Background ...

This journal recounts the nine-year journey to locate my Polish family gone astray and the eventual discovery and personal meeting with that family.

From my journal of that discovery ...


the following extract details the events that led to this trip.

It may be said that at times it is far easier to find a deceased ancestor than it is to find a misplaced living relative. Archived church books, historical documents, civil records, and such usually lead to a successful discovery of an ancestor if some clues are available, such as a region, village, city, town, or even the church parish. Nevertheless, it would be a false assumption to believe that any descendant of those long gone families remains in those ancestral places. Over time, people disperse due to events such as conflict, economic hardships, forced relocation, national resettlement, or changing political borders. One's family relations may be scattered throughout the civilized world ... typically in nearby regions but most often in faraway places. Therefore, how does one go about finding those 'lost' family relations or even if they exist?

No doubt, there are many amateur and professional genealogists that face this dilemma, in their quest to complete a family tree by locating family "branches" still living today. I am one of those individuals that is making this journey ... trying to locate missing relations. A frustrating reality that has consumed my time and energy for nearly long arduous years. In my heart and my conviction I know, I just know, that somewhere out there is an individual that is blood-related to me ... living a normal life, unaware of me - their relation. Moreover, I am equally convinced that that particular individual is most likely thinking ... "am I the only descendant living today ... have I no other family somewhere in the world?"

My narrative ... my story ... deals with that quest with a most remarkable ending. As I said earlier, it took a journey of nine years but I was able to answer that question with a resounding, "Yes, I have family elsewhere." I found them through determination and perseverance, some luck, but mainly tenacious hard work. I would like to share with you my journey, and my efforts, so that perhaps it may offer some encouragement to others that, although finding a "lost" family is not easy, it certainly is not hopeless.

Our Polish family name of Różyłowicz, anglicized to Rozylowicz, is the only name that is known (and used) by everyone in our immediate family. However, in my research I have uncovered so many variations (spellings) of our Różyłowicz surname that there was some concern if an uncovered individual actually belonged to our line or was totally unrelated. Were the variations not so dissimilar but actual legitimate spellings based on phonetic declarations? We uncovered our surnames as Ruzylowicz, Ruzylowicz, Rzoscuiowicz, and even a Rozylowicz.

To attend to these questions in year-2000 I contacted a well-known and respected author on the subject of Polish Surnames – William F. Hoffman, author of Polish Surnames: Origins and Meanings. Mr. Hoffman is a member of the Polish Genealogical Society of America, Chicago, Illinois and the editor of the PGSA's "Rodziny" Journal, (rodziny means families.) Mr. Hoffmann responded to my query with a detailed and comprehensive examination that answered my questions (not discussed here.)

With this reassurance that spelling variations were the norm, I was satisfied that the discovered ancestors were, in all probability, directly related to me. As such, I could proceed with nearly 100% assurance.

However, there was a comment that Mr. Hoffman included in his response that had me somewhat excited. His added comment was "...as of 1990, according to the best data available the Słownik nazwisk współczesne w Polsce uzysanych [Directory of Surnames in Current Use in Poland], which covers about 94% of the population of Poland], there were only 3 Polish citizens named Ro-ż*1owicz (Ed: Różyłowicz). They lived somewhere in the province of Zielona Gora (see map above). Unfortunately, I do not have access to further details such as first names or addresses, so I cannot tell you how to find that information. Zielona Gora is a long way from Ukraine and it is quite likely the family used to live in eastern Poland or western Ukraine but was caught up in the forced relocation of millions from east to west after World War II (Operation Vistula)."

To continue my story ... in October 2000, the Internet was coming into its own. I pressed on by employing the various "search engines" in my search methodology. One should remember that in that time-period the Internet was a godsend of information technology but still immature, undergoing a slow maturation as more and more people, institutions, etc. made use of its power to spread and publicize their messages, albeit data.

Knowing what Mr. Hoffman revealed to me, re: variations in my surname spelling PLUS the mention of a community (or province) of Zielona Gora, I continued a tenacious, methodical, and systematic search of the Internet for more Rozylowicz's in their various spellings. Nothing! No other Rozylowicz (other than known family members) was uncovered. Not that I expected anything different; but the hope was there. As to Zielona Gora ... well, that was a dead-end in itself. There were no Zielona Gora telephone white-pages for that province or any link to community resources.

Over the next few years, I made a more concerted and meticulous efforts to locate a Rozylowicz in Zielona Gora ... considering that the Internet was maturing and the content becoming more expansive. Still nothing. My methodology was lacking something but I was uncertain of what.
Recollections of Poland ... 2009
Meeting Our Newly Found Cousins
September 15th – September 30th
Part 1 ... Page 2 of 15

Then came January 2009. I was becoming very frustrated at my apparent lack of success. I had to go in a new direction. Inspired ... I had an epiphany of sorts and changed my tactics. Instead of searching under the anglicized names of Zielona Góra and Różyłowicz, I thought I would try my search using the proper Polish names of Zielona Góra and Różyłowicz. However, there is a problem here. The standard USA keyboard, The 104-key PC English QWERTY keyboard, does not have the requisite characters common to the Polish language text, i.e., ó, ż, ł, etc. Polish keyboards use the same QWERTY layout but include keyboard shortcuts, which we do not have in the USA. Therefore, I had to find an alternate means to create my search text of Zielona Góra and Różyłowicz. The answer laid in a word processor. A word processor allows for insertion of symbols (ó, ż, ł) in lieu of standard text. Once my search words (Góra, Różyłowicz) were created in Microsoft®Word®, I copied the new text into my search engines and proceeded from there ... hoping for better luck. My first searches on www.google.com, www.google.pl and http://sukacz.pl (English and Polish search engines, suzkacz means search) using the Polish versions of place and my name got “matches” ... I struck gold. I located a Krystyna Różyłowicz followed by a Marta Rużyłowicz in Zielona Góra and a locale named Nowa Sól. Marta Rużyłowicz had a “facebook-type” posting on a site called nasza-klasa.pl ... picture and profile. However, is she family? One way to find out. The nasza-klasa.pl site allows registered members to view another member’s profile. Perhaps Marta had an e-mail link. I registered as a member (no problem) ... accessed Marta’s profile and noticed that all of her profiles were “ukryty” (hidden), except her e-mail link. I composed a brief message, including my contact particulars, describing my search and asked if she could send me anything to begin an exploration into that possibility.

