

England 1 Germany 1

Just to explain this is not a football score it's the amount of conferences I have attended as a new member of the Networking women in the fire service, the first one this year at the fire service college in the UK which I enjoyed very much. The second one in Munster Germany from the 3rd - 5th of November which I have just returned from.

It all started with an e mail from Amelia, (Networking London) asking if anyone was interested in representing the NWFS and the London Fire Brigade at the Women's networking conference in Germany, so I thought why not jumped in with both feet and hit the reply button.

Before I knew it I was off to Germany, I travelled over on the Thursday night from Stansted and was met at the airport by the organiser Susanne Klatt, lucky for me Susanne spoke very good English which is a good job as my German consists of about three words!

Susanne took me to the Institut der Feuerwehr NRW which is the fire service training college where the weekend conference was to take place.

Up with the lark on Friday the Germans certainly know how to pack in a whole day and breakfast started at 7am, the delegates were arriving from all over Germany and some from Holland but not until the afternoon, like all conferences there was a lot to do, so I pitched in and helped put together the badges and conference packs.

Delegates all started to arrive and next on the agenda were the icebreaker sessions! I started doing my own icebreaking by trying to find out who spoke English out of upwards of eighty women firefighters, I was lucky and found Sylvia and Heike and a few others who spoke good English and all became my new best friends for the weekend. After the icebreaking sessions we all went into the conference room for the official opening by the chief, after which I presented the chief with a plaque from the London Fire Brigade.

We all then went for dinner; the food was very tasty and plentiful and continued to be so for the whole weekend, next was the main icebreaking session otherwise known as everybody to the bar!

Now as you know the Germans have a fearsome reputation for being able to drink and deservedly so, and after a little gentle ribbing from them about the English being able to keep up, the challenge was on, after a few beers and a few tequilas courtesy of Sonja! It was amazing how much my German improved!



The bar closed at 2am with me and three others left standing (just!) and having taught them the English term LIGHTWEIGHT! for anyone who left the bar early, off we staggered to bed.

Saturday arrived much too early and I found myself in the breakfast hall at 7am don't ask me how but I managed it!

The rest of the day was taken up with practical exercises and workshops, because of my lack of German I participated in the practical activities, they were very similar to the firefighter for a day workshop in the UK and it was very interesting to see the different equipment and procedures that the German fire service uses.

After the workshops finished we were all taken on a tour of Munster which is a very beautiful town and if you get the chance of a cheap flight I would recommend anyone to visit for the weekend.

After the tour we all returned for dinner and more icebreaking in the bar! I managed to last until midnight where tiredness had me heading for the door, as I said goodnight and opened it I was met with a chorus of LIGHTWEIGHT! who says the Germans don't have a sense of humour.

Sunday the last day of the conference and I presented a workshop on the L.F.B the Arson Task Force and the NWFS, Susanne translated for me and I think it went down well, looking round at the end no one had fallen asleep or fell off their chairs so that was a bonus.

All too soon we were in the conference room and Susanne was giving the closing speech, then everybody was saying their goodbyes and looking forward to next year.

A couple of tips for you if you ever go to a conference abroad, take some spare uniform as they love to swap t shirts with you, and lots of your contact cards as you will be giving them out a lot to keep in touch.

To end I would say that if you ever get the chance to attend a conference here or abroad do like I did jump in with both feet you won't regret it.

I would like to thank the NWFS for giving me the opportunity to attend the conference and I hope I did you proud, a big thank you to Susanne and her team in Germany for looking after me so well, and to all the women I met at in Munster see you next year mine's a tequila !

Best Regards

Sue Douglas

Arson Task Force London Fire Brigade