von Ossietzky fought against German militarism, whereas Mandela fought against apartheid. Their struggle and commitment to their countries led them both to being awarded Nobel Peace Prizes and both their legacies are carried on through the work we are doing at our universities. (MG)

The work continues …

I attended the research presentations with Nokhanyo Mayaba and Malise Terblanche. It was very reminiscent of a similar NMMU event towards the end of 2008. The one difference was that students were presented with certificates at the end – something we may consider? The quality of the presentations was impressive, as was the level of questions and comments that followed.

Shopping at last …

I discovered a SPAR (of all things!) and this is where you stock your room with little tidbits to while away the long, cold nights.

The first rain

And then I woke up one morning and it was raining … cold, wet on my way to the office? … never!

Rule # 3 – Cycling in the rain

You only have to cycle in the rain once for at least two people to offer you a poncho to ensure you stay dry – Vielen dank, Verena & Hilbert! Ask NR!

The first day trip … Bremen

Saturday of the first weekend brought the first day trip. Bremen is about 1 hour from Oldenburg by train. A very picturesque ride …

Rule # 4 – Travelling by train

It is much better to pay 7.10 euros in the station before you board the train, than to purchase it on the train for 40 euros! Ask MG!
Bremen is a beautiful city where old buildings and more modern structures stand side by side in the central market area. From the statue of the Bremen Stadtmusikanten to St Petri Dom to the market square (must be done on a Saturday for full value) and the Schnoor area – meandering long the Weser Riverfront. A visit to Beck’s Bierbrauerei is an absolute must! The tour is informative and they are not shy about sharing their beer with their visitors! In many ways, it is reminiscent of the PE brewery tour.

Mary-Grace with the Stadtmusikanten

There is only one way to do lunch: buy bread, cheese & wurst at the market, buy a bottle of wine (screwtop) and two wine glasses (Bremen logo), and find a quiet spot on some steps. Sit down, prepare the food and ask someone to take your picture.

Lunch at the Bremen market square

It’s a long day and you take in huge quantities of liquid; you may wish to go to the toilet? (a portaloo, we would call it)

Instantly sanitised legs!
We were fetched from the station by Kilian Koebrich, who took us to the home of Arnold Jordaan and Judith Janson for a traditional German dinner. Great food & great hospitality – there is something really special about meeting a South African abroad, the connection is instant! At about 01:30 I was dropped off at the Hauptbahnhoff to collect my bicycle for the 5 km ride home. It was a long, cold ride to the warmth of my room.

Daytrip 2 - Dangast

Kilian kindly offered to take us to Dangast - a coastal village on the North Sea. It was a beautiful day and the sight of the shift from high tide to low tide was most impressive.

Rule # 5 – Portaloo (the use of …)

Do not jump into the portaloo when someone comes out in order to avoid paying. After each use, the door closes tightly, the lights go out, the toilet is withdrawn, and the floor is sanitized. If you are in there – i.e. did not pay, your legs get sanitized. Been there, done that! Ask NR!

Rule # 6 – Cycling late at night!

Do not – under any circumstances – cycle home after the dinner party that ends at 01:30. Bicycles are very unreliable at that hour and really struggle to maintain a steady line! Ask NR!

Judith & Arnold - hosts at our first German dinner, which was a very special event.

Malise & Neville with our guide, Killian

Malise & Mary-Grace enjoying cake & kaffee at Bremenhaven
**Daytrip 3 – remembering the Holocaust**

**Ben** kindly agreed to accompany us to Papenburg & Esterwege to visit the site of a WW11 concentration camp. The temperature was -6, which our guide **Frietjie Auslander** (which he translates as Freddie Foreigner!) assured us was fitting if we were to experience a semblance of the harsh conditions under which the Moorsoldaten had to live … and die.

The tour commenced at Papenburg, at the DIZ.

**Images of horror ...**

**Memorial at the original entrance ...**

**Voices from the past ...**

From Papenburg we travelled to Esterwege to visit the actual site of the concentration camp.
And then off to work again …

My hostess, Christa, made it possible for me to visit Berufsbildungsschule (vocational) Varel. The school has 1 200 learners and more than 100 staff members. The range of their offering is impressive and I have undertaken to give their contact details to Technical High Schools in the Port Elizabeth & Border area in the hope of developing some kind of exchange of ideas.

