



An Account of The Reagan Exhibit

Story by **Katrin Lindroth Planz '71**

One fairly normal day early past spring, I was chatting with Florian Weiss on the phone and he mentioned that I was going to get an invitation from the museum for the opening of the Ronald Reagan "Tear Down This Wall" speech special exhibit.

How neat! Opportunities to go back to Berlin are special in my book, and this one sure was particularly so. Even got Bill to join. So on the morning of June 28 the two of us climbed into our mean maroon Mercedes killer (actually an ancient Volvo 850 which, in addition to normal car liquids, requires a supplemental quart of water every 150 clicks or so), and made our way up the super-highway (compared to what it looked and felt like back in the days) that connects the city to the western part of Germany nowadays.

The ceremony was swell. A highlight (natch!) was the presentation, both at the beginning and at the end of the program, of our own fellow Brat, Jasper Kump '87. It turned out that Jasper had, back in '87, sung for the President and Nancy at the 750th anniversary bash for the city that the Reagan's hosted at Tempelhof (among the 4,000 attendees at that event was the complete BAHS graduating class, still in caps & gowns!). Jasper sang the same songs he had for the Reagan's back then, accompanied by Ray Fellman.

The significance of the exhibit was underscored by the naming of its patron, none less than Dr. Angela Merkel. Would've loved to meet her but she wasn't present in person. The speeches were interesting. Twenty years ago, when I first heard President Reagan's words in the news, my reaction was similar to the one which Peter R. Claussen, the Cultural Attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Berlin (who also spoke at the opening of our exhibit last year), described:

I wish I could say that I recognized in President Reagan's remarks the brighter and undivided future that the City of Berlin now enjoys, but that would be a lie. Instead, like many, many others I took the President's bold statement to be just another piece of Cold War political rhetoric. I was wrong.

Peter Robinson, a young speechwriter on the Reagan staff at the time tasked with writing the featured speech, gave a most interesting talk about his impressions during his preparation / background tour in Berlin, the inspiration for the famous phrase for which he credited Ingeborg Elz, the controversy within the administration from the submission of his draft until the delivery of the speech, and Ronald Reagan's input and reactions.

Interesting and informative continued at the reception following the ceremony, where I had the opportunity to meet, among others, Ingeborg and Dieter Elz, a lovely couple still awed by the chance role they played in the writing of the speech, and Georg Schertz, who introduced himself by betting Bill and I that we knew neither him nor the part he played during the Reagan visit. Turned out he was a newly installed chief of police in Berlin in 1987 who had to not only provide security for the Reagan visit and the speech at the Brandenburg Gate, but also coordinated city security for expected downtown demonstrations. I also spoke with Peter Robinson, though fear I asked rather silly questions about his book* (Peter, should you read this, I now have a copy and it's high on my winter reading list).

Mr. Sullivan's widow, Christel was also there as well as Charlie Bluem. Florian, a perfect host, looked smashing in a dark suit and a pink satin tie. I also had a chance to exchange old Berlin stories with Jasper and later Col. Halvorsen and his wife Lorraine. One of them was a favorite old memory of my mom's: Early on a Sunday morning, eons ago, she went to the RTO to pick up my brother Kevin who was returning from a track meet. There she met Gail Halvorsen, who had come to pick up his son. The train pulled in, teams, coaches and travellers got off, were greeted and departed, and the two of them found themselves standing alone at the track. Several minutes later two fellows appeared at the far end, pulling on clothes while schlepping their bags and themselves...

For a few hours that day I felt re-immersed into the Berlin American community. This community continues to exist, and it is such a pleasure to be able to re-visit it, whether it be at our Brat gatherings and reunions wherever they take place, or at the Allied Museum at our old Outpost Theater in Berlin.

Special thanks and a BAHS cheer to Dr. Helmut Trotnow, the museum director, and our own honorary '71 Berlin Brat Florian Weiss, the curator responsible for all American exhibits and events, for all their efforts in keeping this spirit alive at their end!

* How Ronald Reagan Changed My Life by Peter Robinson