

ST. SOMETIMES

BERLIN AFTER 23 YEARS



*The Life and Times of an International Teacher
Holidays 2013 Vol 146*

Home Again At The Schwarz House!

It is truly hard to describe the feeling of coming back home to Berlin. I guess coming home *is* the way to describe it.

Arrival: I didn't even realize that I had booked a flight into the former Eastern part of Berlin. That turned out to be an extra 45 minute drive for my mother, Uta. I felt really bad, but she insisted on coming to get me.

English: She also really wanted to speak in English for the first couple of days. It didn't matter to me, so we only talked in English unless one of us came upon a word or phrase we couldn't remember in either of the languages. Speaking English with her while surrounded by German was like slowly getting into a warm bath. After a while, the German started to really come back! This worked well for Uta also. Any chance for her to practice English is a treat because her oldest child (Julia) lives with her family in New Foundland. Uta has to speak English with everyone because they don't know German.

Time: Hermsdorf, the small suburb of Berlin where the Schwarz house is, has not changed since I left many years ago. All the streets seem to be the same. The cars are a bit more updated and kids have cell phones, but this is bizarre. The house, the books, the garden, and almost everything is just the same as it was when I lived here. Uta had the kitchen redone and moved the bedrooms around.

Relaxation: This was such a low key vacation. Uta is almost 75 years old - July 15th is the date. That means a daily routine that doesn't move too fast. She wouldn't let me work in the kitchen. It's her kitchen and very small.



So each morning, she would let me sleep in while she prepared breakfast. We would sit for a few hours drinking coffee, reading news (me online and her - the newspaper). We would watch the bird feeders in the back yard and chat about the past twenty five years. If I didn't make a run into the city, I would separate from Uta so she could take a nap and I could work online or read. Lunch time would come around and Uta would fix a big lunch. We'd eat and then nap again. The day would slowly go by and get dark around 4:30pm.

Evenings: Dinner would be leftovers and a few phone calls. Uta still has a lot of friends and since it was holidays, she would often call Canada (Julia's family), Stuttgart (Philipp's family), or Zagreb (Jakob's family was there for the holiday). At around 8:30, Uta would go up to "my room" and turn on the nightly news. We would watch the news together and then either a movie or our favorite *Krimi* - crime show - called *Tatort*. *Tatort* is like CSI, but it takes place in a different city in Germany every show. Awesome! German TV is awesome because commercials were only between shows. Then I'd go to sleep and the routine would start all over again. I really needed this kind of vacation after the quick pace of the 4th grade classroom.



We decorated the real tree with ornaments like this from the late 1800's.



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A Walk Around the Old Neighborhood

Back in 1986-87 I walked to and from school every day, rode my (Julia's) bike through all the streets of Hermsdorf, and navigated around piles of dog pooh. One day, instead of taking the usual afternoon nap like Uta does daily, I opted for a stroll around the neighborhood. Maybe I could find a Döner Kebab or some fries, currywurst and a beer at an Imbiss.

There was no sun as I set out. It was Sunday so everything is closed, and I mean EVERYTHING. Germans don't work on Sundays unless they own a bakery or work for Mass transit. Everything was so quiet!

HERMSDORF - LIKE A WORM HOLE BACK IN TIME. BERLIN HAS CHANGED, BUT NOT THIS NORTHERN SUBURB!

Oh, the Memories

As I strolled from street to street, reaching back and trying to match the streets to distant memories, I navigated around piles of dog crap. Why can't Hermsdorfers make a better effort at cleaning up after their dogs? These are the streets that I walked on back and forth to school and rode bikes with Philipp to local weekend parties. The memories came back like they had happened yesterday. It wasn't difficult because very little has changed.

School

Hasn't changed either. The G-H-G is still there, with just a cafeteria added on. The city require it. Other than that, it felt natural to walk up the steps.



GYMNASIUM

That's what it says on the door. Too bad I couldn't visit during a school day after all of these years. I remember taking all three sciences among the eleven or so courses that an average 11th grader in Germany takes. Wow. Many people ask if I ever received grades that year. Nope. I made up my year the following year and graduated a year later.



