

My report on April in Berlin, 2009
 I guess you might call this file a “debriefing”.

A week ago, I was newly-arrived in Berlin ... too excited and happy to be fully jet-lagged yet; getting my feet under me but starting to feel some tiredness.

Today, I’m in Nashville, again, getting over jet-lag, overwhelmed with much catching up to do, and suffering from a major overload of memory, inspiration, and yes, even new insights.

The frustration is that I can’t capture it all, to record it (on computer or on paper) for my own future reference, and/or to share it with my inner circle of friends and family. Thom King has the photo/video version ... how can I write the text and do it justice?

I can’t do it justice, I guess.

But I will write what I can of it, in segments.

MONDAY, April 20

A ROCKY BEGINNING

Thom and his partner Deb picked me up and we went to the airport. (Thanks, Deb!). At the check-in counter, the Continental staff was wonderful to us – despite the fact that as on my previous trip, my name was listed in their computers as surname Colemans-Steinhice, instead of just Steinhice. Having anticipated the need for explanations, I had brought some museum-exhibit promo invitations with me, plus sample copies of my two books. I pulled out my books/etc., played the “senior citizen card”, asked for their help ... and got it, nicely. They took interest in my books, also, and I say “they” because other check-in staff looked over “my” rep’s shoulder at the book, until they got too busy and had to leave.

They checked Thom in, too, (at business-elite express window), despite his tourist-class ticket (Poor Thom! But better a cramped flight than not to go!). Here we got the first wind of delay ... weather-delayed delay, it was said, at Newark.

If it hadn’t been for the delays, my wanting to get to the airport early would not have been superfluous.

As the morning wore on and our puddle-jumper still showed up “delayed” on the departures board, I began to suspect that Newark may not be one of the swiftest airports for clearing delays promptly. Knowing that we had only (only!) 3 hours to make our Berlin connecting flight in Newark, Thom and I were just about to start conversations with Continental about seeking alternatives, when they finally called our flight and let us board. So that we might wait some more, before actual takeoff. I had a seat near the front, close to a delightful Flight Attendant – his name was Chris – whose good humor and friendly attitude helped a lot. Nevertheless, I studied the Newark Airport map in the material from the seat pocket in front of me, and started thinking ahead ...

I remembered recent news footage of a Chinese passenger who’d missed her flight in Hong Kong, and stormed the gateway only to be dealt with by Security as she pitched a full-fledged hissy-fit kicking and screaming tantrum on the floor by her gate waiting area. I hoped not to have to know just how she felt.

I could easily duplicate her pitiful ululating screams, I feared, but wondered how long it would take me to learn Chinese.

By the time we landed, I knew it was a challenging scenario – we had to get from one terminal to another, and to the correct gate in the remaining 25 minutes before scheduled Berlin flight takeoff. On arrival I shot off like a rocket before the seat-belt had half a chance to relax and cool; Thom and I zoomed to a nearby shuttle gate, and hopped aboard the train that would take us to the correct terminal without having to exit and re-enter security ... then sprinted for the correct gate (it was far enough to feature moving walkways to help us).

On this part of the connecting transfer, I was nice enough to give people in my path (it was fairly crowded) a 3-second “excuse me”, before I shouldered them out of the way. I figured I could get away with that (again, the old-lady card was played) better than Thom could, so somewhere along the way I just took off and trusted him to follow and keep up. We made it to the Berlin flight gate with about 5 minutes to spare – boarding began very shortly thereafter – and once aboard and catered-to by a wonderful crew of flight attendants, I breathed a sigh of relief as our plane waited a few more minutes for our luggage to make it onboard.

For the benefit of other passengers who may have been concerned about timing on *this* flight, the pilot announced on the loudspeaker that we had a tailwind in our favor and would make up the time, expecting to arrive on time or even a little ahead of schedule. Our plane was a relatively new one, I might add, with modern/powerful engines. The flight time was under 8 hours.

A Continental representative – probably a supervisor; suit and tie; only a small lapel pin for company ID – stopped by my seat in business-elite to ask how it was going, and I was able to give him an enthusiastic report on his airline’s performance while noting that I didn’t hold them responsible for the weather. We shared a laugh; he went on to speak with someone else, and at that point I started dealing with the adrenaline and post-adrenaline rush and intentionally brought my blood pressure level down from heart-pounding, pulse-throbbing “overdrive” to something more akin to normal. I don’t know how people manage, if they don’t know how to do this!

