

# International Conference for Physics Students 2008

Krakow, Poland

*By Jodie Barker-Tvedtnes, 2008 SPS Outstanding Student, Utah State University*

First I have to say that attending the International Conference for Physics Students (ICPS) was an amazing experience. This was the first time I had ever had the chance to travel to Europe and the people, the city and the overall atmosphere at the conference were both exciting and memorable.

The beginning of the trip was the only part which I would not want to repeat. I arrived at the airport in Salt Lake City at 6:00 in the morning to find that one of my flights had been cancelled. Luckily there was another flight available later that day so after 24 hours in airport terminals and on 3 different planes I arrived in Krakow. After landing, I took a train to the city center and then a bus to the dormitories where the conference participants were staying. I ended up staying in a room with Madelina, a girl from Romania who is studying particle physics.



**Figure 1 - Madelina, my roommate during ICPS, and me before the welcome party.**

The conference activities began on the night of the 6<sup>th</sup> with a welcome party. This was the first chance I had to meet people attending the conference and it was exciting to talk to so many people with such different backgrounds and knowing they were all interested in physics at some level.

The opening presentation, by Dr. Jozef Spalek, was on superconductivity and was followed by a set of demonstrations which included freezing a rose, a magnetic train, freezing the air in balloons and levitating a disk.



**Figure 2 – Images from the demonstrations following the first lecture on superconductivity. The first image shows a rose being frozen and the second shows a levitated disk.**

Student presentations began the following morning. My talk was third in one of the parallel sessions and attendance was higher than I had expected. This was the first conference lecture I had given but after my nerves settled down the presentation went

smoothly. Afterwards, several people asked questions and even spoke with me after the session ended. Throughout the rest of the conference I attended student presentations on Quantum Field Theory, Sonoluminescence, Gravity waves, and many other varied topics.

For the excursions, I choose to go to Auschwitz. They took place on the only day that it rained during the entire trip, which in a way was fitting based on our destination. It was an experience that I will never forget.

On the third day of the conference there was an invited speaker who gave a presentation on doing physics demonstrations for different age groups as an outreach activity. He gave some good ideas for demonstration but his main point was that you need to make it into a show. It needs to be exciting. Something the kids, or adults, will remember. Most of his demonstrations involved liquid nitrogen (see figure 4).

Each night during the conference there were parties. The second night was a chance for the organizers to show off their national culture and history. The third night was the National Party which gave all the people visiting from other countries a chance to bring



**Figure 6 – This image was taken at the USA table at the National Party. From Left: Jodie Barker-Tvedtnes, Therese Jones, Rachael Roettenbacher, Danielle Kaminski**



**Figure 5 – Some of the costumes at the costume party.**

food and drinks from their respective countries and to do a performance of some sort. The USA table had fajitas, chips and salsa, funnel cakes and s'mores. It was an odd mix but it went over well. The costume party was on the fourth night. I dressed as a vampire. My first reaction when I heard that there was a costume party was that it seemed like a strange event to hold at a physics conference, but it was a lot of fun. Some people were very creative with their costumes, dressing as anything from King Arthur from Monty Python to beach bums, death and even Laura Croft.

The final presentation by Dr. Andrzej Sobolewski was on molecular mechanisms of photostability of life. This was followed by awards and a farewell party that night. This was our chance to say goodbye to new friends and our last chance to exchange contact information.



**Figure 3 - The main Gate of Auschwitz II Birkenau.**



**Figure 4 - An image from a lecture given on physics demonstrations and how to prepare to take them into classrooms.**

I spent my final day and evening in Poland walking around Krakow with Madelina and Marcin, another friend from the conference. This gave us one more chance to see the city by night, then, after dropping Madelina off at her train, I took a train to the airport with Marcin to wait for my early flight home.



**Figure 9 – Wawel castle is a small castle in Krakow. There is a legend of the Wawel Dragon which lived here.**



**Figure 9 – The gardens at the Wawel Castle.**



**Figure 9 – This image was taken in the city center on the evening we all left Krakow.**