MEMORIES

It's the same street and the same house that I lived in years ago. The streets are all the same. This little suburb hasn't changed a bit. I felt like taking out the bicycle and calling a few friends to meet at the city park in Fronau, but everyone has kids, cars, families, jobs, and schedules. This was so weird, it really was. Going back 25 years into history...weird.



MEMORIES

Now this was a treat! I only got to see a few of the many old friends. Martin, Florian (and his sister Sophie), Niedzie and a few others are still around. Niedzie (left) joined the family for Sylvester - German New Years - and dinner. It was great to see him again. He seems to be doing great. He's working in real-estate now, taking care of his mom, and healthy!

The Berlin Wall is now just a memory, but the East Side Gallery is a tribute to the art from The Wall.

Nope, my graffiti didn't make it onto this tribute. This is the real art. The East Side Gallery is near the Ostbahnhof (East main station) if you ever want to go see it. You can also google the name. It took Uta and I about an hour of slow walking to see most of the exhibition.

Is it the real Wall? No. This tribute has been put together as a sort of memorial. It was originally created in 1990 by a host of famous artists that were asked to paint a section of the wall. (The wall is very similar to the outside wall as I saw it from the West in 1986-7.) Over the years,

UTA TREATED ME TO A NICE MEAL AT THE ORANIEN RESTAURANT - TASTY TOMATO SOUP!

due to graffiti, weather, and new construction, the East Side Gallery wall art has degraded. There were several attempts to ask the artists to repaint, but many of them are upset at the conditions of their work.

Years later, there are plans for ever more tourism. The current wall Tribute is in a bustling place. A huge ice arena is nearby and there is a lot of new construction for apartments and restaurants along the water.

I saw the East and West youth hostels. Each is a stationary boat on the water. Google it. I don't stay in Youth Hostels.

Anyway, this is a must see. Uta loves the Brothers' Kiss and I am a fan of the Travi and Floyd tribute. You can't go wrong with this short tour. Our cameras picked up enough light even after the sun went down.