Thom’s cabin was more separated from mine than I had anticipated, so I didn’t get to hang out with him again – with or without photo-ops – until we landed in Berlin. Good flight ... good food ... good service ... and I actually got a reasonable amount of sleep. Can’t speak for Thom.

the preceding portion emailed to select list, 4-29-09

TUESDAY, APRIL 21

WELCOME TO BERLIN!

There it is! The city that means so much to me, its highly-recognizable landmarks passing by my plane’s windows ... and we’re there! We made it!

The process of arrival didn’t bother me: a quick trolley-ride from the gate to the incoming/processing section reconnect with Thom ... passport control (“Nashville! You are famous for Jack Daniels!” and I gave him my best smile, a thumbs up, and “bestimmt!” (‘definitely’) ... luggage retrieval (Good Lord, there were people there from

everywhere! It made me think of the phrase from the Episcopal prayerbook, where we beseech God to be merciful to “all sorts of conditions and men”, and to “deliver them according to their several necessities”. That’s the 1928 prayerbook, of course; not sure what it says in the revised one.

I was so glad I had Thom with me; he was wonderful about schlepping my all-too-extensive collection of luggage, and I could offer him the advantage of being at least semi-fluent in the local language. With two people, you also have the advantage of one to stand guard while the other visits a restroom customs gate (waved thru the ‘nothing to declare’ line; Thom couldn’t believe there was no more to it than that) ... emerging from Customs into the terminal ... and there was Florian!! Hugs! Greetings!! ... a thoughtful of flowers from Florian; that’s so *Berlin* ... and Thom snapping pictures right and left; that’s so *photographer!* That’s so *Thom!*

Having inadvertently created a little bit of an obstacle-island in the stream of arriving passengers, we moved on to the ground transportation area. Florian’s small car, nicely-servicable for Berlin’s often-narrow streets and “green” philosophic character, would hold all of us – but not the luggage, of course. After I reminded him that Thom couldn’t speak German and I could, we put Thom in with him, and I rode with the luggage in the Taxi to our hotel.

No problem. My driver was Iraqi, and friendly. Judging from his command of German, he had probably lived a great part – if not all – of his life in Berlin.

Reunited at the Hotel Berliner Baer on Ringbahn Strasse in Alt (Old) Tempelhof, we were checked in and had left our luggage in our rooms in no-time.

Florian gave us a quick orientation tour of the immediate neighborhood, and then the *real* adventure began.

“BACKSTAGE” AT THE MARION S. COLEMAN EXHIBIT

Florian Weiss (I think “curator” is his official title, but “problem-solver” comes to mind ... and most certainly “friend”) took us to the site of our exhibit, still very much in the process of being set up, at the end of the right “wing” of Tempelhof Airport (no longer functioning in that capacity), in what used to be the Firefighting station. (How appropriate!!!) If I stop to think of it, this must have been a happening place, and not in a good way, during World War II and again during the Airlift.

The exhibit assembly team was in full-force, with restoration artists, display-case builders, all sorts of talented experts plying their fascinating, exquisitely-detailed trades. Clearly, they had work to do! – but they were wonderfully cordial to me and Thom, and of course Thom had his camera grafted to his hand, as usual, and was snapping pictures before we even got in the door. Clearly, I was touched – overwhelmed – by the magnificent giant photographs of my lovely mother, Marion, and the memories of her life now surrounding me, *displayed* so beautifully, with loving care. I tried to get in the way as little as possible, but of course I was stepping over everything and everybody.

In the workroom, there were the familiar things that had been “mine”, spread out on a long table. Our friend Sabina, a restoration artist, sat at one end of the assortment, carefully cleaning a batch of paper-flower WHWs, one by one. (I decided not to take the time to feel ashamed that they were so dusty, completely neglected, when they lived with me.) It was certainly a photo op – Thom and I went around the table; he videotaped in

segments to be sorted out later in the editing process, as I talked about the objects on the table. There wasn't a single item on that table, with the exception of restoration tools and packing material, that hadn't been in my life for five to six decades. I'd know these things, many of them overlaid with a thick patina of treasured memory, longer than I'd known my children.

