

WALL

THE INSIDE STORY
OF DIVIDED BERLIN

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SIMON AND SCHUSTER
New York London Toronto Sydney Tokyo

*INSIDE THE HOUSE AT
CHECKPOINT CHARLIE*

**Checkpoint Charlie, West Berlin,
Summer 1986**

"I was a failure," said the old man with the dancing dark brown eyes, the bulging belly, and the unruly stack of wavy white hair. Bouncing up and down on his chair in the dingy little pizzeria on the West side of Friedrichstrasse, he laughed loudly and threw out his hands, palms up, in mock helplessness.

I knew that here was a showman putting on a show. Rainer Hildebrandt, seventy-five—he was always called Herr Doktor Hildebrandt, because he held a doctorate in psychology—was no defeated soul. He was a celebrated character among Berlin's redoubtable legends, the founder and leader of the Haus am Checkpoint Charlie, the permanent exhibit that documents the life of the Wall. Hildebrandt was Mr. Wall, the impresario of its records, heroes, villains, and bizarre artifacts, the keeper of its memories.

In the guidebooks, Hildebrandt's Haus, less than fifty yards from Checkpoint Charlie, is listed as a "don't miss it" museum. It is entered through the small storefront of the onetime Café Köln and is probably Berlin's most popular attraction. More than ten million tourists—two thirds of them non-Germans—have shoved their way through its labyrinth of dark, narrow rooms and stairwells.

I had been through Hildebrandt's place several times, and as I

Rainer Hildebrandt, the founder and major donor of Haus am Checkpoint Charlie.



faced the man and the cascade of his recollections over a greasy midafternoon pizzeria lunch—he spoke at incredible speed, as if the world would end in four minutes—it was apparent how much the museum was an evocation of his life and passions.

Like his Haus, his mind was wildly overcrowded, exuberantly disorganized, cluttered with memorabilia, all attached to innumerable stories, all held together by a theme, a celebration of resistance, almost a hymnal, not what one would expect from a Prussian, not even a *Herr Doktor* turned showman.

At first glance, his museum seemed to me entirely devoted to adventure and conspiracy. Here hung the gondola, the instruments, and ten strips of fabric from the hot-air balloon that floated the Strelzyk and Wetzel families out of the DDR (see Chapter 43). Here stood one of Michael Gartenschläger's self-firing execution machines (see Chapter 41). You push past numerous escape vehicles: cars with bullet holes, a homemade chairlift, a homemade one-seater plane, a mini-submarine, the Isetta three-wheeler that seemed much too small to hide anyone but ferried nine DDR citizens to freedom, one by one. There were sample specimens of fake Soviet uniforms, forged passports, machinery and tools that burrowed the famous tunnels, the bric-a-brac of wall-cracking.

Here and there Hildebrandt had smuggled into these primitive relics some linkages with past and future. One display traced the Wall to Hitler and his war, the conflict that led to the partitioning of his Third Reich and the rise of the DDR and the Wall. Other exhibits expounded the passive-resistance philosophy of Gandhi and Lech Walesa, the peaceful revolutionaries who are Hildebrandt's most hallowed heroes, his symbols foreshadowing the day when the Wall could come tumbling down.

I had read that as a student in Nazi days, Hildebrandt had worked with two other resisters, men who had been tortured in the Gestapo cellars of Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse, not far from Hitler's death pyre, the *Führerbunker*, all very much part of this neighborhood, now home of Checkpoint Charlie and its museum. Making my way through Hildebrandt's garish exhibits, I wondered how many of the tourists, most of them young vacationers from West Germany, had ever heard of his anti-Nazi resistance heroes, Albrecht Haushofer and Harro Schulze-Boysen.*

* Even according to the rules of inhumanity applied by the Nazis when they murdered their most despised opponents, these revolutionaries died terrible

Hildebrandt described himself as having been only a "mail carrier" for these conspirators. Some mail carrier! He was repeatedly arrested and interrogated, his life hanging in the balance, much as it teetered again when he was threatened with kidnapping by the Communists during his early postwar resistance in his anti-Communist "Fighting Group Against Inhumanity." That group, too, had failed, as Hildebrandt reminded me in our pizzeria, and the violence had appalled him. Yet was his whole life a failure, as he was claiming?