105 ARTISTS



THE TRAVI

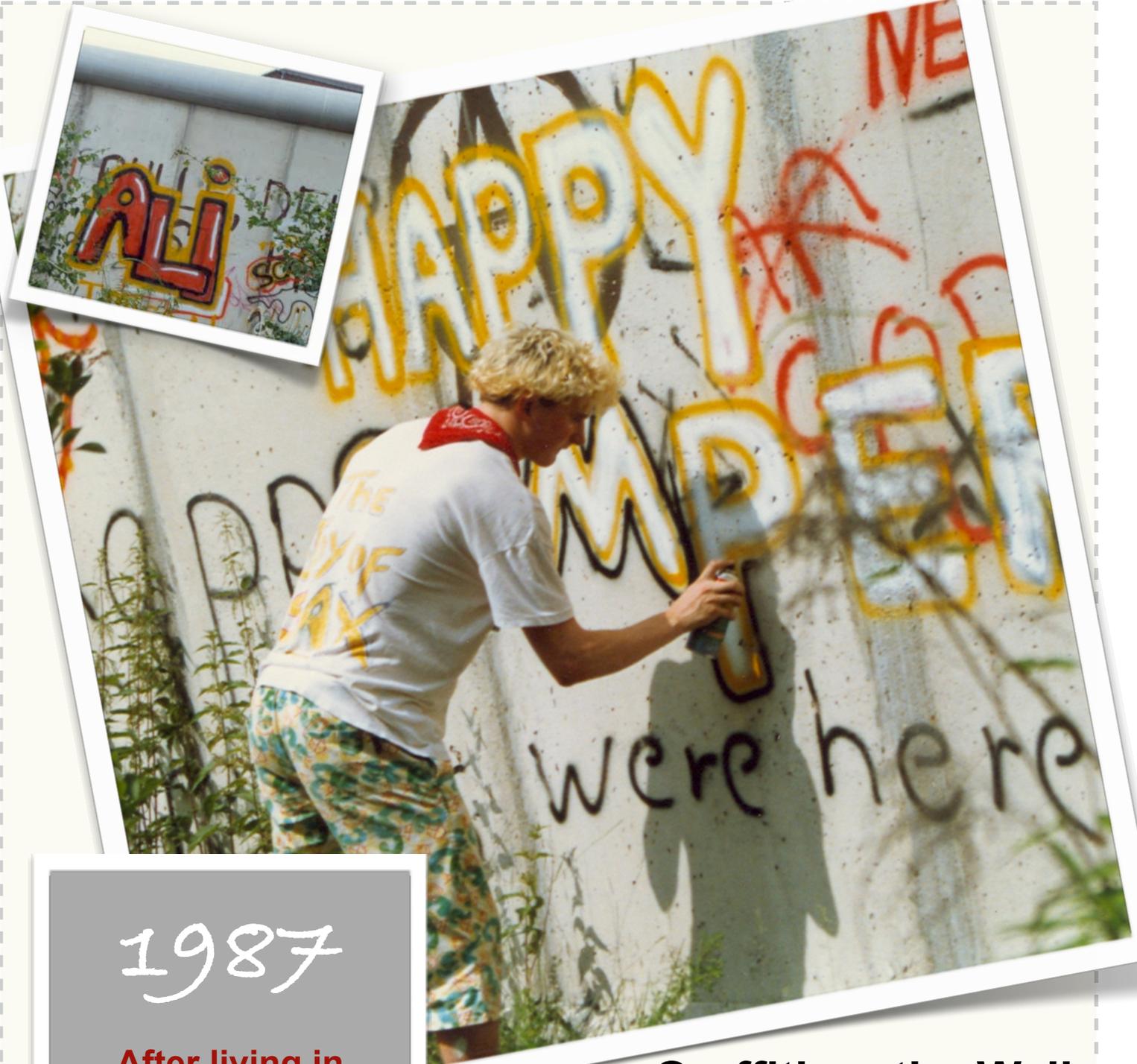


PINK FLOYD TRIBUTE



BRUDERKUSS (MAKING FUN OF BREZHNEV & HONECKER)
BY Dmitri Vrubel.





1987

After living in Berlin for a year, I wasn't sure what unique gift to bring back. Pictures of my Graffiti on the Wall are now even more unique.

Graffiti on the Wall

Another American and I decided to buy some cans of spray paint and take our chances on a bright, mid-day graffiti mission. Sometimes, bored police in each of the sectors would run off gangs of kids that were spraying the Wall. I succeeded in painting three great pieces of work: Lemoine Sector, Happy Campers, and a tribute to Alison then Bachuber (Ali). We were run off after about an hour. Now those three are in a million pieces or part of a Berlin Wall Exhibit in some museum around the world. Let me know if you ever come across one of them. I will certainly travel to see it.



**After So Many years
The Berlin Wall is just a
memory now.**

2013

**Just visiting for
two weeks I
wandered down to
Potsdamer Platz,
and found**

the Wall.

Meeting up: old friends or new friends?

After going to fantastic circus with Uta one day (before Philipp's family arrived), Uta and I separated at the subway. Uta headed home and I tried to find a new part of town at a new subway stop - new to me. Philipp had been arranging for a meet-up with a group of old friends at a bar called Nemos. Philipp wasn't there yet, but I was expecting Martin to show up. That way, I would recognize *someone*. Martin and I had seen each other back in 2008 when Philipp and Tini tied the knot.

When I finally found the bar, along a long street of bars and restaurants (Oderberger Straße) in former East Berlin, there were about nine people in there, but no Martin. I didn't recognize anyone. My texting with Philipp, trying to connect with Martin - no current number for him - was taking a while. I lazily drank a beer and figured Martin was a bit late. Philipp texted back halfway through my beer and said Martin should be there. He even

offered to call Martin. I waved him off with a "thanks but I'm a big boy" text. After all, there were only a handful of people in the bar and I had my eye on a table of four speaking English and German mix.

I hung up with Philipp and took a fresh beer over to the table to introduce myself. You should have seen their faces! It was indeed a group of people that knew me once upon a time. I didn't recognize any of them. They wound up introducing themselves with handshakes all around. Unbelievable!