"....and this was my doll," I began, looking at the lens of Thom's camera before returning my gaze to the Berlin stocking-doll of a cute little horned devil. I reached out to pick up the doll, at which point Florian, from behind me, called out "Please don't touch anything!"

It was one of the defining moments of the whole trip, the whole experience. It's not that I focused on the things not being "mine" anymore – it's that I realized "these people are serious!" They are professionals. I have long dreamed of seeing my family's treasures truly cared for, with respect and expertise. And now my dream has come true: the mementoes that have graced my home and life for all these years, expensive objets d'art and silly little keepsake souvenirs alike, are in the hands of competent, caring museum professionals. They are being *restored and preserved!* I don't have to be afraid that they'll be forgotten and destroyed, over the years to come.

And more than that, they have come home: to Berlin.

I am moved to tears, now, just thinking about it.

A HELL OF A LONG WALK!

Thom King, oh he-of-camera-handed-fame, is always on the lookout for great background scenes against which he could film some video narrative from me, in preparation for DVD projects soon to come. He took a look at the magnificent spread of the Tempelhof Flughafen building before us, and positioned me in front of it to capture some serious memory-moments on videotape. He kept motioning me closer to the terminal building, with its huge facade and signage, and I followed his direction. Then he saw a couple of small planes parked at the end of the other wing of the building, and said "...let's go over there and get some shots of you in front of the planes".

I looked. I thought about it. And I said "no, Thom, that's too far – I could walk it, but I don't think it's a good idea to use up all my walkability-reserve on the first day." But of course I encouraged him to go by himself, while I went inside and found a place to sit down for a little while.

Thom started across the vast expanse of runway, now empty of everything but memory and the occasional passing security or maintenance vehicle, and his figure grew progressively smaller in the distance. He hadn't realized that the main Tempelhof terminal building itself, not including any of the many nearby buildings in the complex, much less the surrounding concrete/tarmac and grounds, is two miles long from end to end. He had a few choice words to say about that later, but I betcha he got some great pictures!

Predictably, I started fading out and decided to crash that afternoon – but Thom still had some get-up-an-go in spite of his long walk, so he and Florian dropped me off and kept going while I settled into my home-for-the-week and allowed myself to fall into a cushion of relaxation and memories of long ago, on my way to sleep. There was Tempelhof, much of it visible from the window of my room.

I was in Berlin, for the third time in less than a year ... after a 56-year absence.

I'm not surprised at how much has changed. I'm surprised sat how much looks the same to me. And for all the stress of getting there – and of knowing how much I had to do, in the next few days! – for all the excitement I was feeling from an amalgam of various details, insights, emotional waves, and the adrenaline-boosting thrills, I was securely grounded in knowing: I'm in Berlin.

I'm home.

I slept.

Installment 2 ends here.

WEDNESDAY, April 22

The beginning of my day was the 2nd-floor hotel breakfast bar with a panoramic view of Tempelhof main terminal building – “our” building – through the wall of windows and beyond the small outside dining-terrace, across the intervening highways, U-Bahn tracks and such. It was fresh Spring air and checking out the immediate neighborhood, on streets so like those familiar ones of my childhood, and being delighted to find a supermarket – Kaiser’s – only half a block from the hotel, just past the Renault car dealership on the corner. I had remembered to take my tote bag – they don’t give out “paper or plastic” either one in Europe; you have to bring your own means of carrying your purchases away.

Armed with a modest wad of Euros I had hung onto from my last trip, I looked the place over and made careful choices: a plastic container of fruit salad from the produce department; a small half-loaf of black bread and a package of sliced cheese, a pack of cookies and a couple of sinfully-delicious pastries from the bakery, and the essentials: yogurt smoothies and diet Coke. The checkout counter took credit cards; even American Express – hooray! I used the card on which I get skymiles, and saved the Euro-cash for taxi fare.

When I’d stashed my perishables in the mini-bar fridge in my room, I hooked up with Thom and he did a wonderful job of being the Berlin end of my personal message-center, via email. Chris was on the Nashville end of the process and by then I was deeply grateful to both of them, as I had gotten disgusted with trying to manage my laptop. In fact, I had pretty well decided that I was about to play the senior-citizen card again, and not take the time to learn to use that peculiar little sucker. I comforted myself with the reminded that it was cheap, I could give up on it without an overload of guilt.

