

Hey y'all!

Last October we had the unique and unforgettable opportunity to experience what it's like to live with an American family and to visit a real American high school.

We stayed with an incredibly nice family with three adorable daughters and a son.

However, their oldest daughter and their son are already going to university in New York City, so we didn't have the chance to get to know the both of them.

We used to be quite an international household since our host mother was half Scottish – half American, and their grandma was also visiting (she had a *lovely* Scottish accent!).

Generally speaking, we wouldn't say that we experienced the American way of life much differently from the Austrian way of life. Hanging out with friends, partying (officially without alcohol – that goes without a saying (since the drinking age is 21!)), doing sports etc. – that's what most teenagers do in their spare time.

School isn't much different from what most of you would expect...it's pretty similar to what you see in the movies, but, of course, all the schools differ from each other...however, what they all have in common is that they all have several sport teams.

We joined the Cross Country Team during our visit. They have a couple of meetings during the X – Country season (which is always a big deal), where some schools of the state come together and compete.

Our host family was really willing to make our stay as exciting as possible – they had already organized a bunch of funny things to do - even before we arrived... For example a visit to New Orleans (which is approximately 2.5 hours from Jackson, MS) for Columbus Day.

Some of you might have already heard about the so-called Homecoming Week. For the ones who have no idea what it is about, let us describe it shortly:

Normally, Homecoming falls around September/October. It's a tradition where graduated students from the school come home for a football game. Prior to the game, the Homecoming Queen is elected and also during that time the Homecoming Ball takes place. They dress up formally and if the guy isn't a cad he will take the girl to a fancy dinner and buy a corsage for her. After dinner the legendary Homecoming Dance starts ... Homecoming is just hilarious... and everyone's pumped about it!

Now some of you might ask whether *all* the stereotypes we have of Americans are true or not. Well, our answer is NO – they are certainly not all true! Nevertheless, Americans do eat way too much fattening and unhealthy food, they have huge fridges, love American football, as well as MTV, drive huge cars, don't pay much attention to the environment... But still one should avoid generalizing everything. There do exist health – conscious, intelligent, kind and environmentally conscious Americans – only a minority of them is shallow, obese or dumb, like often presented on TV.

Less surprisingly, most people we met in Mississippi said that they had neither been skiing, nor out of the country before. They said that they had never heard of Bode Miller, that they hadn't known that Arnold Schwarzenegger is an Austrian, and that the only things they associated Austria with were *the mountains* and *the movie "The Sound of Music" (starring Julie Andrews)* (Isn't it weird that hardly any Austrian has ever heard about that movie ;-P)

Again, we would like to thank everyone who made it possible for us to do such a fantastic exchange program! We really benefited from it and it definitely broadened our minds!

Lisi & Hanna Wipplinger