

A remarkable addition to my life story (see pages 256/257)

Three days after my 82nd birthday on 13 August 23, the 62nd anniversary of the building of the Berlin Wall, I received an email from Carol and Dieter that landed in my inbox completely unexpectedly.

They asked if I was the Jochen Lude who had organised and led a trip to Poland and Auschwitz in 1967.

I was very surprised and curious why they wanted to contact me after 56 years. It was, indeed, me who had organised this memorial trip with young people to Auschwitz at that time.

In my reply, I confirmed my identity and was curious to know what I would hear from them next. In my mind, I imagined that they had met on the trip, later married, and now wanted to thank me.

A few days later they explained to me in detail why they could only contact me now.

Back in 1967, Dieter, as an East Berliner, had happened to board the train at East Berlin's Ostbahnhof station where our travel group was sitting. During the journey that night, Dieter made positive contacts with some of our participants, which led to him joining our group.

I only vaguely remember Dieter today, but I know, I gave him permission to travel on with us.

Carol and Mark, both American citizens, were living in West-Berlin at the time and were part of our group. Carol worked at the Pestalozzi-Fröbel-Haus Neighbourhood Centre and Mark maintained contacts with friends in East-Berlin. As American citizens, they could travel to East Berlin more easily and stay there for 24 hours.

After the Poland trip, they met Dieter several times in East-Berlin, which finally led to his successful escape via Prague and Vienna to the Federal Republic of Germany at the end of March 1968.

(I will return to his escape and his first steps in the West later).

In March 1996, Carol and Dieter visited the Gauck Authority for 5 days to study his files.

(Stasi files can be viewed and copied there. The authority has since been dissolved and incorporated into the Federal Archives. Access to files is still possible).

They were shocked when they found my name in the Stasi files and wondered what might have happened to me if I had crossed the border, because I was suspected of being the agent that organised Dieter's escape.

According to an informer's report, I was supposed to have stayed in East Berlin between October 1969 and January 1970 and to have made suspicious transit trips. In addition, a long report was made about my alleged place of residence 'Am Vierling 7' in Berlin-Zehlendorf. However, only my mother lived there.

When I read this, I was speechless and could hardly believe what was written there in black and white on paper. Only after some time did I realise that all this was not true. I had already travelled to London by car in July 1967 and stayed there until Easter 1968. I was during this time only in Berlin for two days and then lived in the USA for 16 months.

A Stasi informant must have made that up to further his career and make himself popular. True or not, crossing the border has become risking getting arrested, which I hadn't known before.

I find it amazing and very interesting to see how the various cog wheels of life interlink to form a whole picture.

This is my view of things, and I would like to express it as follows:

Cog wheel 1

I have just turned 82 when out of the blue I find an email from Carol and Dieter in my inbox. They ask me to confirm my identity.

Cog wheel 2

A few years ago, friends told me that it would be worthwhile to write down my life story. For my 80th birthday, I had 50 copies of my biography printed at my own expense and distributed to family and friends.

Cog wheel 3

I received a lot of positive feedback that encouraged me to go public with my life story.

Cog wheel 4

My friend Gisela then had the idea that her friend Lauritz could create a website for me and put it on the internet.

Cog wheel 5

Since 1996 Dieter tried in vain to find me. My name was not to be found in any telephone book. Only recently did he leaf through his Stasi files again and suddenly got the idea to google my name and found my homepage.

Since then, we have been in lively exchange, and we very much hope that we will be able to meet one day. I wanted to know more about the circumstances of his escape and if he knew anything about Mark's life. He was happy to tell me.

The idea of escape arose in November/December 67. In March 68 he took the train to Prague. It was the Prague Spring. The first question the GDR border guards asked was whether he had a return ticket. He had a gut instinct that he should buy a return ticket, whilst hoping he wouldn't need it.

He met his three voluntary helpers in Prague, with whom he illegally crossed the Austrian border to Vienna the next day. The border crossing was successful. They met Carol in Vienna and travelled on to Germany together.

A residents' registration office issued him with an identity card without carrying out more checks. The necessary admission procedure was subsequently carried out in West-Berlin.

Life in freedom could begin and in July 68 they celebrated their wedding in Berlin-Schöneberg. In August, they moved to Frankfurt/Main.

Mark returned to America in 1967 but kept coming back to Berlin to continue his studies of Bertold Brecht and the Berliner Ensemble. In 1969 he received a permanent visa for East-Berlin.

Amongst his contacts in the East, one individual in particular, became his misfortune. It turned out that this 'friend' was an active Stasi informer.

Shortly before his return home in January 1970, Mark was arrested by the Stasi for anti-state agitation, espionage, and aiding escape. The sentence: 7 years in prison, reduced to 5 years on appeal.

This caused some uproar in the USA. His family was not unknown. His grandfather Eugene Rosenstock-Huussy, born in Berlin in 1888, professor of philosophy at numerous universities in Europe and the USA, was known for publishing various books on social philosophy.

Whether Mark profited from this is not known, but after 18 months he was released.

This addition to my story shows me, once again, how life in many ways inexplicably runs in parallel lines and that we are usually not even aware of this happening.