THE GATE, AND CHECKPOINT CHARLIE

With the com-link “chores” out of the way, I turned to the agenda for the day: our meeting with Helmut was set for 11:30 at the U-Bahn station by Checkpoint Charlie. He would pick us up there, and take us to our meeting with Dr. Nachama at the Topography of Terror (museum) offices, nearby. Having decided not to spend all my “walkability” on the way from the hotel to the Alt-Tempelhof U-Bahn station, we called a cab and I arranged with the driver to take us first to the Brandenburg Gate for some photo-ops and then on to Checkpoint Charlie. Again, we could have walked it, between the two, but

time was relatively short and I was still conserving my walkability-resources against future need. This was the first full day of four – you know me; I felt like I wanted to make every minute of it count for something. I could enjoy the moment *and* get something done.

Brandenburg Gate and surrounding area: oh my God, how wonderful! Unification! Rebuilding! The American Embassy once again right there, on Pariser Platz! French Embassy ... Embassy Row! It looked more like pictures I'd seen of pre-war Berlin than the familiar ruins and empty fields of loose rubble of my childhood. There were TREES in the Tiergarten, instead of broken-up statues and small garden-plots in the bits and patches of land that been cleared and hand-cultivated. Tour busses lined the side street on what was once the American Sector side of the Gate; souvenir vendors and tourist photo-op staging scenes filled the square on what used to be the Soviet Sector side, and I *loved* seeing them there. Fellows in bear costumes roamed the crowd posing for pictures and collecting tips for charity. It was life ... it was touristy, yes, but it was people caring about history; knowing they had come to an historic place. My history ... my place.

As I walked back through the Gate to our waiting cab, under a side-arch beside the “Stillraum” – the quiet room, where people could sit and take the time to think; to feel – I got hit with a wave of emotion, and began to cry. Too much to take it all in; too much to see, to think, to feel; too much to express it ...

Back to the cab; on to Checkpoint Charlie; and that was, curiously, a “safe”, unemotional place for me. Until I went there last August with Chris, Charlie and Ursula, I had never thought of it as “Checkpoint Charlie” – to me, it was Alexanderplatz (have I got the right one? I think so), and not on the beaten track of places I usually went. On this trip we mostly walked around and took pictures. I bought a few souvenirs – spent most of my Euros in a shop that didn’t take plastic! – and when it turned cloudy and cold, I bought a grey sweatshirt – You Are Leaving the American Sector – and put it on. Felt really stupid about that, but better stupid-looking than cold. And at least I could take it off when we got to our meeting.

After a bit of fumbling around up and down the street with Thom still taking pictures a mile a minute, we connected with Helmut and went to our meeting at the TofT museum offices; had a very productive preliminary talk with the director about the possibility of working together on a project of mutual interest in the future, and grabbed a quick bit of refreshment in a nearby Cafe before going back to our hotel to rest up for the big night ahead.

[And here I'll share a non-sequitor with you. It's 6:10 a.m. as I write, and I've been up since 4:00. Chris just stopped by to say ‘bye on his way to work, and asked me “..are you going to stay on Berlin time the rest of your life?” My reply was “I hope not!” But there wasn't anything gained by lying in bed awake, wishing I could go back to sleep while getting more and more brain-aware by the minute.]

A NIGHT TO REMEMBER

When Helmut picked us up for our journey to Karlshorst (an outlying district on the other side of Berlin, deep into what had once been the Soviet Sector), I couldn't help

thinking how enormously demanding “our” projects and events must be, for him and his staff. The ‘Marion S. Coleman, an American Woman in Berlin Exhibit’ - What an undertaking! Yet for the most part, they had succeeded in making it easy for me. Our big official opening night was still a day away, and by then, already, the wonderful people of the Alliertenmuseum had touched me so deeply with their understanding and caring for my mother’s life and legacies that I will always think of them as “family”. They understood *my* world. What greater kinship could there be?

My world in 1948 and 1949 had been the Berlin Blockade and Airlift, yes, and those cold dark times are worthy of being honored in my memory – and in our nation’s memory. But for me, that wasn’t the beginning.

My world, in 1946 and 1947, had been grounded in the very essence of those elements that come into play when we now speak of World War II as “The Good War”, and those who fought it as “The Greatest Generation”. The “Big Four” Allies – Britain, France, the United States and the Soviet Union – banded together in defense of liberty itself, against Nazi tyranny and would-be world domination. Truth, justice and the American way.

