

The Reconnection of a City

The intensity was building while the wall was falling. Thousands of people had joined together to bring down the barrier that had defined their lives for so many decades. For the city of Berlin, Germany, this was November 9, 1989, the day the Berlin Wall fell. For almost thirty years, the Berlin Wall controlled the lives of Eastern and Western Germans. When the Berlin Wall fell, it changed the people during that time, but it also influenced my life.

World history was made in 1989 when the Berlin Wall fell. But this story started on August 13, 1961, when the construction of the wall began. In the early hours of that day, thousands of soldiers and police officers were positioned down the length of what was soon to be a large concrete wall. To aid in the initial separation of East and West Berlin, miles of barbed wire was stretched out and attached to poles that were anchored in the ground. Over the next fifteen years, four separate phases brought the completion of the Berlin Wall to Europe. By the end of the 1970's, the wall was approximately twelve feet high by four feet wide, and a tube had been placed on top to prevent people from climbing over. Much was calm in Europe regarding the Berlin Wall until May 1989 when Hungarian officials removed the barbed wire border that stretched from Austria to Hungary. Over the next six months, reform began to spread like a violent storm. Towns all along the border began opening their gates so people could migrate to the other side. Then on November 4, 1989, a half a million people gathered in East Berlin to protest their communist government (Grant 43). Three days later, all the members of the East German cabinet, the Communist Party Politburo, and the Central Committee resigned. Then came the liberating day of November 9, 1989. People in Berlin screamed and shouted, "The Wall is gone! The Wall is gone!" (Terr 118). Easterners went to the west; Westerners went to the east, and both sides greeted each other with open arms. Those standing next to and on top of the wall began hacking away at it with hammers, chisels, and axes. Pieces of the broken off portions were being passed around for souvenirs while more and more people climbed on top of the wall to celebrate. Finally, "Berlin was whole again" (Bornstein 23).

The fall of the Berlin Wall brought an end to Communism in Germany, and this gave the German people hope for freedom and a chance at a new life. When the wall was built, East Berliners knew that "the gate to a better life in the west had been slammed shut" (Gelb para.5). But many people were convinced that they would still be able to get across the wall. According to the book, *The Wall Came Tumbling Down*, almost five thousand people were able to get across the wall in those thirty years, but at least eighty innocent citizens gave their lives (Bornstein 13). For the people of 1989, freedom was finally won thanks in part to those who succeeded and failed in crossing the wall. Historian Gale Stokes wrote, "In that one night, the entire picture of Europe constructed in the minds of almost all its citizens for forty years underwent an irreversible phase shift" (qtd. in Terr 26). Berliners were actually able to go from the east to the west without worrying about being shot. This was a freedom that many had never felt. Now, Germans were able to start the better life that they had dreamed of for so long. The initial result of freedom brought prosperity to East Berliners, but it was only months later when more difficulties arose. East and West Berliners had lived completely different lives; they had different attitudes, education levels, mannerisms, and so on. This made for tension between the two sides. The economic standards were also on opposite ends of the spectrum. Most of the factories in East Berlin had to be closed because they didn't meet the pollution and safety standards set by West Berlin (Grant 53). As a result, many East Berliners lost their jobs and quickly realized that this better life would come at a price. The price was a higher standard of living and working, both of which the Easterners had not previously experienced. It has been over a decade since the wall fell, and the battle over social and employment consistency continues. The

two worlds have started to level, and there is more acceptance amongst each other. But for most, the issues they faced after 1989 were minute compared to what they had in their previous Communist rule.

I was only five years old when the Berlin Wall fell, but that event has shown me that change, either positive or negative, is always possible. The most vivid pictures that I have in my mind of the fall of the Berlin Wall is that of the people standing on top of and climbing up the wall shouting at the top of their lungs. In those moments, they seemed as though they could have jumped up, touched the sky, and nothing would have stopped them. For many years after the fall, I didn't understand the significance of what had happened. My brother-in-law, Tim Frenedt, stated, "We just knew that it had happened. At the time, [the fall of the Berlin Wall] had the greatest impact on the people of Europe." It wasn't until high school when I learned what effect the fall of the wall did have on the world in and outside of Europe. I quickly discovered the many trials Berliners had to go through during their separation and throughout their fight for unity. Those people in 1989 went against the grain. They challenged the Communist government and won. The collapse of the Berlin Wall and Communism in Germany created a dominos effect, and soon after, Communism was all but history within Europe. Those involved in the fall of the Berlin Wall showed the world what true determination was. I learned that any type of change is possible, no matter what the circumstance.

No one knows what the world would have been like if this great stride in Berlin hadn't taken place. The fall of the Berlin Wall was "a symbol, not just of Communism's fall, but of freedom's rise" (Locke para.18). I have been influenced by the fall of the Berlin Wall, and many generations to come will benefit from the events that have taken place. But no one will be affected like those that were there on November 9, 1989.

Works Cited

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