

## HOW IT ALL BEGAN - David Skillan

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David Skillan runs a successful Travel Company from his home in Vancouver, providing personally escorted worldwide tours. For 25 years he has been producing a newsletter about his life and his trips around the world. This is an extract from his Autumn 2005 newsletter and was published in Newsletter 37 in April 2007.

After two memorable family holidays in Germany, in 1951 we moved from the family home where I had been born, a small neatly kept bungalow on the outskirts of Romford, Essex, to join my dad, then a transport supervisor responsible for moving V.I.P.'s and classified documents around in Berlin. A few years after the war ended he had transferred from the Armed Forces to the Control Commission of Germany, and went to live in 'The Divided City' as it was known in those days - Germany's former capitol, both then and now one of the most thrilling cities in Europe.

Suddenly (through one of life's strange quirks of fate) at the age of twelve, I found myself with my parents, older sister and younger brother going from very modest surroundings in England to comparative luxury in Germany. We moved into 32 Miquelstrasse; a two-storied, five bedroomed house in a posh, tree-lined avenue in the American sector, in the suburb of Dahlem, Berlin's Shaughnessy. Germany was to be our home and Miquelstrasse the Skillan residence for the next several years. I, for one (even though I had had the most carefree childhood in England) could not have been happier. But, no sooner did the summer of 1951 fly by, than my sister and I were packed off to Prince Rupert School, a unique co-educational Boarding School in Wilhelmshaven (a former submarine base and home to the giant battleship Tirpitz) on Germany's bleak North Sea Coast three hundred miles away, where at the beginning of the first few terms I had to contend with long, lonely bouts of homesickness!

But it was in Berlin during school holidays that I really enjoyed myself. Every Sunday, almost without fail, we all piled into the family Volkswagen - yes the original grey Bug - and went for a drive in this endlessly fascinating city, then at the height of the Cold War making it even more intriguing than normal. We went everywhere. We visited museums and markets, churches and castles in the districts of Steglitz, Wilmersdorf, Potsdam, and Tempelhof (scene of the 1948/49 Berlin Blockade and Airlift) and Schoneburg (where some years later on the steps of the townhall President Kennedy was to give his famous "Ich bin ein Berliner" speech) and to the outlying areas of woods, lakes and countryside. It was at Grunewald that I first learned to cross-country ski, and at the Olympic Stadium (built for the 1936 Olympics) where I learned to swim. Many times we crossed into the Soviet Sector via the Brandenburg Gate, or Checkpoint Charlie and we frequently shopped at KA-DE-WE, the city's finest department store, where to this day the fifth and top floor is still Europe's largest and perhaps best-known delicatessen. (When visiting Berlin be sure not to miss a lunch of Bratwurst and sauerkraut washed down with fine German beer or wine, here). Kurfurstendamm, Nuremberger Strasse, Unter Den Linden and Reichkanzlerplatz were no longer just foreign names to me - they were places that I came to know, and to know well. When not on a family excursion, most of my free time was spent exploring on my bicycle, on my own.

As we youngsters grew older, my parents ventured further afield and in the long summer holidays we joined them on driving tours to the Black Forest, Swiss Alps and the French Riviera. It wasn't long before I realized I loved being out and about and going here and there and everywhere. Travelling appealed to my restless nature and strong sense of curiosity for as well as being entertaining it was also educational - and fun. And I loved every minute of it. In a nutshell I was well and truly hooked. I had caught the travel bug -and been smitten by the Wanderlust - Big Time. But little did I know or realize all those many years ago that it was the beginning (despite my shy and rather reserved manner) of a life of travel and adventure that many people would envy and most could only dream about.....The rest, as they say, is history.

David Skillan (Raleigh Collingwood 51-56)