

# A BERLIN MEMOIR

Sue Milliken



More than half a lifetime ago I visited Berlin. The Wall was less than three years old and it was not yet the edifice so memorable from TV footage. In 1964 it was mostly barbed wire, bricked up windows and border police with guns. The Brandenburg Gate, built by King Frederick William II of Prussia as a sign of peace in 1788, the year that Captain Phillip landed at Sydney Cove, was framed by wire and warning signs.

There were still some areas in East Berlin where it was only too easy to imagine the Berlin of 1944, the morning after an air raid. At every turn there was a reminder of what had happened in this city, in this country, less than twenty years before. A mere breath in history.









While West Berlin was rebuilding, the East was bowed under the unforgiving retribution of the Russians.



to the border fortifications. The street also witnessed some of the most spectacular escapes and it is here that the most varied traces of the border installation have survived. Inaugurated in 1998, the Wall memorial is a 70-metre long segment of the original border corridor, inaccessible now as it was then. It comprises the border wall and the hinterland wall, the death strip, a sentry path, goose-neck street lamps, and a transformer for the electrified fence. A documentation centre was added in 1999. The Chapel of Reconciliation followed in 2000 and commemorates the large Church of Reconciliation detonated in 1985. The viewing platform erected in 2003 permits a broad view of this prominent scar in the urban landscape. The surrounding area between Nordbahnhof station and Ackerstraße is to be developed into a coherent memorial site.

1985 Sprengung der Versöhnungskirche auf dem Mauerstreifen

Demolition of the Reconciliation Church situated on the death strip



1961 Menschen flüchten aus den Fenstern ihrer Häuser auf den zum Westteil gehörenden Bürgersteig der Bernauer Straße.  
People escaping from their apartment windows to the pavement on Bernauer Straße – and thus to West Berlin.



The Russian War Memorial, in the Western Zone, was ringed off with barbed wire after riots over the building of The Wall in 1962.



You could drive to West Berlin via corridors through East Germany. We entered from the south. After being ignored for a couple of hours by grim faced Russians in a wooden hut in a forest in Bavaria while a door slammed in the wind every thirty seconds, someone decided to stamp our passports. Then, so long as you did not leave the highway, you just drove straight to West Berlin.

Watching were the young of East Germany, who leaned over the railings on the autobahn flyovers as the cars of the west shot by underneath. When my travelling companions and I stopped for a coffee from our thermos on one of the legal laybys, a young man appeared, and asked for a ride. He spoke no English, we no German. He looked like a student, just the type who might be trying to escape to the West. Very nervous, we squashed him into our kombi van and drove him twenty miles or so, then ejected him. He departed without protest. When we reached the outskirts of Berlin, on the Russian side of border control the van was searched. Everything had to come out, and they checked underneath. They were very thorough. You could not have hidden an avocado, let alone a person.

Arriving in the city late in the evening, we looked for somewhere to spend the night. We were campers, and we found some green space with trees. We pitched our tent and after cooking and eating a meal retired to our sleeping bags.

We were awoken at dawn by a lot of engine noise, to discover we had camped on an American airfield. Khaki vehicles drew up around us. We were politely told to leave, quickly. The airmen directed us to the Bahnhof Red Cross hostel, adjacent to the main railway station. It was a bleak place. For sleeping the sexes were segregated in dormitories and a thin, grey *kartoffel* soup was served for the evening meal, much as it must have been to refugees at the end of the war. It certainly tasted bad enough.



When I returned to Australia I wrote an article for the Sydney Morning Herald, which was headed "Berlin today is one of the nerve centres and trouble spots of the world...."

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# Berlin Is Focal Point Of Modern History

## HOLIDAY—TRAVEL GUIDE

*Berlin today is one of the nerve centres and trouble spots of the world, but despite this it can be visited quite safely by tourists.*

**By Susan Milliken**

IT is quite a distance from the nearest West German cities normally visited by tourists such as Hanover, Hamburg and Munich.

However, for the very reason that it is so important in the modern world and that so much modern history has been made there, Berlin should be a must for every thinking visitor to Europe.

No matter how much one has read and seen on film about Berlin, nothing can prevent a sense of shock at the sight of so much war devastation still visible, or at the tragic affront to humanity which is the Wall itself.

Berlin is a city which sowed the wind and reaped the whirlwind, and, wherever you go, this feeling is inescapable.

There are large areas of ruins still untouched near the western side of the Wall; the beautiful lines of the Brandenburg Gate, which was built in the year Captain Phillip landed at Sydney Cove, are seen against a frame of barbed wire and warning signs.

The Russian War Memorial in the Western Zone is well ringed off with wire since the riots of 1962.

In the Russian Zone the picture is even grimmer.

Many buildings are still splattered with bullet holes, and in spite of the reconstruction which had been done, there are some areas in the East where it is only too easy to imagine oneself standing in the Berlin of 1944, the morning after an air raid.

The linden trees have been replanted in Unter Den Linden, but they seem the only remaining trace of the gaiety and beauty which made this street one of the most famous in Europe before the war.