The next day I received a response ... Marta wrote ... “Thank you for contacting me, how did you manage to find me on nasza-klasa? I am sending a short family story. My ancestors come from Stanisławow (western borderland of Ukraine), they lived at 9, Targowicki Square. In 1941 my grandmother was resettled in Kożuchów (30 kilometres from Zielona Góra), in today’s Lubuskie. She arrived with two daughters - Felicja and Henryka. Henryka was a spinner, Felicja had a son - Tomasz, who is my father. My great grandmother was called Weronika Janowicz, my great grandfather - Stefan Rużyłowicz (son of Cyrili Rużyłowicz and Elizabeth Kreinmeyer). Currently there are only four people in Poland called Rużyłowicz: it is I, my mother Danuta, my father Tomasz and my younger sister - Krystyna. I am a student of pedagogy/social work and it is my second year. I am 20, my sister is 18, and in April is finishing high school. My parents are environmentalists. My father has been seeking for family contacts abroad for a long time now. We know for sure that his aunt immigrated to Vancouver (Canada) in the seventies, but we failed to find her.”

No sooner did I reach the point where I read ... “son of Cyril Rużyłowicz and Elizabeth Kreinmeyer” I had my answer. Cyril and Elizabeth are my paternal great-grandparents. I found one of my living relatives ... my cousin. Of course, what could I do ... I wrote back, saying ... “I am pleased to tell you that you are my ... 2nd cousin.”

One other fact should be mentioned. In her response, Marta wrote that ... “In 1941 my grandmother was resettled in Kożuchów.” This corroborates what Mr. Hoffman wrote to us in 2000 ... “Zielona Góra is a long way from Ukraine, and it's quite likely the family used to live in eastern Poland or western Ukraine but was caught up in the forced relocation of millions from east to west after World War II (Operation Vistula).”

Thus began a series of e-mail communications between myself and my 2nd cousin Tomasz confirming our families ties. Knowing that exchanging e-mails is at best impersonal, I made the decision to travel to Poland later in 2009 to meet the family. An agreement was reached between us that mid-September to early October would be ideal to visit as the two young girls would still be on summer leave and Tomasz would be able to take his vacation time from his work. To add to the joy of meeting the family, cousin Laurentiu (Dr. Rożyłowicz, University of Bucharest, Romania) was invited to join me. He heartily accepted and travel plans were solidified ... departing USA on September 14 ... returning to USA on October 1.

Oh yes ... although initial indication was that the family lived in Zielona Góra, fact is they lived in Kożuchów, a small town due south of Zielona Góra and southwest of Nowa Sól.

The plan ... because Kożuchów is located approximately 250km (150 miles) from Berlin, Germany, it made sense to travel to Poland by way of Berlin. I would fly to Berlin by way of El Paso, TX – Atlanta, Georgia – Amsterdam, Netherlands – Berlin. Laurentiu would meet me in Berlin by way of Bucharest, Romania – Düsseldorf, Germany – Berlin. We would unwind and rest a day-and-a-half in Berlin ... do a little sightseeing and wait for cousin Tomasz to pick us up at our Berlin hotel for the 3-hour drive to Kożuchów. The trip was on.

Monday, September 14th...

The beginning of any trip, especially international, is always a roll of dice ... will the flights be on time, will they be delayed, will I miss any of my connections? Of course ... will my luggage arrive with me?

Woke up at 4 AM to catch the 5 AM shuttle van from Las Cruces to the El Paso airport. Dee drove me to the shuttle terminal, bid me a bon-voyage, and I settled in for the arduous 24-hour transit. Arrived at El Paso at 6:15, checked in (no problem), cleared security, and waited for the Delta flight. Aircraft was already parked so I knew there is that assurance of an on-time departure ... and it did. Flight was quiet (i.e., no screaming kids on board), arrived in Atlanta at 1:30 PM (two hour time difference included.) Atlanta’s Hartsfield’s Airport is monstrously large ... my international flight departed from a terminal that probably was located in the next county. Had to ask for help locating it ... took the airport shuttle train to Terminal T ... located my departure gate ... and waited.

Because I had no breakfast I needed to eat something ... my next flight was at 4:40. Found a Chinese place, ordered a plate and realized I made a mistake. Food was greasy, pork was dry, beef was stringy, and the rice was overcooked. Typical airport fare.

Gate opened at 3:15 ... I checked in ... got boarding passes for my next KLM flights. Aircraft was an Airbus A-330 ... flight was full ... did not notice any kids boarding. Could I be that lucky? Flight departed on time ... destination Amsterdams Schipol Airport. Being an overnight flight, two meals were served ... late supper (if one can call it that), with a
Recollections of Poland ... 2009
Meeting Our Newly Found Cousins
September 15th – September 30th
Part 1 ... Page 3 of 15

“somewhat” taste ... and a before-landing breakfast of non-descript fare ... did not eat it all.