The books he had written, including a lively account of the resisters who staged the East Berlin workers' riots of 1953, had barely kept him alive. His career took a dramatic turn when he stood on Bernauer Strasse in the second half of August 1961. He heard a certain noise, a horrible sound, on this dilapidated street, half West, half East. He was hearing a smacking sound—bodies of jumpers who missed the nets of rescuers and broke up on the cobblestones, followed by the thundering silence of shock from spectators and passersby.

Hildebrandt could not stay away from Bernauer Strasse. Day after day, the fate of his fellow citizens on the wrong side of the street haunted him more urgently. They were being walled in, their windows sloppily slammed shut by bricks, slowly, very slowly. Floor by floor, teams of government masons, *Vopos* watching at their side, worked their way up the street, up and up in each building. Each day people jumped to freedom and each day the risk grew more desperate as the distance to the street kept creeping upward until people were leaping off the roofs. More and more of them paid for freedom with severe injuries or death on hitting the ground.

deaths. Albrecht Haushofer, a history professor about whom Hildebrandt later wrote a biography, was one of the conspirators in the nearly successful attempt to assassinate Hitler on July 20, 1944. Less than two weeks before the Russians occupied Berlin, he and seven other resistance leaders were taken from the Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse Gestapo prison and marched to a park, where each was shot in the neck from behind. Harrö Schulze-Boysen, a *Wehrmacht* lieutenant and a Communist, led the *Rote Kapelle* espionage ring that furnished intelligence to the Soviets in World War II. Most death sentences for political prisoners were by guillotine. For Schulze-Boysen and other key victims this method was considered too humane. On December 12, 1943, he and his twenty-nine-year-old wife, Libertas, were hanged in Plötzensee Prison at suburban Berlin. Along with six other resistance leaders they were placed on footstools. According to a minister who witnessed the scene, nooses were tied around their necks and then suspended from hooks in a wall, whereupon the stools were removed.

All along this street, Hildebrandt noticed, still photographers and film camera crews recorded breath-stopping scenes. The many miles of barbed wire and wall throughout the city became hunting grounds for cameras capturing the unforgettable: escapes, defections, reunions, wedding receptions, birthdays, all the milestones in the progression of family lives suddenly ripped apart, insisting to continue regardless.

This epic of separation, and the drive to overcome it, cried out to be told in a permanent exhibit of photos and memorabilia, Hildebrandt decided. The showman in him drove him to scout up and down Bernauer Strasse for months, looking for a vacant apartment. In October 1962 he opened the forerunner of his present museum. It lasted for nine years, largely financed by the sale of books and gifts that Hildebrandt managed to extract, mostly from politicians wishing to keep the tyranny of the Wall in the public eye.

After he decided that the stream of tourists from abroad made a move to Checkpoint Charlie desirable, my old friend Egon Bahr got Hildebrandt a government grant. Most of the construction and craft workers who installed the museum were volunteers compensated by no more than their meals, usually working nights. When Hildebrandt started charging an admissions fee it was so nominal that his talents as a *Schnorrer* remained oversubscribed.

He was a persuasive beggar, managing to make even the rich West German State Lottery spring for an occasional subsidy. The West German parliament held a debate affirming the museum's status as a national asset, and when Hildebrandt needed 5,000 marks to buy the only available specimen of the execution devices captured by Martin Gartenschläger, an American diplomat scrounged the funds. Ultimately the Haus became a largely self-sustaining nonprofit agency.