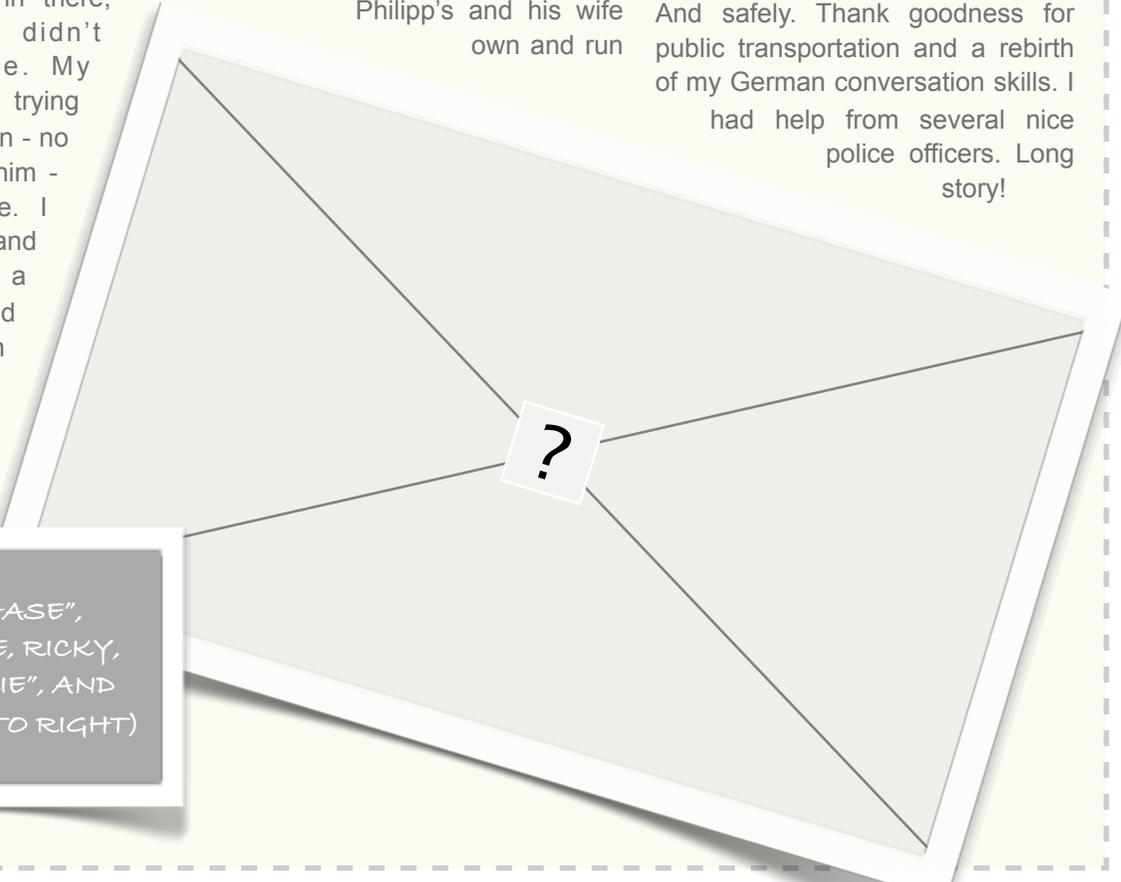
Jürgen was to my left. He was in P.E. with me 25 years ago. I spent the entire night trying to figure out just which kid he was in Gym class 25 years ago. I don't remember her name, but Ricky's wife is from Poland. She was delightful to talk with. Since she didn't know German, there was a lot of English flowing around the table. Then there is Ricky. Ricky was one of Philipp's and his wife own and run

a small international school in Poland together. He is a real character now and back in the day, he was too.

Towards the end of my exchange year, Philipp and I had drifted a little apart with friend groups because we were one class year apart. Ricky, Ollie, and Stefan Turini were more friends of Philipp than me.

The beers started flowing along with the stories from days gone by. I passed around about a hundred pictures from those days. They were scanned copies from a meager collection. The pictures really caused a lot of laughter and disbelief. Ahh the 80's.

I don't really know how I got home after all of those beers, no food, and a subway/street car system that has grown exponentially after 25 years! Just think, I barely know how I got TO the bar sober, much less get all the way home. But I did. And safely. Thank goodness for public transportation and a rebirth of my German conversation skills. I had help from several nice police officers. Long story!



JÜRGEN "HASE",
RICKY'S WIFE, RICKY,
OLIVER "OLLIE", AND
TURINI (LEFT TO RIGHT)

Review - Philipp

In a nutshell, I was an exchange student in Berlin, Germany back in the 1986-1987 school year. I lived with Philipp, his brother Jakob, his father Peter, and his mother Uta. I went from English to German, small town Green Bay to Big City Berlin, surrounded by fields to surrounded by Machine Gun toting Communists (seriously, Berlin was East and West back then), and small Catholic Abbot Pennings to public Gymnasium.