Tuesday, September 15th... Flight landed at 7:15 AM (again, good luck, no screamers on board) ... weather in Amsterdam was overcast, drizzling rain, and cold. Airport was busy even at that early time of day. Had a nearly 3-hour layover ... so finding my next gate was a no-hurry effort. A leisurely stroll through the terminals allowed me to assess if I should purchase any duty-free items. After glancing at the euro prices of items that interested me, I said “no.” Apparently the economic downturn does not affect airport business ... buyers everywhere. Dutch 4-pack of cheese that cost €12 in 2007 was now €22 ... certainly not a bargain (a € was $1.49 USD at this point.) Our wait for the flight departure was boring as the gate was located at the end of the terminal and any “eye-candy” was missing. Still, time passed quickly ... flight left on time at 10:15 ... weather was cooperating ... smooth 1-hour flight ... and landed at Berlin’s Tegel Airport a bit early at 11:20.

Went to retrieve my luggage ... could not locate it. Baggage belt was empty and my bag nowhere in sight. Not the first time this happened so I was not perturbed ... it would be found but it’s a question of how many days I have to wear the same underwear. Left the baggage claim area ... and headed to the main terminal to meet Laurentiu ... and there he was. His flight arrived a bit earlier. Good timing and the beginning of our trip is auspicious (less my luggage.) Found the lost luggage office ... cried about my bad luck ... filed a claim ... and hoped for the best. Was advised that my bag was still in Amsterdam and would be delivered to my hotel that very same day. Heartened by this bit of good news we left the airport and caught a taxi to our hotel ... Winter’s Hotel Berlin Mitte am Checkpoint Charlie at Hedemannstraße 11-12 ... (left, at night) near city center and within walking distance of all points of interest. Taxi was a Mercedes Benz (classy) but driver spoke poor English. Gave him a printed copy of hotel address so he would not misunderstand our instructions. Drive through Berlin was fast and furious ... passing many points that would be on our agenda for sightseeing. Thirty minutes (1 PM) later we arrived at our hotel (fare almost €28 or $42 USD) ... but check-in room was not ready. We parked our bags with the desk and left the hotel for a brief sojourn to get our bearings for tomorrow’s exploration.

From the hotel, we trotted down Hedemannstraße, made a right on Stresemannstraße and walked north ... not really paying attention to where we’re heading or for that matter where we came from ... a lapse of judgment that we would pay for later. Nearing Askanischer Platz we spied a beer sign (meaning food and liquor) and made a left on Schönebergerstraße. Within a short distance we stopped to feed Laurentiu (young men need their nourishment) and to liquor-up this writer (older men have a different need for calories.) After a sandwich for him and a beer/wine concoction for me we left to trace back our path to the hotel ... it was 3:00 PM by now. We backtracked on Schönebergerstraße and without realizing it passed Stresemannstraße and continued east.

Soon we sensed that nothing was familiar ... we were disoriented ... which way back to the hotel? From this point on it became a comedy-of-errors ... we took so many detours, so many unknown —straße’s that eventually we actually wound up on the main drag of Berlin ... Unter den Linden (Under the Linden), far north of our hotel location. We were lost.

Undeterred, we spied a bookstore and made a wise decision ... buy a detailed map of Berlin. Marking our present position on Unter den Linden and noting our hotel on Hedemannstraße we were in for a shock ... we were so far off that if we continued (before map purchase) we would actually wind up in the former East Berlin. But ... who says men do not ask for directions? Using our map and following street signs, we maneuvered our way back to the hotel (passing some very interesting waypoints for later re-visit) and checked in. Luckily my lost luggage arrived and everything was happy in Deutschland again.

Our room was modern, clean, and compact (left) ... no view onto the cityscape. Two twin beds ... small TV ... no coffee maker. Shower/bath was efficient but tiny (below, left). What intrigued me was the newest in a WC ... a unique design (below, right).

Settling in, we each opted for a quick shower and a 1-hour rest. By now, it was past 5 PM and the city beckoned us for a brief exploration and finding a place for a typical Berlin or Bavarian supper.

Leaving the hotel, we recalled our taxi passing an outdoor attraction that seemed to draw people. We headed for Wilhelmsstraße and headed north again (remembering the way for our return later.) A quarter of a mile ahead was the outdoor exposition, crude and encircled by a cyclone fence ... Topographie des Terrors.

Background on this historic site ... Between 1933 and 1945, the central institutions of Nazi persecution and terror were located on the grounds of the present-day Topography of Terror. Gestapo headquarters were set up at PrinzAlbrecht-Straße 8, as was the Reich Security Main Office.
(Reichssicherheitshauptamt) in 1939, while the neighboring Hotel Prinz Albrecht housed the administrative leadership of the SS, and the Security Service (SD) of the SS moved into the Prinz-Albrecht-Palais at Wilhelmstraße 102. The actual government district of the National Socialist SS and police state thus arose in a small area. It was here that the genocide of the European Jews and the systematic persecution and murder of other sections of the population were planned. Here that the persecution of political opponents in Germany and occupied Europe was organized, and here that the "Special Units (Einsatzgruppen) of the Security Police and SD" sent reports of their mass murders in Poland and the Soviet Union. It was here, as well, that the Gestapo had its "house prison" for detainees, who were interrogated at Gestapo headquarters and sometimes subjected to brutal torture. The buildings, which were in part destroyed and in part severely damaged in the final phase of the Second World War, were demolished so that nothing remained by 1956. The division of the city left the terrain on the periphery of West Berlin, and after 1961, it bordered the Berlin Wall. Its history was forgotten.

Topography of Terror Documentation Center … Only towards the end of the 1970s was this historical site gradually rediscovered. On the city of Berlin's 750th anniversary celebrations in 1987, the grounds and the remains of the buildings were made accessible to the public and the documentary exhibition Topography of Terror. Gestapo, SS and Reich Security Main Office on the "Prinz-Albrecht-Terrain" opened in an exhibition pavilion. The construction of a documentation center based on the winning design of the 1993 architectural competition was begun in 2004. The new exhibition and documentation building and the redesigned historical grounds are scheduled to open in May 2010. Until then, the exhibition will be shown in the open air.