Resisters learn to be patient people and to be optimists, Hildebrandt being no exception, never mind his lament of being a failure. As long as there was a wall, he would be its press agent, relentless, letting its monstrosities speak for themselves. He had created an organization for this purpose, the Cooperative of August 13, and made it a source of public information for every statistic, every change in construction and in enforcement practices, every newsworthy defection. Former political prisoners and deserters from the DDR army, the *Nationale Volksarmee (NVA)*, could count on an opportunity to tell their story at one of his press

conferences. Hildebrandt counseled the newcomers, helped get them jobs, and sometimes gave them a little money.

It was hard for Hildebrandt to picture Berlin without a wall, but not impossible. "Hungary already has no refugee problem," he said, pointing to one Communist nation whose people are not fleeing.

In the more than twenty-five years of the Wall's life Hildebrandt had become a principal father confessor to the professional "escape helpers" who made it porous, and he remained a leading consultant on ways of quitting the DDR. These days, his advice was not frequently sought. And it was simpler than in the past.

"It's much healthier to go to jail and come over from there," he said, echoing what lesser authorities on the subject had told me. "That's what we advise now."

For special cases—prospective emigrants with political pasts considered particularly odious by DDR authorities—it was still possible to obtain forged papers, Hildebrandt reported. Holders of such documents were sometimes encouraged to make a detour by flying to Moscow and booking their trip to the West from there. This route was expensive—the exit papers cost up to 50,000 West marks—but it tended to work better than exiting directly from Berlin.

Hildebrandt shrugged. Even special cases did not much interest him any longer. His pet cause was the entire vast DDR army, and his dream was to depopulate it. "Five hundred tanks are unimportant if five men in the tanks will come over," he lectured me, sputtering into the pizzeria, suddenly turned disarmament strategist. "Now! At once! That's the job to be done."

His principal frustration since 1961 had been the caution of Kennedy and his successors in dealing with the Communists. That wasn't the way for the West to gain credibility! Some West German politicians looked upon Hildebrandt as a relic, the last of the Cold Warriors. They were wrong. He was eager to get Red soldiers to climb out of their tanks so they would not shoot at people anymore. It was one job at which he was determined not to fail.

Hildebrandt's style of showmanship allowed for considerable sophistication, so since 1974 his museum incorporated a permanent exhibit of impressive professional paintings, mostly winners of art

competitions sponsored by the Haus. All the works attacked the inhumanity of the Wall. On display (and reproduced in a stunning catalogue) was Oskar Kokoschka's endlessly bleak *View of East Berlin*; George Louis's *Day of German Unity*, with desperate hooded figures tumbling across the Wall to reach Western prosperity as symbolized by a plump, vacantly staring, but sexy nude; Matthias Köppel's *Tearing Down the Berlin Wall*, showing an Eastern and a Western worker about to shake hands across the Wall's ruins; dozens of other canvases depicting pain and separation, by such artists as Anton Tapies, and Bernhard Heiliger.

Few of the works dealt with the Wall itself. Many artists told Hildebrandt that they considered the structure too overpowering a subject. "You must have *touched* the Wall yourself to comprehend that it is real," said the painter Michel Butor.

As a canny propagandist, Hildebrandt also knew how to turn the bewildering anarchy of the Wall's Western graffiti against the DDR. He was selling a shocking collection of this populist art in a colorfully illustrated book, *The Wall Speaks*, and he encouraged such artists as Jonathan Borofsky and Richard Hambleton to shout their indignation in paint along "the longest concrete canvas in the world."

In October 1986, Hildebrandt attracted Keith Haring, famous as an illegal decorator of the New York subways, able to command up to \$50,000 for a canvas, to contribute a one-hundred-yard mural of acrylic on the cement near Checkpoint Charlie. The Wall was so densely occupied by artistry for so many miles that Haring had to paint over numerous amateur painters. The work took the bespectacled twenty-eight-year-old six hours, and its purpose gratified him.

"It's about both sides coming together," said Haring, echoing his sponsor Hildebrandt's philosophy, "a political and subversive act, an attempt to psychologically destroy the Wall by painting it."