It was Superman stuff – and in those early Postwar days, before a series of differences and international tensions had started to sour things between us, the camaraderie we shared, as Allies, was deep and heart-felt. We were noble victors – and so were the Soviets. No nation had suffered more than theirs, under the grinding wheels of war, and it was an honor to embrace the joys of victory with them.

Riding across rush-hour Berlin in Helmut’s car with Thom in the backseat (no doubt planning for the next photo op, and snapping backgrounder-pix through the windows), I thought of the good old days when I was 10 and 11, and my mother Marion and I used to spend social time with our Russian friends. Peter Koltypin and Col. Dimschitz were often guests in our Dahlem home, along with Marianna Koschevnikova and several others whose names have escaped me over the years. We also saw them at our Press Club, and were frequent guests at *their* Press Club, as I recall quite fondly. On a still more personal level, Madame Koschevnikova had a daughter about my age, and when the little girl came to join her mother in Berlin – mirroring my own experience, coming to live with Marion, here – we visited each other, back and forth between our respective sectors.

I remember playing outside in the gardens of the Koschevnikova apartment complex, next to the ever-present cabbage patch one found in every scrap of open ground. It was muddy and still adorned with a few bits of snow here and there; my Russian playmate and I laughed together at how hard it was to communicate in her bad German and my equally bad German, then contented ourselves with making up a little follow-the-leader dancing game, hopping along the sidewalk and jumping over rows of sad-looking cabbage. That awkward little bit of hopping was probably a real triumph for her – she’d had polio, and walked with a limp.

That was so long ago. A different world.

But I remembered.

Tonight, the occasion of our visit to the Russo-German Museum in Karlshorst was the opening of their American Lend-Lease exhibit, curated by the Russo-German Museum in Moscow, and their delegation would also be attending our Marion exhibit opening, on Thursday. I was touched to be an invited guest with a front-row reserved

seat, next to U.S. Embassy representatives – and I was blown away psychologically and emotionally by the discovery that *we were in the room where the unconditional surrender of Germany to the Allies had been signed.*

Wow!

I listened to the speakers (in German) and managed to concentrate and understand their presentations – at least partially – through the slight buzz of the loudspeaker system (to say nothing of my partially impaired hearing), but my mind kept wandering. My eyes kept drifting to the side of the room that was roped off; to the conference tables upon which history had been written.

After the formal opening presentations, we toured the museum – and I loved it! *History!!!* Memory ... Communication and conversation – mostly in German; sometimes in English; sometimes with the help of Russian translations, and sometimes even (like the old days!) a mishmash combination of gestures and smiles, heart to heart reaching out, as the honored and distinguished gentleman from the Moscow museum and I stood together, looking out the window at the retreating figure of the translator as she made her way across the parking lot to her car. The party was over, I guessed.

Still, I wanted so much to get the message across to him: that those long-ago Russian friends of mine from 1946 and 47 will live forever in my heart. We did the best we could.

Meanwhile, Helmut was in the thick of the familiar (to him) museum-community, and they were a warm and welcoming bunch! Thom was similarly in his own element, snapping pictures right and left, and we managed to make it outside to the military hardware display before it got too dark – they had a katyusha! Stalin's organ pipes! A *real* one! I couldn't wait to tell Chris!

When we left Karlshorst it was starting to rain, but this time I had remembered to bring my jacket. It was great to have a relaxed supper with Helmut in the warm atmosphere of a popular downtown Berlin restaurant, and gave us a chance to do a quick conversational touch-base over our arrangements, plans and details.

I wanted to say thanks, but how could I tell him what this project and this trip have meant to me? There are no words.

Marion's presence, with us, was clear and strong.

It had been such a stellar day; my head was swimming with a mixture of memories and hopes; insights and ideas; I was so excited that I wondered whether I'd be able to sleep at all that night ... but when the time came, that wasn't a problem.

...and tomorrow would be our big day!...

installment 3 ends here

THURSDAY, April 23

I'd promised myself permission to sleep late that day, but of course I was too excited for *that* to happen. And by the time I'd had a cup of tea and a croissant in the breakfast room, Thom showed up to join me – so he brought me up to date on emails sent and received; we compared notes on plans, and set out on our first mini-adventure of the day.