Thirty minutes here was adequate to rekindle our sense of history.

Below is a sampling of the types of images on display … disturbing to view … some haunting … many tragic …
By now, it was well past 6 PM ... and hunger beckoned us to find a restaurant for our evening meal. We left the exposition and headed for the other main thoroughfare ... Friedrichstraße, and headed north ... always on the lookout for a place to eat. As this was city center, many hotels were about, but we did not want to eat at a hotel. As for restaurants, they were few. It was Laurentiu who eyed a likely place ... an unlikely front with outdoor seating. Being chilly, we opted for indoor dining and were surprised to learn that this establishment also had an indoor patio ... right in the midst of a covered commercial building plaza.

Maximilian's was an excellent choice and a lucky find. The patio was not crowded ... the servers spoke passable English ... the Pilsner beer was cold ... and the entrees enticing. I well remember my 2005 Nürnberg trip where I experienced my first taste of the town’s specialty ... the Nürnberg sausages. And this is what I recommended that we order ... 6 Stück Nürnberger Würstl auf Sauerkraut und Frischem Brot (6 original pork sausages in sauerkraut, served with farmer bread.) The meal was excellent ... the price was €29 or roughly $44 USD + tip (for both of us.)

Sated, we made our way back to the hotel to further rest up for a grueling day tomorrow ... a day devoted to exploring, as best as possible, the many historic and cultural attractions that Berlin has to offer.

Wednesday, September 16th ...

It was a restful night for the two of us ... the neighborhood was quiet. After showering and checking the world news on BBC, we left the hotel for our day's exploration ... but first, a breakfast of sorts was in order. The hotel charges €16 ($25 USD) for breakfast ... much too rich for us. We had to locate an affordable alternative.

I do not recall the name of the place but, because it was busy with customers ... the lines were long ... the fragrance was mouth-watering ... and the prices seemed reasonable ... we elected to stop here and have a “quick breakfast” ... quick meaning coffee, baguette with scrambled eggs, and a croissant (left.) Cost for the two of us was less than €10 ($15 USD) ... and the fare was filling.

OK ... now we’re ready to see Berlin. Taking leave of the diner, we head on out not knowing exactly which way to go or what to see. Finding ourselves on Leipzigersstraße we head west towards Potsdamer Platz.

Potsdamer Platz and the New Centre ... In the 1900s this was one of the busiest squares in the whole of Europe and when the Berlin Wall was built it had a platform that allowed Westerners to look over the wall and into the eastern part of the city. After many years of neglect, recent renovation has created a wonderful new, vibrant area, (top) full of shops, cafés, restaurants, and other entertainment venues. Once again, it is a thriving square and is becoming the heart of the city. There are many modern constructions and the Sony Centre has a large, contemporary roof that resembles a sail (center.) For best views in the city, visit Panorama-Point, which is situated at the very top of the tall Kollhoff building (bottom.) A lift is available and it is thought to be the fastest lift in Europe. Sections of the Berlin wall are on display (left + below) in the plaza.

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Leaving the plaza, we move in the direction of the Brandenburg Gate. We skirt the Tiergarten (German for Animal Garden), the largest park in Berlin. About this park ... Once a hunting ground of the Electors of Brandenburg the Großer Tiergarten Park of today was designed in the 1830s by landscape architect Peter Joseph Lenné. After 1944, the park was largely deforested because it served as a source of firewood for the devastated city. The park houses many parliamentary and governmental institutions, among others the Bunderstag in the Reichstag building and the new German Chancellery. The residence of the German President, Schloss Bellevue and the Carillon are also located in the Tiergarten park.

Prussian generals, all of which were located in the ceremonial park facing the Reichstag before they were moved to their present location by the Nazis. In addition, the tree-lined walkways emanating from the Victory Column contain several ceremonial sculptures of Prussian aristocrats enacting an 18th century hunt.

We're on Ebertstraße ... and on the east side of this busy street is a memorial that is almost unrecognizable ... a Holocaust Memorial ... designed by architect Peter Eisenman and engineer Buro Happold. It consists of a 19,000 square meter (4.7 acre) site covered with 2,711 concrete slabs or “stelae,” arranged in a grid pattern on a sloping field.

The stelae are 2.38m (7.8’) long, 0.95m (3’ 1.5”) wide and vary in height from 0.2 m to 4.8m (8’ to 15’9”). According to Eisenman's project text, the stelae are designed to produce an uneasy, confusing atmosphere, and the whole sculpture aims to represent a supposedly ordered system that has lost touch with human reason. A 2005 copy of the Foundation for the Memorial's official English tourist pamphlet, however, states that the design represents a radical approach to the traditional concept of a memorial, partly because Eisenman did not use any symbolism. An attached underground “Place of Information” (German: Ort der Information) holds the names of all known Jewish Holocaust victims, obtained from the Israeli museum Yad Vashem. Building began on April 1, 2003 and was finished on December 15, 2004. It was inaugurated on May 10, 2005, sixty years after the end of World War II. The cost of construction was approximately €25 million.

The time was past 11 AM ... if there was any chance of seeing the highlights of this city we had to make a choice ... stay at city center and see a few of them ... or, take a tourist bus tour of the city and catch the major points of attraction. As we neared the Brandenburg Gate, we opted for as bus tour. Cost was a nominal €12 and the tour would take about 3 hours to complete.

The route the tour would take is shown below ... it is ambitious, but does include the highlights of the city – cultural and historic.
When the Berlin Wall still stood, the Gate stood alone and isolated. Today it is once again integrated into the recently designed Pariser Platz.

