



Rotary Club of Santa Rosa West

Bulletin for April 7, 2008 "Farewell Marienburg," Claus Neumann

By Bill Dodson

Preliminaries



President **Fred Zmarzly** eloquently called the meeting to order of this very fine chapter of a great organization at the St Rose Meeting Hall.

Pledge: **Ruth Lincoln** did a fine job of leading us in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Rotary Moment: **Gary Lucas**, never at a loss for a moment, provided one.

[PDF Version for Printing](#)

[Last Bulletin](#)

[Bulletin Archive](#)

Coming Up:

4/14 - Life & Times of J.S. Bach,
Bob Worth, SSU Choral Director

4/21 - "Being Myself," Gary Lucas

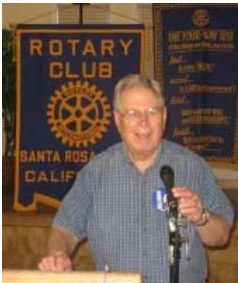
4/28 - Rotary Speech Contest,
Carston Mitchell

5/5 - Evening Cinco de Mayo
Celebration @ Harvest Moon
Winery (details TBA)

5/12 - GSE Team

5/19 - Planning Commission
Overview, Scott Bartley

Our Greeter: **Phil Talamantes** was our official greeter and announced our one visiting Rotarian: **Vicki Lockner**



Guests: **Bill Fisher** introduced his son **Jim** and his longtime friend and a former member **Rich Barbieri**. **Jim Valinoti** introduced his longtime friend and a former member **Mike Arendt**. **Rich Pratt** introduced his wife **Kathy**. **John Withers** introduced our guest's speaker's wife **Debby Newman** and his own wife **Pat**.

Announcements and Such:

Board meeting at Josef's on April 8.

The Rotary Foundation has announced that our club has been approved for a matching grant for kitchen equipment for a school for abandoned children in Guadalajara Mexico.

Tarina Hall, member and director of 'Rebuilding Together' announced her organization will work on three houses on April 26. Let her know if you are available to help.



The District Assembly is April 12. **Chuck Stark** is spearheading the efforts to extract awards for our Roseland

Prep support and our annual speech contest.

The District Conference is May 16, 17 and 18 this year in San Francisco. Go to the District website for more information and let **Fred** know you are going.

Students of the Month

Bob Zeni introduced our two students of the month from Piner High School.

Beverly Preston is a very poised and articulate senior who will be attending UCLA (?) and is interested in art and theater and would like to be involved in teaching special education students. Her schedule includes captain of Piner's badminton team and she has had lead roles in several drama productions in their state of the art facility.



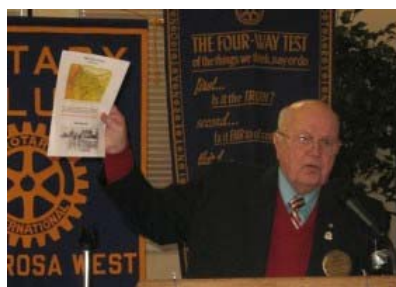
Keegan Owsley is a senior who was pretty sure he would be a computer programmer until he was introduced to the world of medicine. After some intellectual soul searching, he has decided to combine his love of technology and medicine to study bioengineering. We can imagine great things coming from **Keegan** in the future.

Raffle

Teddy Sipe had the winning ticket but managed to avoid the winning marble. **Bob Zeni** won the great bottle of wine.

Program: "Farewell Marienburg" by Claus Neumann

John Withers introduced longtime Santa Rosa Restaurateur Claus Newman who has written a book titled *Farewell Marienburg* about his growing up and leaving this town in Prussia during the early and middle parts of the last century.



Here's what Amazon.com has posted about **Claus'** history:

Recollections of a boy in Hitler's Germany , September 21, 2007, by KM "literary devotee"

Ask someone where East Prussia was, and chances are you'll get a shrug. Well, it was the part of Germany that lay alongside the Baltic Sea with Russia/USSR on its northern border and Poland to the southeast. Situated just south of the Baltic coast and close to West Prussia was Marienburg, East Prussia, the birthplace of **Claus Neumann**.

He (**Claus**) came into the world in 1929 in the relative lull between the two world wars. The first portion of FAREWELL MARIENBURG consists of Neumann's warm memories of his childhood. He tells of their vacations, remembering the floor plan of their boathouse as if he were there now. He recollects the specials foods at

Christmas and New Years. He tells of his father's job as manager of a sugar plant. He writes of his friends, Dieter and Gerhard. He confides a few of his and his brother Gerd's pranks, including the time Gerd's chemistry experiment blew up in the pantry loft.

All German children became part of the Hitler Youth when they were ten. **Claus**, a year younger than his brother, got special permission to join at nine so they could be in the same unit. The author, who makes it a point to write each stage of FAREWELL MARIENBURG from the perspective he held at the time, honestly admits he took pride in being a member of the Hitler Youth. He was an idealistic young boy who believed that his Fuehrer was leading his country to solid, constructive strength again.

When war came, the Neumanns were at first cautiously optimistic about victory. But when Hitler declared war on Stalin's Russia, they and other Germans wondered why a second front was being opened; shouldn't the adversaries in the West be dealt with first? They also sometimes questioned the incessant National Socialist propaganda. And the family noticed and worried that there were hardly any Jews left. **Claus'** father said, " 'All of them whom I knew left long ago. It seems to be an obsession with our government.' " They heard that Germany operated some concentration camps, but they believed them to be few, and thought they housed only an overflow of criminals.

In 1944, the war tide turned irrevocably against Germany, and fourteen-year-old **Claus** was sent to a youth labor camp to dig anti-tank trenches. When the Russians broke through German army lines and overran East Prussia, **Claus** got back to Marienburg to help his father organize the last of the fleeing refugees who used to work for the sugar factory. He saw, heard about, and experienced some harrowing things. As they left their home, **Claus** looked back at the still imposing Marienburg Castle that was built by Teutonic knights in the thirteenth century. It's half-destroyed (by the fighting) silhouette was the last **Claus** saw of Marienburg. The question then became, would he and his father be reunited with the rest of the family? And how would they fare in the harsh reality of a defeated, bombed-out Germany?

Neumann answers these questions in the plain, forthright manner he did dealing with his earlier life recollections. His writing style is appealingly conversational; one can feel the charming, slightly quirky English-as-a-second-language component to his syntax. He doesn't engage in a great deal of detail but moves the narrative briskly along. Nor does he pause to analyze too much, although he certainly does not hesitate to express opinions. And those opinions change markedly over time.

This memoir will be of interest to adults, especially those who are World War II history buffs or who had relatives who came from East Prussia, as this reader is and does. This book though is also suitable for young people (perhaps even for some below age twelve). They could be hooked into a history lesson by the easy, uncomplicated prose and the story of a boy who grew up under Hitler's rule.

After the Allies won World War II, East Prussia was subsumed. About half is now part of Poland, and Russia claimed the rest. **Claus Neumann** doesn't say whether he has gone back to see what has become of his childhood home. If he has, or were to do so, he would see Marienburg Castle, now called Malbork Castle, has been rebuilt. But perhaps little else would be familiar. So much in East Prussia was destroyed in the war, and few Germans live there now. Neumann, an American since the 1950s, might prefer his childhood memories of Marienburg be undisturbed by modern images.

FAREWELL MARIENBURG is a finely modest contribution to the sparse literature about East Prussia. Thank you, **Mr. Neumann**, for writing it.

Your Bulletin Reporter:
Bill Dodson



Your Bulletin Editor:
Jim Valinoti