I gave Thom the tote bag I'd brought for him – a sturdy, tastefully camo-colored sailcloth one that looked suitably masculine – explained to him why he was going to need it, and escorted him down the block and across the street to Kaiser's supermarket. Watch out! Stay out of the bicycle paths! People *use* them, here. Berlin is full of bicycles.

On the way back to the hotel, laden with newly-purchased batteries for Thom's cameras and a modest re-supply of soft drinks for both our mini-fridges, I doubt if there was a moment when his camera wasn't either in use or at the ready. Was there a single Berlin scene or street un-photographed, by the time we left? Well, not if Thom could help it!

(But seriously, it gave me a good feeling to know we'd have plenty of material to work with when we got home and started putting things together.)

By the time we got to the Airlift Anniversary Symposium at Tempelhof that afternoon at 2:00, I was already in such a state of anticipation, gearing up for our big opening that night, that it was hard for me to concentrate on the panel speakers' presentations – and of course since they were mostly in German, Thom was quite out of luck on that unless he chose to avail himself of the translation modules. I was also quite disappointed not to be able to meet an airlift pilot who had originally been featured on the program; he had been a member of Bill Tunner's staff in the CBI (China-Burma-India) Theater in World War II, flying cargo “over the hump” – i.e., the Himalayas. Sad to say, the 89-year-old veteran had fallen while gardening, and instead of swapping Airlift memories with us he was back home recovering from a broken hip.

After yet another quick trip back to the hotel for a mini-rest and to change clothes, it was time for the big event: the official opening of the *Marion S. Coleman, Eine Amerikanerin in Berlin Ausstellung*. The champagne reception featured a popular Swing dance band – one that has played at Carnegie Hall – and was held in Hangar N. 7., a huge, cavernous place that was suitably decorated with piles of bricks and construction material, complete with scaffolding. Uniformed servers circulated with trays of drinks and canapes, and a whole gaggle of photographers snapped away as I was introduced to the governing Lord Mayor, Herr Burgomeister Klaus Wowereit, and his party.

The Mayor – our host, for the reception – was so warm and charming I felt entirely at ease with him, from the first, and it would have been easy to forget we weren't just a couple of newly-found friends, chatting together. At the microphone a few minutes later, Helmut Trotnow spoke first, and welcomed us ... gave the assembled crowd the background on our exhibit, and how it came into being ... and I was reminded that Peter Klassen, an American Embassy staffer (who had also been present at last night's Russo-German museum exhibit opening) had been the one who made the connection, between Helmut/the museum and me.

When the Burgomeister spoke, he moved me to tears – he wrapped up his remarks, addressed to me, with the statement “Berlin will always belong to you, because it is a part of your life ... and you will always belong to Berlin, for you are a part of the life of our city.” Next was Helena Finn of the American Embassy, who now holds the job that was once Marion's, and then *me*.

I hadn't prepared a speech: I just spoke from the heart, sharing my thoughts and feelings about the exhibit and about what Berlin means to me. The listeners were warm and attentive – they laughed in all the right places – and actually, I felt very much at home and among friends. Helmut's follow-up email to me a few days later said my talk

had been very well received, and he thought it reflected well on the special relationship between Berlin and Americans. I hope so. That relationship is indeed a very special one, in my book.

We adjourned to the exhibit itself, and there was a delightful whirl of conversation, questions, comments, friends – several members of Berlin Mensa were there, including locsec Hendrik Wagner and our translator Ingeborg Hagedorn, whom I had met in February – it was she who did the translations for the subtitles to accompany my English-language guide films for each section of the exhibit. Another familiar face, well on the way to becoming a good friend to me, was Peter Dallman, who teaches at the Alfred Wegener school that is now housed in the building that was once my alma mater, TAR – The Thomas A. Roberts American Dependents School of Berlin.

I'd had the pleasure of speaking to Peter's class at "our" school in February, and when he volunteered to fetch-and-carry for me, I felt I knew him well enough to take him up on it. He was a big help, and easy to spot with his bright yellow sport coat.

I don't know how long we were there, at the exhibit. I just know it was wonderful. Giant photographs of Marion at various milestones of her life surrounded me, punctuated by accompanying display cases and framed documents ... there were her uniforms and evening gowns; there was the lier-kaste – the barrel organ – that had only recently come from our Nashville home after all the intervening years between our longago life Berlin and our lives in American; there were my mother's things, and mine, back in Berlin again, where we had first acquired them.