The Potsdamer Platz, once one of the busiest squares in Berlin and the hub of the Government, is now a broad wasteland as bare as the moon, with the

Wall stretching across it and a minefield underneath.

As in most communist-controlled areas, there are very few cars in the Eastern Sector, the shops are dull and the people drably dressed, and the scene is one of an overall greyness.

However, there are brighter sides to Berlin, and these are mainly to be found in the Western Zone.

Here the amount of rebuilding is as amazing as the lack of it in the East, and the business centre is composed of modern buildings, beautiful squares, fountains and wide avenues.

There are attractive shops full of fine-quality goods, and the women of West Berlin are often expensively and fashionably dressed.

The Kurfurstendamm—usually referred to by the Berliners merely as "The Damm"—is to Berlin now

*The Kurfurstendamm—usually referred to by the Berliners merely as "The Damm"—is Berlin's most elegant and fashionable street with its exclusive shops, cafes and beautiful women.*

stands, or visit the city quite easily on a car tour.

There are two road corridors from Western Germany to West Berlin, one due west of the city leading to Hanover and then north to Hamburg, and the other almost due south to Nuremberg and Munich.

The best idea is to enter by one corridor and leave by the other, thus the continuity of your tour will not be broken.

From Hamburg to Berlin is 186 miles, 113 of which are in Eastern Germany, and from Berlin to Munich is 375 miles, 181 of which are in the East.

Although both roads are first-class autobahns, it is wise to leave plenty of time to travel through the Eastern Zone, as you can spend a long time at the borders, being issued with visas and having passports checked and double checked—not at all complicated, but the Russians are very thorough, and it all takes time.

Be sure to have your passport made valid for East Germany before leaving

England—either your bank or Australia House will take care of this formality.

You cannot leave the corridor on your way to Berlin and go careering off into East Germany—unless you want to be arrested—but there are frequent lay-bys on the road where it is safe to pull over should you wish to go so.

Entering and leaving East Berlin from the Western Zone is also quite safe for tourists, but once again takes time. You have a choice of walking into the Eastern Sector, taking your car or going on a guided bus tour—ideally, do the bus tour first, then walk.

Checkpoint Charlie in the American Zone is the tourists' crossing point. It is quite safe to take photographs in the Eastern Zone provided you use discretion and avoid such obvious taboos as the Wall and military installations.

West Berlin provides a wide range of fine hotels, while at the other end of the scale, there are camping areas, which are open from May to September.



Fifty seven years later I returned, twenty years since The Wall came down. If you didn't know where to look, you could barely tell that there had been a war, and a wall.