I returned and made up my senior year at Pennings. The next year, Philipp did the exact opposite with my parents and Jason. Jason and Philipp graduated together.

1986 - I LIVED IN BERLIN

1991 - A SHORT 2 WEEK

VISIT TO BERLIN

2006 - A VISIT WITH PHILIPP
AND TINI IN DARMSTADT

2008 - PHILIPP/TINI WEDDING

2013 - XMAS VISIT

Time With my other "Family"

I really need to say thank you to all of the Schwarzes. It was a time way over due. This was a fantastic holiday season just spending time with my adopted family from so many years ago.

Some day, I would love to see my Lemoine family and my Schwarz family together for a Christmas. That would be nothing but fun. Can you imagine what a "full circle of life" it would be if Pauline or Moritz spent a Lemoine year in the USA sometime or if young Teddy gets to be friends with Pauline or Moritz and spends a year with the crazy Philipp? That would be amazing.

Thank you Schwarz family. I was missing my Lemoine family this holiday season. I had so much fun.



MR. BLACK

Brother number 4. The lost Lemoine boy. Mr. Fillup Black. All of these describe Philipp. He hasn't changed much in the past 25 years since I joined his family. We should all be thankful that he hasn't changed at all. He's just grown up a bit, gotten married, and is now the proud father of two kids just like him.



TINI & MORITZ

This is Tini. Perhaps you have met her before. To me, she is the perfect match for Philipp. Philipp is outgoing, silly, and childish like me. Tini is the opposite. At least, that is my impression.

This is Moritz. He is only 2 yrs old but he is just like his daddy. I love his 2 year old stutter. If you meet him, you will simply melt. Unless, of course, he has just spilled out the 4,000 legos all over the floor again.



PAULINE

Pauline is now four years old. What a cutie. I think she really likes the Hello Kitty hat I gave her for Christmas. Maybe because I wore a Koala bear hat and gave her brother an Elephant. Maybe I'll have to get one for the littlest Lemoines. Pauline totally enjoyed spending time with Grandma. I loved talking to her. You can tell she gets her calm demeanor from Tini and her craziness from her daddy. It was great to meet her!

East West ? Berlin has Changed

I had a lot of time to sit with Uta and listen to stories. She had so many. It is unfortunate that I didn't record them. She has already written three chapters of her book - *momoires* - and soon she will be writing about what she shared with me. Her eyes would tear up when the topics switched over to Peter. Inevitably, everything had to do with Peter - her husband and my host father that passed away in 2006.

Uta shared several stories with me describing how Peter was active with the underground, getting

Eastern Germans over to the West. Peter would be the "drop man" that muled large amounts of money over to the East. Peter had a standing visa into the East and he traveled extensively as a professional musician (choir director and organ player). I just sat there in awe as Uta shared with me. I had had no idea when I was there as a teenager. One other interesting fact I learned: East Germany owned and maintained the S-Bahn (street cars) while the West owned and operated the U-Bahn (subways). The topic came up when I mentioned to Uta that the S-Bahn cars seemed a lot more modern, with formed plastic seats, than the old wooden benches I remembered.

When Philipp and family arrived on the 29th, Philipp was eager to show me areas of the former East. It was

amazing how Der Mauer (the Wall) snaked through the city. In modern Berlin, I couldn't keep up. Philipp would be driving Uta's car and suddenly say "this was the East" or "now we are back in the West".

I still remember (back in 1987) going through the U-Bahn border crossing at Friedrich Straße. The guards had loaded machine guns and everyone was so stoic and serious. (Have you ever seen the movie *Gotcha?*) Philipp and I would go over the border for a day just to eat and drink real cheap.

If you ever go to Berlin, you will be able to see pieces of the Wall, go to a few indoor or outdoor museums, but it is truly a different place. It is an amazing city with everything to offer. Go see it. You won't see what I saw in the '80s but the modern Berlin is amazing still!



THE FORMER EAST SIDE IS STILL TRYING TO FIND
IT'S IDENTITY.