No, Rainer Hildebrandt the resister was not a failure.

Consistent with the circumstance that almost everything in Berlin comes equipped with two opposing faces, I had been privately briefed about the Western graffiti from the Eastern viewpoint during the preceding summer.

The briefing was very private—for me alone—and very official and unexpected. It took place within the East columns of the Brandenburg Gate, in an easily overlooked former guardhouse rebuilt

into a surprisingly posh museum with lecture rooms—a counter-museum, a defense against Hildebrandt's propaganda.

This was no public place. It catered to an exclusive crowd. In all my years in Berlin I had never heard of it, nor ever met anybody who had. It served selected guests only—the most privileged members of the supposedly classless Marxist society, especially ranking visitors from the Warsaw Pact Communist nations. I am certain that the DDR government feels uncomfortable about this curious establishment, because it reflects the ambivalence about the necessity of putting up a wall to keep an entire society from collapsing.

For two years I had been appealing to the DDR Foreign Ministry to help me gain insights into the government's true attitudes toward the unmentionable or barely mentionable Wall. The invitation to visit the museum at the Brandenburg Gate was the first direct response. I found the setup spellbinding.

There was nothing ambiguous about the briefer at this tidy and curiously deserted place (nobody came or called while I was there, and I wouldn't have been surprised if I was the day's only visitor). My guide was the museum director, an army lieutenant colonel named Hartmut Beyer, firm-voiced and handsome like briefers all over the world. He had been a sergeant serving at the border on the great day, August 13, 1961, and once he had placed me within a student-type desk-and-chair, taken over the lectern, and seized a pointing stick, I thought I was back in infantry basic training at Camp Wheeler, Georgia, during World War II.

Colonel Beyer's manner changed abruptly. He had been pleasant and relaxed in the early minutes of our encounter. At the lectern, his tone turned hostile as he barked out an obviously well-studied recitation of the West's disgusting disrespect for the DDR's border, down to this very day.

The Western graffiti were a particularly glaring sign of such disrespect, the colonel declared. He said that inscriptions such as "*DDR Verreckt*" (DDR Drop Dead) and "*Alle Roten in die Gaskammer*" (All Reds into the Gas Chambers) vented the spleen of criminals, criminals! Though the colonel did not say so directly, it was clearly his view that the Western powers should permit no such insults.

He represented the presence of the graffiti as evidence of DDR liberality. "We don't resist these things, even though the Wall is on Eastern territory," he said.

Much of the briefing was a tirade, supported by photos and

charts, against border violations perpetrated by Westerners. In German, the term for such violations makes the offense sound more personal. Border violations are *Grenzverletzungen*, and *Verletzung* is a hurt, an injury. A border violation thus becomes an *injury* to the border, inhumane and deplorable.

Colonel Beyer lectured at me on my school chair that 44,000 *Grenzverletzungen* had taken place in the preceding five years, not to speak of "nineteen hundred terrorist acts" in 1985 alone. I was aghast and incredulous, which must have shown on my face. The colonel stopped his rehearsed recitation to remark that "terrorist acts" included "*bewerfen*," which means throwing things, including orange peels. An excellent example of a border injury, he said, was committed by President Reagan on June 11, 1982, when he deliberately took a teasing step or two across the border, presumably to show his courage in the face of his enemies from the "evil empire."

I said nothing. They had a right to resent the contempt that Westerners often display at Communist ways, and I was not about to defend silly behavior by somebody from our side, not even by a President of the United States, especially not one for whom I did not vote. Should I have protested against the colonel's interpretations of alleged acts against the border? I had learned that such remonstrances served only to cause informants to clam up entirely. Discussions with Communists were possible in informal surroundings.

This weird, silent museum was like signs in libraries of past times. Here the walls seemed to say, "Shhh!"

Communists groomed institutions to suit themselves. And this museum was far from the most forbidding.