The position of the Brandenburg Gate was “of its kind undisputedly the most beautiful in the whole world” and therefore he took the Propylæum on the Acropolis in Athens “as the model,” as Carl Gotthard Langhans wrote on his design which was implemented in 1789-91. The present emblem of the city was only one of 18 city gates; the position and names of the other gates can often still be seen on a street map. However, this gate was by far the most elaborate - most gates just consisted of two simple pillars. Construction work began in the year of the French Revolution, and it was the first building in Berlin's architectural history to be based on models from Greek antiquity - a trend that eventually led Berlin to be called "Athens on the Spree." The gate with its angled side wings (the guardhouses) originally joined directly onto the city wall, but when the city wall was demolished in 1867-68, pedestrian passages were created in the side halls and column halls were built in front of the plain western front.

The gate has five openings that are eleven meters in depth and separated by walls, and their ends are covered by Doric columns. Above the Doric entablature and the steps of the attic is the five meter high copper "Quadriga" with the goddess of victory, designed by Gottfried Schadow and cast in bronze by Emanuel Jury. The goddess Victoria is shown in reliefs as a bringer of peace, and a time of peace is portrayed as a time of cultural abundance. Originally, it was even suggested that the gate should be entitled "Peace Gate." The central figure in the reliefs of the openings through the gate is Heracles.

In its design, the gate reverses the significance of mediaeval city gates, in that it represents the openness and cultural generosity of the self-assured city of residence.

In 1807, the Quadriga was taken away to Paris by Napoleon, but in 1814, it was brought back in a triumphal procession. After the structure had thus become a symbol of victory in the liberation wars, Schinkel added an iron cross to the crown on the rod of the goddess of victory. After war damage, the gate was restored in the 1950s, and with the renovated Quadriga (which was again restored in 1990/91), the gate spent the years from 1961 to 1989 in no-man's-land close to the Wall to West Berlin.

The gate was originally integrated into the continuous complex of buildings around the rectangular Pariser Platz, but in and after the Second World War, all of the other buildings disappeared apart from - remains of the Academy of Arts. Since 1995, reconstruction of Pariser Platz in its historical dimensions has been in progress.

Next on our tour is the Reichstag (#16) ... The Reichstag building was constructed to house the first parliament of the German Empire. It was opened in 1894, and housed the Reichstag until 1933, when it was severely damaged in a fire supposedly set by Dutch communist Marinus van der Lubbe, who was later beheaded for the crime. That verdict has been a subject of controversy over the years. The National Socialist German Workers Party used this event as casus belli to begin a purge of traitors in Berlin and to ban the Communist Party of Germany.

The building was made safe against the elements and partially refurbished in the 1960s, but no attempt at full restoration was made until after the reunification of Germany in 1990, when it underwent reconstruction. After its completion in 1999, it became the meeting place of the modern German parliament, the Bundestag.
The Reichstag as a parliament dates back to the Holy Roman Empire, it ceased to act as a true parliament in the years of the Nazi regime (1933–1945).

In today’s usage, the German term Bundestag refers to the institution while the term Reichstag or Reichstagsgebäude (Reichstag building) refers to the building.

Directly south, and across the street from the Reichstag, we encountered a makeshift memorial ... dedicated to the men and women who died in their attempt to flee from East Berlin to West Berlin. To these people, their flight to freedom was unsuccessful.

Near the Reichstag and on the river Spree, a short walk away, are located two architectural jewels ... the Paul-Löbe-Haus and Marie-Elisabeth-Luders-Haus.

The Paul-Lobe-Haus is a parliament building in Berlin's government district and is located on the grounds of the former Alsenblock on the southern edge of the Spreebogen parks. It is named after the Reichstag president and interim president of the first German Bundestag. After the Bundestag moved back to Berlin, buildings had to be constructed to contain supporting services. Paul-Löbe-Haus, built alongside the Reichstag houses the committees of the Bundestag. The building has a central spine off which smaller blocks projects at ninety degrees. These are linked at parapet level to give the building continuity along its street elevations. This has the effect of creating voids in the facade that turn the space between the projecting blocks into internal courtyards.

The Marie-Elisabeth-Luders-Haus is located directly across the river Spree from the Paul-Löbe-Haus, connected by pedestrian bridge that is only accessible from the interior.

Continuing our bus tour, we pass by the imposing building complex ... the Bundeskanzleramt ... The German Chancellery (#18).

Bundeskanzleramt (Federal Chancellery) (#18) ... One site in the new Berlin that everyone should see is Germany’s most powerful building, the Chancellery. After four years of construction, it was ready to be occupied on May 2, 2001. Located on the "meander of the Spree," the heart of the government district, the Chancellery is just a stone’s throw away from the Brandenburg Gate and Reichstag.

This imposing building of exposed concrete, with its unconventionally designed 36-meter high main facade, emanates the federal government’s new self-confidence. The transparent front of the court of honor resembles an expressionist stage set.

The new building cost 465 million marks to build. The design provides passers-by with a view into the “Chancellor cube.” The cabinet room is situated on the sixth floor of the central block; the office of the Chancellor is on the seventh. The top level is reserved for the Chancellor’s living quarters.

The long side wings contain 310 offices for the staff and a bridge leads to the Chancellor's Park on the west bank of the Spree.

Sometimes we are reminded of Washington, Brasilia, or Canberra, cities that were built as capitals of their countries on green fields. In Berlin, too, a completely new parliament and government building is currently arising which has little in common with earlier buildings.

The master plan by the Berlin architects Axel Schultes and Charlotte Frank is generally regarded as a stroke of genius. No other proposal envisaged such a radical restructuring of the meander of the Spree where the earlier buildings of the "Alsenviertel" were destroyed in the war, apart from the Swiss embassy. With the ribbon of government buildings, the Tiergarten has again an accentuated northern edge where it once just "frayed." In addition, it is symbolic that the Chancellery, as the centre of government, does not compete architecturally with the seat of parliament, but is integrated into the ribbon of government buildings.

