

# Notes from Europe: Week Four

Here I am on the final days of an absolutely amazing four weeks filled with family, nature, and so many good meals together. My heart is filled to the brim as if it might burst. What a blessing to have two homes and to love each one equally for different reasons.

I'm quite grateful that my plan had us in Oehringen a full week leading up to our departure. Each and every day has been packed and there is still more to come. The days are full but they are not busy and the relaxed pace is rewarding. While there are special gatherings and events that have occurred these past weeks, it is the simple daily routines that fall into place that I appreciate most. These routines couldn't be easier and begin each day with a family breakfast on the terrace that looks out over my mother-in-law's garden. Sitting in the sun with overflowing platters of gorgeous fruits and freshly made tea, planning our day ahead is truly idyllic.



Laps in the Oehringen schwimmbad follow breakfast. Because

this has been a cooler summer (rarely breaking 80 degrees) it was often just Joachim and me. Swimming in 69 degree water felt like home to us with our Austin Barton Springs holding at 68 degrees year round. As swimmers, we have found that every lap pool has its regular cast of characters but I haven't met one yet like the guy here who jumps a lane every length, making his way across the pool diagonally and back again. He so can't be German!

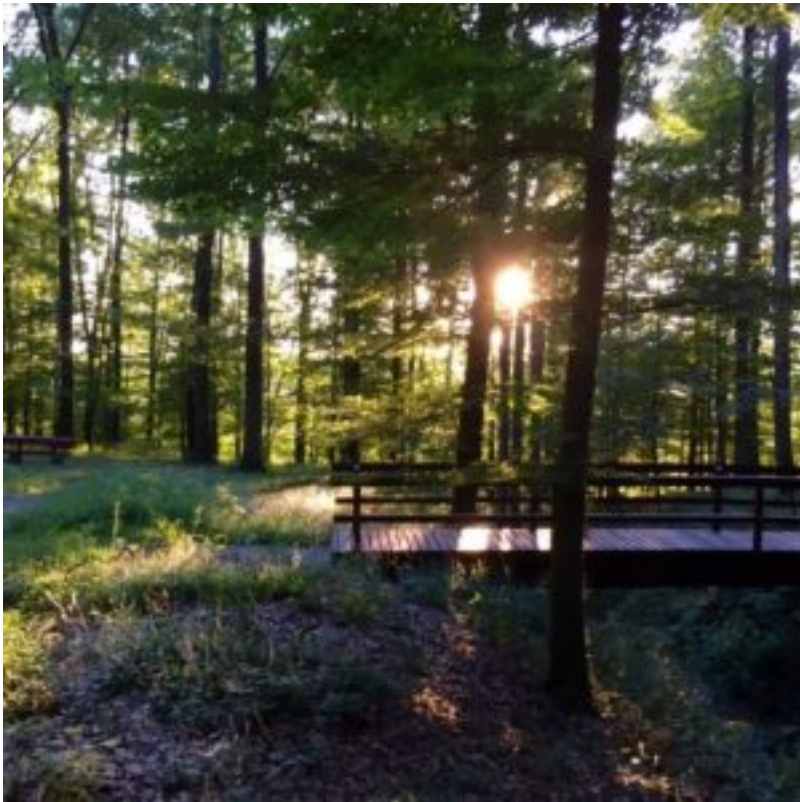


Food shopping is always last on my list of favorites at home because in Austin it always seems like such an ordeal. But, here, popping into the all bio grocers in Oehringen is the best thing ever. I can get in and out in 15 minutes, literally every product is organic, and they have everything I need. What's even better? I can get there on my bike!!



Then of course there is cooking with Oma. It's simply fantastic! We both have such a love for good natural food and at 81 she is still amazingly curious and more than willing to try new things. The fact that she embraces the way we eat is absolutely heartwarming. Some days we take turns with meal prep but most of the time we are in the kitchen together, turning out food fresh from the garden for the four of us to enjoy.

Then every evening we head to the Friedrichsruhe Wald for an after dinner walk. I don't know that I can find the words to describe how I feel about this place but the closest one is "home." The sensory experience is so intense from the fresh air, to the song of the rustling leaves, and the palette of every shade possible of green. In the constantly changing world we live in, with so much artificial stimulation, this is a place that delivers a great reminder of what is real.



And so our time here soon comes to a close, as it has every summer for the past 8 years since we moved from Germany to Austin. Another life waits for us on the other side of the ocean with people we dearly love and a very different set of routines. It's a little busier and moves a bit faster but it all happens in a city that won over our hearts on our first visit. It's also home to all of my children. In a week's time it will feel like all we shared in Europe is so far away. But when we take a moment and slow ourselves down we will remember the family breakfasts together, the feel of the forest each evening, all of the laughter, and of course the love which will carry us through the next year.