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THE SCHACHT FAMILY OF HOHENECK WOMEN'S PRISON

**Hamburg, West Germany,
September 1986**

Ulrich Schacht and his family, gathering together for the first time ever, were united by a terrible bond: a prison.

His mother, Wendelgard, "dismissed" by the DDR, had joined him in Hamburg. His wife, Carola, had been released from the DDR earlier. His sister-in-law, Bettina, arrived from there later. At various times, all had been involuntary residents of Hoheneck, the institution feared as the DDR's toughest penitentiary. More: it was the only prison set aside exclusively to "educate" women, and it humiliated the female sex in particular. Hoheneck was a microcosm of how the DDR repressed political dissent.

Of the Schacht family group, none had committed any act punishable in Western countries. Only Ulrich, now thirty, had not been formally a prisoner at Hoheneck. He was born there.

Ulrich never knew his father, and no photograph of him survived. He was Vladimir Fedotov, a lieutenant in the Soviet occupation army. Ulrich's mother had met him in her native city, the Baltic port of Wismar, where she was a stenographer and bookkeeper. When the Soviet authorities refused them permission to marry in 1950, they decided to flee to West Germany. A "friend" gave them away, and in November, five months pregnant, Wen-



Hoheneck fortress, perched atop a steep hill in Saxony about fifteen miles north of the Czech border, was used by the Nazis as a concentration camp and then by the East German government as an appallingly brutal prison for as many as a thousand women, about half of them "politicals."

delgard arrived in Hoheneck to begin serving a ten-year sentence for "inducement to commit treason."* She had been guilty of nothing but loving her fiancé.

From the distance, Hoheneck looked like a travel poster for fairy-tale medieval Germany. It was a walled and towered thirteenth-century fortress perched atop a steep hill on the edge of Stollberg, a county seat of thirteen thousand in the Erzgebirge, a pleasantly wooded mountain range in Saxony, about fifteen miles north of the Czech border.† In Hitler's time, Nazi storm troopers, the SA, found Hoheneck a convenient site for a concentration camp. Over the years the two massive wings had risen ten stories high, so that up to eight hundred, sometimes one thousand, women could be sandwiched into the place.

Eventually, about half of them would be "politicals" like the women of Ulrich Schacht's family. The others were true criminals, including nearly one hundred murderers; these received preferred treatment. They acted as straw bosses for the guards and were allowed to harass the "politicals." Twelve or more prisoners slept on three-tiered bunks in rooms usually measuring about twenty-five by thirteen feet, and shared two toilets with twelve additional inmates next door. The sense of total confinement extended to letters the prisoners could write home; they were limited to precisely fifteen lines every ten days.

The commandant during Ulrich Schacht's mother's time did have a soft heart for babies. He inspected Ulrich—born premature and weak—and ordered special injections for him, along with a month's hospital rest with double rations for his mother. Wendelgard, in turn, exercised imagination in guarding her son. When she was asked to fill in the name of his father on an official form, she wrote, "Don't know," realizing that the Soviets might seize the baby once they knew the father's identity, because the offspring of Russian soldiers were "children of the state."

"Better to be branded as a whore than to have my child taken away," Wendelgard said later.

After Wendelgard had served five months, her mother was allowed to visit her for half an hour. "Body contact," even hand-

* Her Russian lieutenant was sentenced to twenty-five years in a Soviet "work camp" and was never heard from again.

† The Erzgebirge area is a principal source of uranium for the nations of the Eastern bloc.

shaking, was prohibited. When Wendelgard wanted to hand over her baby to the grandmother, a guard blocked the move like a quarterback. Clothes and toiletries that the elderly woman had brought in her rucksack had to be taken back by her. At the visit's end Wendelgard darted quickly to embrace her mother and received a loud scolding for this breach of the rules.

All of Ulrich Schacht's family were devoted to the Lutheran church, and church services—permitted only once every few months—were great occasions for the inmates. They also became a special experience for the elderly country parson, newly recruited to lead the prayers. He had been told he would be facing hardened criminals. When the "politicals" burst into song, the old man sensed the truth, and tears rolled down his face.