The Federal Chancellery, the design for which was praised for its buoyancy and playfulness, appears from its sheer size quite massive. Between and above the two five-storey administrative wings rises the 36 meter high, eight-storey "main building" containing the offices of the Chancellor and his ministers of state, the cabinet room and conference rooms.

I must add that touring by bus appears to be a 'sissy' way of seeing the area’s attractions ... but, with limited time and a large town to explore this options is by far the best.

So ... we continue to be driven by a double-decker bus past all the interesting spots ... of course, we are on the top (and open) level. Next highlight ... Hauptbahnhof, the main Berlin RR station (#17).
Berlin Hauptbahnhof station (#17) ... Berlin's gleaming new focal point is the massive Hauptbahnhof main station, located just north of the Reichstag and government buildings.

After an 8-year construction period (and just 5 years behind schedule), the station recently opened, permitting the main east-west rail corridor to cross the north-south route, in a new tunnel, and giving Berlin a central station for the first time.

The numbers concerning the building and related transport connections are amazing: it cost some 4 billion euros ($6 billion USD) to complete the project; the station is 16 meters high, 60 meters wide and 400 meters long and has nearly the same volume as New York's Empire State building; and 11,800 glass panes weighing 100kg (220 pounds) each form the platform roof, a total of 1.2 million kilos (2.65 million pounds) of glass.

The main east-west S-Bahn track was rerouted through the semi-complete station in 2002, after which the adjacent old S-Bahn station was demolished. As the budget and money were tight, some concessions were made during construction, much to the ire of the architect: the glass platform roof was made 100m shorter than planned (so that the front and rear of ICE trains will still get rained on), and the underground area was given a fixed roof rather than the planned 'cathedral ceiling' that would have reflected light down onto the lower platforms.

Another problem that locals point out is that the station is not really near to anything – it is built in a wasteland close to the former Wall, not within walking distance of either the traditional centre of Mitte or western Berlin.

And the bus rolls on … the passing scenery, the pedestrians, the river, and the rebuilt Berlin architecture mesmerizing. I must add, that although we're in the middle of a major metropolis, there is greenery all around, especially near the river Spree. Our next attraction … Haus der Kulturen der Welt (The House of World Cultures) (#19.)

The Haus der Kulturen der Welt (House of the Cultures of the World) is an arts venue, exhibition, and cultural centre that has been operating since 1989. Situated in the Tiergarten area, between the park's green meadows and the banks of the Spree, its varied all-year-round program includes exhibitions, talks, lectures and seminars, concerts and festivals. Its mission is to bring to Berliners an authentic, consistent fare of challenging, contemporary art, and culture from around the world.

Formerly known as Kongress Halle (Congress Hall) the KKW is a well-known, easily spottable Berlin landmark ... largely because of the extravagance of its roof structure. In 1957 Interbau, an architecture exhibition brought international talent and new architectural visions to West Berlin. The Congress House, given as an American gift to West Berlin, was US architect Hugh Stubbins' contribution to the exhibition and was regarded as a technically revolutionary as well as creatively brilliant achievement. Its highly original parabolic roof was nicknamed – and known ever since - as the 'Pregnant Oyster'. Titanic in its originality, the technological possibilities at the time were not up to the vision and the roof collapsed in 1980.

The roof is supported by steel anchors at two points. Three levels accommodate a large reception hall, a cafeteria, a 400-seat theatre auditorium, and additional rooms where seminars and talks take place. A huge auditorium seating 1250 has state-of-the art projection facilities and is a Talent Campus seminar venue during the International Film Festival in February.

We continue to follow the curve of the river Spree heading west and encounter our next attraction … Schloß Bellevue (#20.)

The immaculately looking white neoclassical palace on the Spreeweg, just off the Tiergarten's northwestern corner is the official residence of the German President – Bundespräsident. Horst Köhler, Germany's current ninth post-war president was elected on May 24, 2004.

The palace was erected in 1786 as a private residence for Friedrich the Great's youngest brother Prince Ferdinand of Prussia, designed by architect Philipp Daniel Boumann, as three-winged palace ideally situated on the Tiergarten hunting grounds. Over the centuries, it became a school under Kaiser Wilhelm II (1888 – 1918) – the last German Kaiser – and a Reich guesthouse in 1939. The round arched windows of the side wings were converted from the original side entrances. The present building is the 1959 reconstructed version and only one room the Oval Saal (Oval Office) from Carl Gotthard Langhans is original.

The President's offices are located in the new building, the Bundespräsidialamt, south of the Palace, a contrasting glass and black granite edifice under heavy guard.

We pass the Victory Column (Siegessäule) (#21), and take the Kinkelhofeß through the heart of Tiergarten Park. Along the way, old and new Berlin presents its many faces. Our next view … Zoologischer Garten (#22.)
Zoologischer Garten (#22) … Affectionately known as the Zoo on the south-west corner of the Tiergarten, this is Berlin's favourite family spot - a wonderfully kept urban Zoo with a huge playground, restaurants, and coffee shops, providing a whole day’s worth of family entertainment. A site Berliners are justly proud of, this large and very well kept Zoo is home to 13,700 animals and 1,400 species. The Berlin Zoo and its animals are part of local life and most Berliners will be aware of the news of a new arrival.

Rare among city zoos, the Zoologischer Garten was founded in 1844 on the initiative of zoologists Alexander von Humboldt and Martin Lichtenstein and was the first Zoo to be built in Germany. Under Friedrich Wilhelm IV, it became a joint project by Martin Lichtenstein and Peter Joseph Lenné who had redesigned the Tiergarten and allocated the southwestern tip of the Tiergarten as a zoological garden. Prior to this, a Pheasantry had served the royal kitchen from 1742. The royal family's private zoo had been on the Pfaueninsel (Pheasant Island) where pheasants can still be seen strutting around.

