



**Comments to the Deutscher Sprache und Schuleverein
Award Ceremony, May 1, 2011**

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Congratulations – winners and participants! You really are all winners. Why? Because you are taking the international view, the big view. This is surely the path less travelled, simply because it is more difficult.

I am happy to see that, in addition to the Deutscher Sprache und Schuleverein, Goethe house is also involved in this program. Jan Berger and Goethe House are located on our campus and we are happy to have them there.

You have worked through basic studies to the point where you now enjoy some of the extraordinary benefits of your German language activities. They will give you much satisfaction throughout your lives.

I now challenge you to integrate your language skills into your careers. Find a way to include your language ability in whatever else you do. Such opportunities exist and if you look for them, they will certainly contribute to your success.

I would like to talk with you about college studies, overseas experience, my personal experience and finally my children's experience.

So, you have done very well in high school German and I suppose in your high school studies in general; now what? I would expect that many of you are interested in somehow combining your German interests with your college program. There are many possibilities.

I will mention only two because I have been and am still involved with both of them and thus know them well.

A long time before you were born, a good friend of mine and I started a program at the University of Rhode Island. He was an outstanding German professor, Dr. John Grandin, and I arrived as Dean of Engineering. The thrust of our program was a five year curriculum that results in a degree in engineering, another degree in German and a six month internship in Germany. The program was very successful and has, under Dr. Grandin's guidance, expanded into several other languages.

When I arrived at MSOE, I wanted to create a program with the same flavor. Our result is a four year program combining Engineering or Business with a full academic year in Germany. Our students spend their junior year in Luebeck, Germany continuing the study of their major, along with an immersion in the German culture. Thus in four years, our students earn both the MSOE BS degree and the German Diplom. We will send about thirty students to Luebeck, Germany in September.

Our MSOE students study in Luebeck with their German counterparts. The following year, the German students come to the U.S. along with our American students. Then both groups study at MSOE during that final undergraduate year.

Both of these interdisciplinary programs are award-winners and are available to you after you finish high school.

My own children's experience with German has been very productive. Two of my children, a boy and a girl, studied German at Shorewood High School and each of them participated twice in a German language exchange with Salzburg, Austria and enjoyed that experience immensely.

Both of my sons studied at MSOE and participated in the German Exchange Program with Luebeck. One of them has now worked in Germany for over ten years for the General Electric Company, has married a Polish woman he met through GE and together they have a young son. My son speaks German fluently and is well underway to fluency in Polish. His career options have greatly expanded. This is the difference a foreign language can make in your careers.

My own experience is, of course, different. My first language was German. I was born in Germany in the midst of WWII, came to the U.S. as a child and learned my first English. I have tried to maintain my German and it has been a great advantage for me. As one example, I was heavily involved in a Data Exchange Agreement between the German and American governments for the better part of a decade. We had annual meetings alternately in Germany and the US.

It was a wonderful experience and certainly helped my career. With those meetings, I learned the answer to the challenge often thrown at language study: Why do I need to study German when everyone of consequence in Germany speaks English? I learned the answer is very simple. When a discussion or negotiation gets to a sticking point, the participants revert to their own language to straighten out the problem. It is a huge advantage to be able to participate in that discussion.

In addition, your relationship with others during a negotiation is vastly improved if you speak their language.

Another of the advantages is personal. For example, in my work with Dr. Grandin, we spent the first two weeks of June each summer in Germany, just as the white asparagus matured. If you love German food, this is heaven.

Lastly, I want to say a few words about our own international year. My wife, Pam, and I spent a year in Belgium following the completion of my Ph.D. Pam taught third graders at an international school in Waterloo, Belgium and I did post-doctoral work at the von Karman Institute, a NATO facility. We experienced the normal reaction to a time abroad. We spoke no French but learned enough to function well in Brussels. We did a lot of travelling, particularly in Germany, where my German was very useful, particularly since we wanted to get off the well-travelled roads. It was a marvelous experience and changed our lives.

An interesting thing about a foreign experience is our judgment of time. The first month included so many new experiences that, looking back after that time, it appeared we had been in Belgium for six months instead of only one. My wife kept a diary; we integrated well and were extremely busy and happy. After six months we were so comfortable that could function without stress. For that reason, I believe any period overseas is a good idea but to get the most out of it, the length should be, if possible, a year.

Now just a few words about our Grohmann Museum, established by Dr. Eckhart Grohmann, a German immigrant. The collection consists of over 900 paintings and bronzes, the oldest from 1580. We probably have 50 paintings from the 1600s. Almost all of these artworks are European and most of them are German. We have an imposing home for the collection at the corner of Broadway and State Street downtown with a roof garden and statues nine feet tall on the edge of the roof. Come and see it. You will certainly enjoy it.

Lastly, I'd like to say a word about Faust. I suppose many of you have read Goethe's Faust, perhaps even in German. If so, you are familiar with his bargain with the Mephistopheles. This was of particular interest to me because my family lived in the German town of Thale, which is the setting for one of the most famous scenes in Faust, Walpurgisnacht. This is the night the when the women in the town become witches and not necessarily ugly ones. One of the local attractions is the Hexentanzplatz, where the witches dance.

What you may not know about Faust is that Goethe wrote a second part, finished just before his death. In this part, Faust is redeemed and saved. How was that? He was saved by good deeds, specifically building dykes and reclaiming land from the sea at the northern coast and in the Netherlands. So what is the message? Engineering saved Faust and it can save you too!

Again, my congratulations to all of you.