On Reformation Day the following year, the hymn traditional for the occasion, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," was not to be sung. At the end of the service the inmates of the Hoheneck fortress spontaneously decided to sing it anyway. They did so with such gusto that the guards paled and looked out of the window in embarrassment. The old parson was never asked to Hoheneck again.

Triumphs were few. Because of her participation in the illegal preparation of costumes for a holiday party, Wendelgard was given twenty-one days in a totally dark solitary cell, with warm meals only once every third day. In 1953 she went on a three-day hunger strike. After Stalin's death an amnesty was declared, and Wendelgard was discharged to her DDR home. That was in 1954. She was not allowed to move West for another twenty-four years.

Her worst day in Hoheneck, always remembered, came when Ulrich was three months old and was carried away by car. Wendelgard had grasped him firmly in her arms and refused to surrender him.

"You pigs," she cried, "you pigs! How dare you take our children away! You pigs!"

She screamed until the effort caused her to collapse. The baby slipped from her arms. The transport nurse barely caught him. Wendelgard had lost possession of her child.

She was beside herself, especially since she knew other mothers in Hoheneck whose children had been taken long ago and who still did not know the whereabouts of their kids. Wendelgard was spared this fate because one woman offered resistance. This mother was to be reinterrogated by a panel of Soviet officers, but she refused to say a word until all the mothers were told where

their babies were. The officers surrendered. Ulrich was placed in a Leipzig children's home, soon to be released to the care of his grandmother in Wismar.

Even in the DDR, resistance often got results.

The Berlin Wall was a motivator for the restless "politicals" of the Schacht family, especially for Carola, Ulrich's future wife.

Carola had never seen the Wall until 1975, when she was nineteen. Her mother was a ballet dancer, her father the conductor of the Riesa Symphony Orchestra. Carola studied viola at the Franz Liszt College of Music in Erfurt. Music was her life. Politics as such bored her. The less stultifying ways of the West did not. She grew euphoric whenever she learned over Western radio or TV of successful escapes across the Wall. She fantasized what it would be like for her to risk such an attempt too. The thought never progressed far. Escape was too dangerous. It remained a dream, a vague one.

One hot afternoon in August 1975 the fantasy assumed reality. Carola was on vacation, visiting her fiancé in East Berlin. He was on Army service with an air defense unit in the suburbs. She slept on an air mattress in a hole of a room on Köpenicker Strasse, near the Wall crossing at Heinrich-Heine-Strasse. Walking along the Wall with her lover ("I felt simultaneously attracted and repelled by it," Carola said later), she passed Saint Michael's Church, and her fiancé related that some years earlier many DDR citizens escaped through a tunnel that ran from beneath the church to another church on the Western side.

"If the tunnel were still there, I'd go through it immediately," said Carola.

Her fiancé said he wouldn't. "How do you suppose I'd find work in the West?" he asked. "What would we live on? Besides, the Western secret services would interrogate me about my knowledge of military matters."

Carola was shaken. The question of whether he would go through the Wall with her had assumed new proportions. The issue was: would he go with her through thick and thin?

"I'd go by myself," she said.

"Are you serious?" he wanted to know. It was his turn to be upset. Late that afternoon he told her that he had changed his mind and would go West with her. He did not tell her of the foolhardy crime he was about to commit. Not wanting to start out penniless in the West, he stole some secret DDR military docu-

ments that he planned to sell after his escape. Since he was a printer by trade and served with an Army printing unit that produced secret papers, the theft was easy. Naively, he left his loot in his room at his barracks, where it was quickly discovered. He received a six-year sentence, Carola two and a half years.