Numerous architects worked on the design of the urban habitats for the specific animal. The Antelope House dates back to 1872 and the Elephant House to 1873. The Hippopotamus House (1997) is an example of more modern concepts applied for the well-being of the animals. Under a 13,000 square feet glass solar panel roof the hippopotamuses can be viewed beneath the water and the animals are no longer simply on display.

There are two impressive main entrances – the Lion Gate on Hardenbergplatz, and the Elephant Gate (left) next to the Aquarium on Olof Palme Platz.

The Zoo is visited regularly by 3 million animal enthusiasts – Berliners eagerly follow the development of newborns and recent stars have been the panda Bears and of course Knut, the baby polar bear who became a local legend and subject to a number of pop hit singles.

The Zoologische Garten is at the edge of Breitscheidplatz and the start of the busy shopping district which includes the Tauentzienstrasse and Ku'damm … here our tour bus is parked.

Among the many denizens of the Zoologischen Garten … here is a sampling …
Of historical and cultural importance, this plaza holds the Gedächtniskirche or Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church (near #24.)

The Gedächtniskirche or Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church is the symbolic centre of West Berlin, an anti-war memorial to peace and reconciliation. Following allied bombing during WWII, the original, west Tower has remained standing as a ruin and is hauntingly named the “hollow tooth” as it is literally an empty husk. Immediately recognizable and located on the Breitscheidplatz, this is the only building on the square which was spared by the bombing and deliberately preserved as a part ruin.

Built between 1891-95 in memory of Kaiser Wilhelm I, the first German Emperor (1861-1888), by Franz Schwechten in neo-Romanesque style, it was damaged on December 23, 1943 and subsequently almost completely destroyed during the April 1945 air-raids.

The Church remained heavily damaged until 1956 when the new building was built following Egon Eiermann's winning project for an adjacent modern church including an octagonal hall and a bell tower. This was erected between 1957 and 1963 and the nave had to be removed. The modern tower, which is not to everyone’s liking, consists of an octagonal structure and a six-sided bell tower. Its peculiarity is blue shimmering light, was achieved by leaving an inner cavity of 2m between the inner and outer walls with lamps that give-off a blue hue to the inside and outside of the structure. Over 20,000 panels of stained glass make up the walls of the modern Church, consecrated on May 25, 1962 the same day as the new Coventry Cathedral in the UK, also a victim of WWII bombs.

We reboard the bus for a continuation of our tour … passing normal, imposing and unimposing architecture. One must remember that Berlin was virtually rebuilt after the war … it was practically leveled to the ground by Allied British and American bombings.

Again, we skirted Tiergarten, that green urban oasis, flew by the Potsdamer Platz, and the Topographies of Terror exposition.

Our next viewpoint, which we will visit on a later walk-by, is Checkpoint Charlie (#6.)

Checkpoint Charlie (#6), along with Glienicker Brücke (Glienicker Bridge) was the best-known border crossing of Cold War days.

The sign, which became a symbol of the division of Cold War Berlin and read like a dire warning to those about to venture beyond the Wall – YOU ARE NOW LEAVING THE AMERICAN SECTOR – in English, Russian, French, and German - stood here.

It is today an iconic marker of territorial boundary and political division. Until the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, it signified the border between Communism, freedom and confinement.

The spot remains a must-see sight in Berlin with huge historical and emotional resonance, even accounting for the fact that there is remarkably little left to recall the atmosphere of pre-1989 days. An enormous amount of debating went into deciding what should be left here and preserved for Berliners and visitors to see in the future.

Historically, the site is important because from 1961 to 1990 it functioned as the main entry and departing point for diplomats, journalists and non-German visitors who used to be allowed to enter East Berlin on a one day visa after exchanging their Deutsch Marks on a one-to-one basis for East German currency. More dramatically, US and Soviet tanks had a close encounter here in October 1961 when J.F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev’s tanks faced each other in an acrimonious moment feared around the World as a possible lead up to World War III.

The wooden barrack where visitors to the Russian Sector (East Berlin) were once obliged to pass through for vetting was removed. Reconstruction has included a US Army guardhouse and a copy of the original border sign. The original white booth, which served as the official gateway between East and West, can be seen in the Allierten Museum in Berlin-Dahlem. Cobblestones mark the exact spot of the former border and the poignant photograph by Frank Thiel of an American and Soviet
soldier can be seen here. Memorabilia includes the nearby Café Adler (eagle), a hotspot for journalists and spies in the past where informers met their counterparts.

The Museum, known as Haus am Checkpoint Charlie, contains the best documentation available on the many escape attempts from East to West. The original Checkpoint sign is exhibited there.

Ironically, the New Berlin has turned this area into an entry, rather than departure point, to a new kind of American sector. Today’s Friedrichstraße, with its Manhattan style office district, its new buildings by international architects such as Philip Johnson, who created the American Business Center, is the fruit of the millions in corporate investment which rebuilt this central part of East Berlin in the 1990s.

Next on our tour … **Gendarmenmarkt (#7.)**

The Gendarmenmarkt is arguably Berlin’s most magnificent square (top). It is best known for the architectural duo composed of the German Deutscher Dom Cathedral (center) and Schinkel’s Konzerthaus (concert hall, bottom) which together form one of the most stunning ensembles in Berlin.

The ‘dom’ refers to the domed tower structure erected in 1785; was mainly intended to add stature and grandeur to the building.