There was Marion's life of accomplishment, set out before the public eye, as it so deserved to be. I was so proud!

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED!

I've always known my mother was special. I've always felt her exciting story should be told, and when she died in 1992 without having written her memoirs (as I had so often encouraged her to do!), I knew I would have to be the one, somehow, to tell that story. For a dozen years, I kept putting it off – partly because I was intimidated by the amount of archival material she had left us; there was so *much* ... but finally, I just sat down and began to write about her life and my own, from memory.

Last year I saw, at long last, the publication of Marion – followed by Marion's Child – and with the printing of those books, I made a *beginning* on getting our stories into the public arena. In the last year I've been back to Berlin (in August, 2008) for the first time since we left in 1953 ... made contact with Dr. Trotnow and the Allied Museum ... welcome him to our Nashville home to go through Marion's rich legacy of photographs, documents, archival clothing and other memorabilia with me, selecting items for the exhibit ... seen curator Florian Weiss come to us, also, to help get things together for shipment ... had the Art Movers come and put together 11 custom-made crates for shipping the chosen items to Berlin ... been to Berlin again in February, to answer questions and to film the exhibit guides for the 6-section presentation ... and now, to Berlin again for the exhibit's grand opening.

I've learned so much in the process – memories have surfaced after having been long-buried; new insights have come forward about Marion and her life, and even about

my role in all this. As someone said to me at the opening, “oh ... so you were actually here when there were four Allies ...”

Yes, I was.

And there can’t be many of us alive, today, who remember those times.

Throughout this unfolding process, there have been times when I’ve felt my age (I ain’t no spring chicken!), and have felt the pressure of other activities in my daily life. Sometimes I’ve had to extend myself, to keep the ball rolling. Sometimes I’ve had to tell myself to ‘hang in there’ and see it through.

On Thursday night, April 23, 2009, I knew I had ‘hung in there’ successfully. I made it! What a joy!

FRIDAY APRIL 24 and SATURDAY, APRIL 25

I think it was at that point that I started to relax – perhaps a bit prematurely, actually – and let my guard down. I got hit by a wave of fatigue much stronger than I would have liked, coupled with the flare-up of a sore tooth accompanied by a swollen jaw. Consequently, I did little else but rest and recuperate, for the next couple of days, and (except for some delightful meals with my friends from the museum) skipped the other activities I *might* have wanted to undertake.

On Friday morning Peter Dallman and his class came for a private tour of the exhibit, and I was glad to have Florian’s help with escorting them. I was self-conscious about my swollen jaw, and pretty much holed up in my hotel room, that afternoon.

SUNDAY, APRIL 26

Packed and ready, Thom and I were up early for our morning flight out of Tegel to Newark, and once Berlin had disappeared into the clouds behind me, I was eager to get home. Apart from being annoyed at being extra tired, I was ok – the swollen jaw had gone down considerably – and thoughtful; beginning to remember details I wanted to take note of, and starting to put things into perspective. I hoped to get right to work on follow-up details from the trip when I got home, but it has taken longer than I might have wished. I guess I had a lot of resting-up to catch up on!

It was worth it, though. Mission accomplished. I’m happy with the Marion exhibit – and I don’t think I’ve seen the last of Berlin. I’ll go back, hopefully sooner rather than later – and I’m delighted to report that Charlie and his fiancee Linda were there this week for the 60th End-of-the-Blockade anniversary celebration, of which our exhibit was also a part.

WHAT’S NEXT?

A lot, I think.

Thom took over 9,000 pictures and has given me the “edited down” number of about 6600. I haven’t even looked at them all, yet!

My head is full of ideas, as usual. A DVD set on Marion’s legacy, that will include the exhibit ... more books to write; articles ... some proposals for museum exhibits here in this country, of the maneuvers material ... a lot more things to assess and determine where they’ll end up ... loose ends to tie up ... and the beat goes on.

And overlaying all of that, the sense of accomplishment is steady: we got it done. I'm so proud of Marion – and so happy to see her legacy shared, at long last, with the world. She belongs to history and now, finally, history has embraced her.

Laurel Steinhice
May, 2009