In Hoheneck she darned socks for eight and a half hours daily, along with a group of prisoners that included spastics, epileptics, and mental cases. Outside their cells, inmates were not permitted to talk. Vegetables were very rare in the diet, fruit almost unheard of. If a prisoner altered her clothing for a better fit, such articles were confiscated; even tucking in a shirt at the waist was an "act of sabotage," punishable by an extension of the guilty inmate's prison sentence. Two incoming letters were permitted per month, no more than one letter could be in a prisoner's possession at any time. Apples were occasionally for sale at a kiosk, which closed at noon—just before Carola could get there from her work shift. Again and again, each day, inmates were counted and frisked, frisked and counted. One visitor was permitted for thirty minutes every three months.

Physical mistreatment was rare, although once Carola heard a prisoner scream from behind double doors and then saw the woman emerge with broken glasses and a blood-smeared face. The daily indignities were so demeaning, however, that Carola sometimes cried hour after hour under the coarse blanket in her cell.

"Of course things were much worse in the concentration camps," she said later, "but I *felt* like a concentration camp inmate."

Since both the East and the West German governments encouraged secrecy, prisoners and their relatives were left in the dark about *Freikauf*, the ransoming scheme for leaving the DDR. Learning about this exit route from the prison grapevine, Carola could not get her name on the official ransoming list until one of her fellow prisoners left Hoheneck, notified her relatives in West Germany, and mobilized them to put attorney Jürgen Stange, Wolfgang Vogel's West Berlin partner, to work on her case.

After eight months in Hoheneck, Carola boarded a bus with eighty other prisoners for the West German reception camp in Giessen. She had met many prisoners who had to serve their sentences in full and others who were inexplicably rerouted back into the DDR—and despair—at the last moment before discharge. Carola was very lucky to be sent West. She never discovered why. Two

years later she married Ulrich Schacht, having learned in letters from her former fiancé that he had changed his mind again and did not want to come West.

Bettina, twenty, Ulrich's future sister-in-law, had been vaguely thinking of quitting the DDR. Then she witnessed a scene that left no room for indecision.

It happened in May 1978 in her native Erfurt, a city of 200,000 in Thuringia, famous as a center of horticulture, and the decisive event took place on the grounds of the International Garden Show.

Bettina and her fiancé, Ronald, were sitting on the grass listening to a concert with other young people. Sitting there was not permitted. *Vopos* appeared with dogs to chase the audience away. An argument ensued between the cops and a young woman who wanted to photograph the confrontation. A fistfight followed. One of the police dogs bit into the woman's arm and wouldn't let go. Screams were heard. Fury boiled up, then general fisticuffs that led to numerous injuries and arrests.

Bettina's mind was made up.

"We wanted out," she recalled. "Nothing but out!"

Five days after they were married that fall, she and Ronald sneaked onto a West-bound train while it stood sidetracked and dark during the night at the Erfurt station. They were arrested almost immediately. Bettina was sentenced to two and a half years in prison. Ronald received five years, because he was found further guilty of "treasonable transmittal of communications." His treason consisted of having written a letter to friends in West Germany describing the fight at the flower show.

Bettina felt blessed for having been briefed by Carola about conditions at Hoheneck and she was consequently delighted at one liberalization instituted at the prison since her sister-in-law's confinement. During the outdoor "free hour" in the courtyard, prisoners were now allowed to talk to each other. Sometimes they could even play badminton. The harassment of "politicals" by the real criminals had remained the same. Bettina was treated as a second-class inmate, was instructed by a convict when and where to clean her cell and then clean it all over again. The pace of her work—sewing together parts of men's shirts—was determined by an inmate who had murdered her child.

Yet Hoheneck was evolving. When the tension between the politicals and the criminals grew so intense that Bettina contemplated

suicide, friends advised her to appeal to an authority unknown in earlier days: a prison psychologist, and a female at that. Bettina never got to see that doctor, but within a week she was transferred into more bearable company.

