

THE WALL CAME TUMBLING DOWN

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In late September, the first pictures shown on TV of the West German Embassy in Prague, full to the brim with citizens of the GDR hoping to be allowed 'out', struck fear into many hearts here. At that time, no one had an inkling of what was to come; of what overwhelming emotions would be unleashed as, in the succeeding weeks, we witnessed history being made.

On the fourth of November, "The Canadian Brass" came to Duesseldorf and we took a few German friends to the concert. We had an early, pre-theatre supper at home, and nearly missed the opening bars of the concert because we were all glued to the TV listening incredulously to news reports about the possibility of border relaxations. The following weekend was Remembrance Sunday, and since the summer, we had planned to participate in the service at the Commonwealth War Cemetery in Hamburg. As a result, we were able to be part of that momentous first 'free' weekend. Good friends we had hoped to see were out of town though; they had flown to Berlin to be part of the history there!

Hamburg is normally a somewhat sedate city, but the atmosphere that week-end was electric. The city is only 50 km from the border and the first citizens from the GDR arrived on Thursday evening (November 9); by noon on Friday it was full of East German vehicles such as Wartburgs and Trabants, belching blue smoke and being greeted with honks from the locals. The radio announced places offering free meals and accommodation for the visitors. The cemetery was full of families visiting relatives' graves. The Remembrance Day service brought back memories of the three we had attended in Prague, and somehow it seemed fitting that we should be in Hamburg for this particular weekend. On Sunday, the downtown area was full of people and a 'Volksfest' atmosphere prevailed. One of my funniest memories is that of a tow-truck operator attempting to remove a GDR vehicle that was blocking a main road. The owners had simply stopped and gone for a walk! The crowd kept undoing the tow chain and bringing the vehicle back down the tow ramp; they did not want the owners to have to use their precious 'westmarks' to pay the hefty fine. The large crowd was becoming more and more vocal, and the police finally used the megaphone to assure them that they would not fine the owners, and that someone would remain at the spot in order to take them to their car when they returned. Satisfied at the outcome, the crowd dispersed!

Returning to Duesseldorf on Sunday evening, it was hard to believe that the events of the weekend had been real. There was little evidence of it here - the distance from the border is too great for a weekend trip. Walking into my first English language class on Monday morning, still in somewhat of a trance, and wondering how I could face a session of prepositions after such a weekend, I was delighted to hear one of my students ask if we could scrap the day's lesson plan and discuss the weekend's events. With

unaccustomed Monday morning enthusiasm, they started to learn a whole new English vocabulary: dismantle, liberation, monetary reform, etc.

Having spent ten years in the Federal Republic, we have passed many evenings with German friends discussing and attempting to understand the 'German