An impressive lathe at Varel …

Mary-Grace and I had the opportunity to address students who were soon to visit Port Elizabeth as a part of the exchange programme. Some were rather nervous about the trip.

"So when you visit a school in PE ..."

Another day, another school …

Maren was my guide on the next school visit. Berufsbildungshule Cloppenburg was next on my itinerary. This is a school with a strong exchange relationship with Linkside High in Port Elizabeth. This is a truly impressive school, with facilities that clearly demonstrate Germany’s commitment to their berufschulen. Similar in population to Varel, the school struck me as being one of the best in the area.

I had the opportunity to attend two English & one German class. In the English classes the teachers gave the pupils the opportunity to quiz me about SA. Two 45 minute sessions with some really tough questions ensured that I was quite exhausted when Maren took me home. I was most impressed with the discipline in the classes and the informal relationship that existed between learners and teachers. A most enlightening visit to an excellent school

Dental chair to prepare dental assistants
Maren on the water bed in the "therapy room"

On the way home, Maren stopped at a spot where we could walk in the forest & take some “frosty” pictures.

Cold, cold, cold, but beautiful ...

Mary-Grace in action …

Mary-Grace did a presentation on Scientific Literacy, which led to some animated discussions and my colleague acquitted herself very well in the face of some probing questions!

Look, Ma, no hands!

Post-presentation drink with Killian

Exchange of ideas in the NPDE (FET)

My meeting with Karin and her team was a good one and marks what I would like to believe is “the start of a conversation” that will be continued in Port Elizabeth when a number of their team will reciprocate by visiting SA. A summary of the meeting was prepared by Maren and will serve at our next meeting in PE.
Research presentations with a difference …

My host, Hilbert Meyer, hosted his last round of student presentations at his home, with a view to end the semester with a lunch, prepared by his wife, Christa. Mary-Grace joined Christa in the kitchen and I was really impressed by the ease with which she moved from prospective PHD to chef’s assistant!

Student presentation at Hilbert's home ...

View of Hamburg from St Michael's Cathedral

Mary-Grace handling the heat in the kitchen.

Drinks at ten ...

Daytrip 4 - Hamburg

Malise, Mary-Grace & I were guided by Astrid on this trip. Hamburg was a wonderful experience. We visited the massive harbor area, St Michael Cathedral, and many others.

Hamburg's place for protest

Boat ride on the Weser - Hamburg harbour
We also took a walk though the Reeperbahn, where some hard lessons were learnt ...

If only I’d checked the price ... !

**Rule # 7 – Ordering a drink at the (Grim) Reeperbahn ...**

*Never buy a drink (especially not a Piccalo) at a pub in the Reeperbahn without checking the price! (Ask MG)*

Tobias, Britta and Maren were my hosts for a Sunday breakfast in the country. We drove for about 30 km. to get to Café 21, where we enjoyed the most wonderful breakfast!

That evening I experienced one of the big highlights of the trip – attending a **Bundesliga** (soccer) match between **Weder Bremen** and **Bielenveldt**. The stadium was filled with more than 38 000 fans and the atmosphere was awesome! Weder Bremen (our team!) lost, but we were not allowed to show emotion, as we had to sit amongst the opposition, as the local tickets were sold out. **Thank you, Tobias!!**

My Bundesliga experience ...

The local fans fly their colours.

And then – at last! – it snowed ...
Dinner at Karin’s …

**Karin Rebmann**, Head of the Business Education Chair, where I spent most of my time, hosted a dinner for us and those who were soon to visit Port Elizabeth. The food was really good, and the evening a great success.

![Mary-Grace and Karin clearly having fun!](image)

**Interesting discussion – module writing.**

We had a very interesting discussion, led by **Wolfgang Nitsch**, exploring opportunities for co-operation in module writing. This meeting was also attended by **Annekatrin Klopp**, from the educational psychology department. It appears as though there are excellent opportunities for co-operation in this regard.

![Wolfgang Nitsch leading the discussion.](image)

The last round, folks!

On the evening before our departure for home, we (the die-hards) gathered at Carl’s Pub for a bout of some serious reflection. A good time was had by all … Thank you to all those who attended! That too tells a story!

![The final round of drinks - relationships cemented ...](image)

And so we take leave of the place and the people who have been a part of our lives for the last three/four weeks. Thank you all!

**Cheers!**

**Hambani ka’hle!**

**Auf wiedersehen!**

(‘Till we meet again in Port Elizabeth!)