In September 1979, after about a year in prison, an electrifying announcement came over the loudspeaker. Certain prisoners would be dismissed as part of a general amnesty to celebrate the thirtieth birthday of the DDR. "Crimes" subject to early release were announced after a suspenseful wait of weeks; they did include attempted escapes from the DDR. The amnesty period was to end December 10. When the day had passed, nobody from Bettina's cell had been freed.

Some of Bettina's friends had long packed. Bettina had not. She suspected that her husband would not be released early and that she would be kept back as well. Besides, the rumor mill reported that the ransoming agreement between East and West had blown up. Inmates were having "reentry interviews" with prison supervisors, which indirectly confirmed the bleak prospect of a return to the DDR.

And so it happened. Bettina was amnestied, as was her husband, but they had to resettle in Erfurt. There they were kept under observation, frequently arrested for short periods, and finally told on April 23, 1981, to leave the country immediately.

Ulrich Schacht's birth certificate stated that he was born at an innocuous-sounding address: An der Stallburg 7 in Stollberg/Erzgebirge. The document left unmentioned that this was the street address of the Hoheneck penitentiary. Ever since he learned the truth at the age of eight, he regarded his birthplace as an obligation to act as an opponent of the DDR regime, and he fulfilled this commitment all through his career as a baker's apprentice, psychiatric aide, dockworker, stagehand, theology student, and ultimately as literary editor of a West German national newspaper.

During most of this time, his poetry and his resistance activities via the Lutheran church kept getting him into trouble. Finally, in 1973, his editorship of an illegal newspaper caused him to have to serve four years in prison, much of the time in the Brandenburg Görden penitentiary, where Honecker was incarcerated during the Nazi days.

Schacht—bald, bearded, soft-voiced, and given to brooding—

saw nothing unusual in any part of this odyssey. "My fate is the fate of many of my generation" was his view of his travail.

With the growth of an illegal peace movement that included many female activists, the total number of women prisoners in the DDR increased considerably beginning in 1983. Hoheneck being full to the bursting point, more women were diverted to other institutions. The authorities made some effort to humanize the old fortress—warm water had been brought into the cells in 1976—but reports from released inmates struck the same old tragic notes well beyond the time when the members of the Schacht family had moved on.

"Hell can't be any worse," said a more recent inmate, Eva Marie Krause, fifty-two, whose asthma brought her "preferential" treatment: a two-person cell that she shared with a woman who had killed her husband by a blow with a vodka bottle. Frau Krause reported that by 1983 soap and toothpaste sent to prisoners by relatives were no longer authorized for distribution.

Doris Wels, a twenty-seven-year-old secretary, got into difficulties with the mail censor because she wrote home that the weather was nice, which was thought to be a coded message. And she reported this bon mot from her "educator": "I will convince you that you will only be free when you have divested yourself of your freedom."

In April 1985, Rainer Hildebrandt of the Haus am Checkpoint Charlie sponsored a press conference at which five recent Hoheneck inmates testified to much the same treatment once experienced by Schacht's relatives. In particular, the discriminatory treatment of "politicals" continued. The visiting mother of one such prisoner found her call at Hoheneck prematurely terminated because she managed to stroke her daughter's cheek.

Few prisons throughout the world treat prisoners with dignity. What caused the DDR, increasingly sensitive about its international reputation, to keep running Hoheneck as a place so unusually awful, a throwback to the age when the fortress was first erected?

Ulrich Schacht believed that the root cause was the Honecker government's lowly view of women. While equality between the sexes was official government doctrine, women in DDR society were greatly underrepresented in leadership and executive slots.

I brought up the conditions at Hoheneck during one of my

conversations with lawyer Wolfgang Vogel, who had called upon clients there many times. He agreed that the standards of the place were not ideal and ventured that prisons for women were more difficult to administer than institutions for men. Not wanting to annoy Vogel, I didn't pursue this dubious thesis. His heart was clearly not in any defense of this prison. In all the contacts I had with him, it was the only time I had seen him slightly embarrassed. Sangfroid was as much part of him as his tailoring, even in the face of scandal, and plenty of that was about to explode around him.