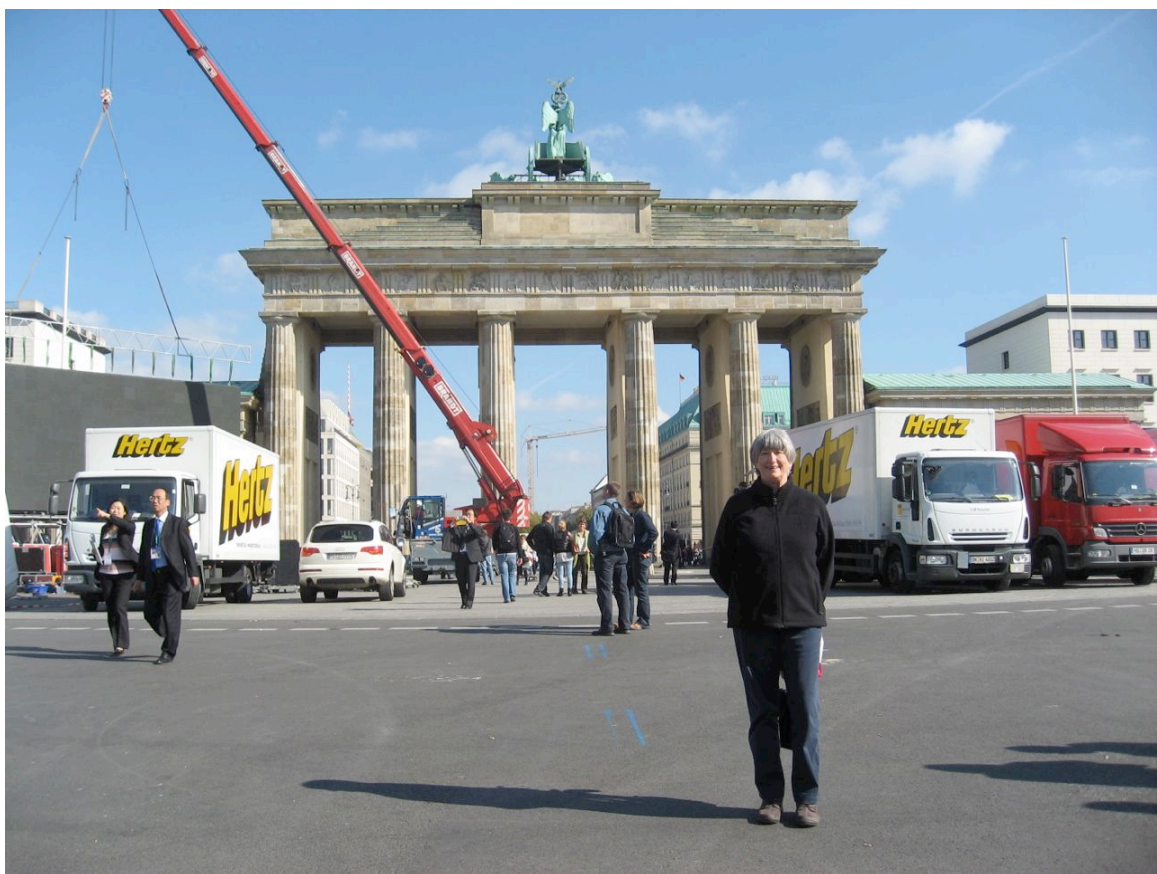
Checkpoint Charlie, looking east







The Brandenburg Gate



Setting up for a rock concert

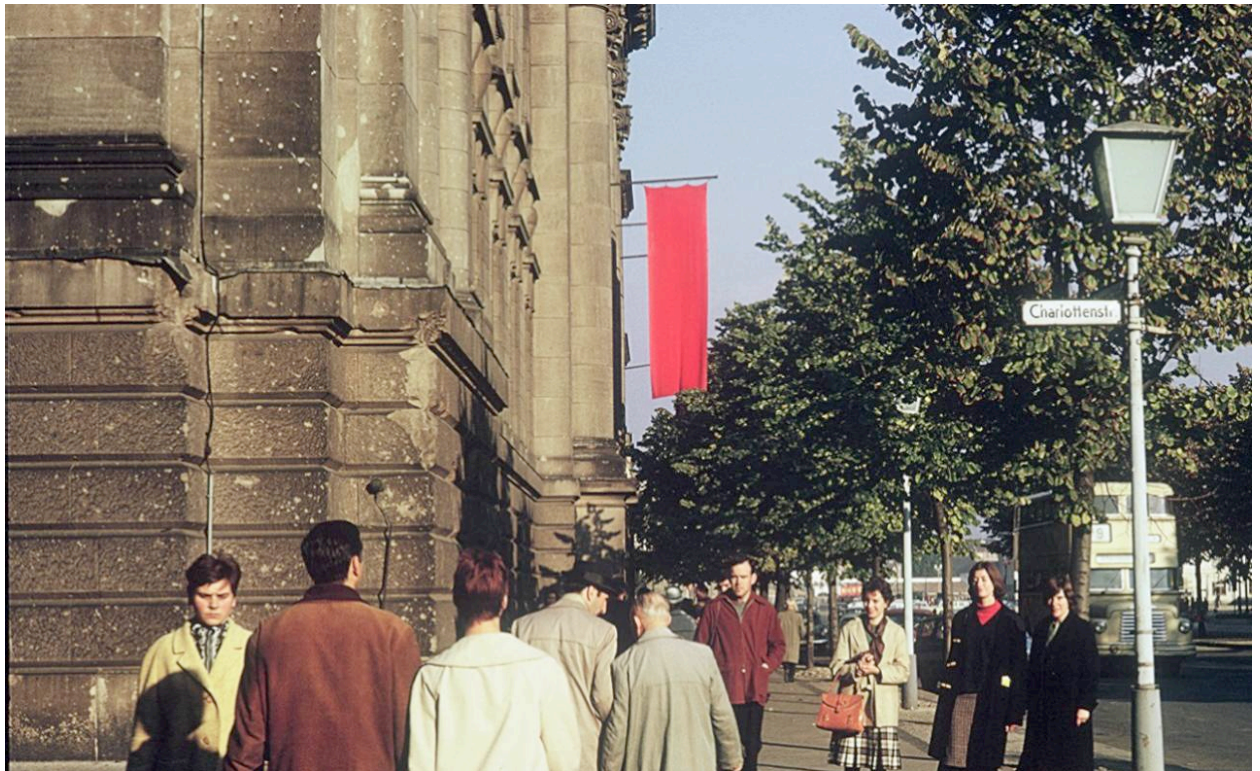




Kaiser Wilhelm Church, Kurfürstendamm







Unter den Linden at Charlottenstrasse





The Potsdamer Platz, once one of the busiest squares in Europe and the hub of government, had been a broad wasteland as bare as the moon. The Wall stretched across it and there were minefields underneath.



The Wall at Potsdamer Platz





Having a beer at the Potsdammer Platz



Souvenirs



Just metres from busy Unter Den Linden, the Hotel Adlon and the Brandenburg Gate is **the Holocaust Memorial**. Covering a city block, it comprises a maze of columns of grey concrete through which the public can walk on paths where the levels are deliberately uneven, so that you are always slightly disorientated, always a little uneasy about finding your way out.

It is a mark on the city which will never heal, a brand which the people of Berlin will always wear, which says, *We Did This*.



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