The square dates back to 1700, part of King Friedrich I’s plan for Friedrichstadt, an emerging new quarter of Berlin, where the recently expelled French Protestants or Huguenots had settled following the Edict of Potsdam in 1685 which granted them asylum in the Prussian capital. The name is in fact of French origin as “Gens d’arms” which was a Prussian regiment consisting of Huguenots soldiers.

At this juncture we leave our tour bus behind … we disembark and elect to sample the rest of the tour on foot … considering that we are quite familiar with Berlin by now and the way back to our hotel is a well-known track to us by now. Therefore, we elect to explore this point of interest … **Alexanderplatz Area (#10.)**

‘Alex’ to Berliners, a cattle market in the Middle Ages, a military parade square and an exercise ground for nearby barracks until the mid 19th century - Alexanderplatz is the square named to honor Alexander I, Tsar of Russia, on his visit to Berlin in 1805. It was here that Alfred Döblin took the pulse of the cosmopolitan metropolis portrayed in his 1929 novel ‘Berlin Alexanderplatz’ filmed by Fassbinder for a TV series as a portrait of the bustling city in the 1920s before the imminent Nazi takeover. Fast forward to more recent times, one million people congregated here, on 4 November 1989 to demonstrate against the GDR regime shortly before the fall of the Berlin Wall. This was the largest anti-government demonstration in its history.

Layer upon layer of Berlin’s urban history is located in Alexanderplatz, interweaving centuries of social, political, and architectural history and repeatedly the subject of public debate and urban design competitions.

The transformation of Alexanderplatz into a modern transit junction and shopping area came about during the second half of the 19th century with developments such as the construction of the S-Bahn, Berlin’s surface rail network in 1882 and the underground railway from 1913. Devastated during the war, the square gradually developed into the pedestrian zone during the 1960s becoming a popular if rather amorphous urban area.

Amongst the sights here are the 365 meter TV tower, Berlin’s highest construction topped by a globe (turned into a pink football during the 2006 World Cup Event) with a rotating viewing platform. It is common for large cities to have a broadcasting tower. That this technically modest structure is situated in the center of the city is a peculiarity of Berlin. The Television Tower on the west side of Alexanderplatz was originally 365 meters high and is the tallest structure in Berlin, conspicuously marking the center of the capital.

The idea for the massive structure came from the architects Henselmann and Streitparth. The old city quarter between the Berlin Town Hall and Alexanderplatz was in rubble after the war. The SED leadership wanted to build a modern, powerful downtown for the GDR capital at that time. Hence the “Telespargel” (TV-asparagus), built in 1965–69, also represented the political and economic power of the socialist republic.

Visitors from all over the world enjoy the view and restaurant in the seven-story globe that stands 250 meters above ground, rotating around its own axis.
It is a strange idea to build a 365-meter high television tower in the middle of a city. It is so unusual that the tower in Berlin is even today the only television tower in such a central position in Europe, and perhaps in the whole world. The local people have not just become accustomed to it - it soon became the pride of the people of East Berlin, and it is now one of the undisputed major landmarks of the unified city. Hardly anyone in Berlin finds it out of place.

The idea of building such a television tower grew out of the need for a separate television broadcasting system for the eastern part of the city. Various projects outside the city had been rejected, and when even the tower block planned on the site of the demolished palace in the typical wedding-cake style of contemporary Moscow and Warsaw became obsolete, it was decided to implement this unusual project. It was carried out in 1965-69 by the collective of Günther Kollmann.

There is a legend that the height was prescribed by Walter Ulbricht so that every schoolchild could remember it: 365 meters, one for every day of the year. It was the second tallest tower in Europe, surpassed only by the television tower in Moscow.

The reinforced concrete shaft reaches up to a height of 250 meters, and above it is a red and white striped steel mast. In 1997, the top end was removed and replaced by a tip that is three meters higher.

The sphere on the tower covers seven stories, two of which are open to the public: the viewing floor is at a height of 203 meters and above it the Telecafé in which the outer ring with the tables revolves around its own axis once per hour. A few years ago, the rotation time was reduced to ½-hour to shorten the amount of time spent there by guests. The exterior surface of the sphere consists of 140 stainless steel segments, and when the sun shines, a large cross appears as a reflection. When the SED communist party was in power, this was jokingly referred to as "God's revenge."

The Neptune Fountain (1886) that once stood in front of the City Palace is now on the garden grounds in front of the Town Hall just west of the tower.

Also in this area is the Rotes Rathaus. The Neptune Fountain (1886) that once stood in front of the City Palace is now on the garden grounds in front of the Town Hall just west of the tower.

Berlin Rotes Rathaus, literally Red Town Hall, is the seat of the Berlin Senate – city government – as opposed to local, district government that is housed in the district Town Halls. Berlin is one of the 16 German Länder or States which make up the German Federal Republic.

Berlin, a city that tends to lean towards the left of the political spectrum, has been ruled from inside this building since 1869 - reunited Berlin from 1991. The name red actually refers to the building's red clinker bricks that make its façade instantly recognizable. The ruling Mayor's offices are located here and those of the Berlin Senators who make up the city ruling government or Senate. Klaus Wowereit, who became famous around the world for his outspoken outing in 2001 “I’m gay and that’s OK,” has been Berlin’s unconventional ruling mayor since 1995.

The Rotes Rathaus served as the administration building for the East Berlin government in the 1950s after war damage restoration was completed, whereas Rathaus Schoneberg – famous for President Kennedy's memorable address to Berliners and his assertion of commitment to the city - “Ich bin ein Berliner” - seated the separate West Berlin government.

Berlin had a medieval town hall but a new town hall became a necessity in the 1850’s as the growing industrial city craved independence from the long rule of the Hohenzollern monarchs. The building was built between 1861 and 1869. It is huge, nearly (99m by 88 m) with four main wings and inner courtyards with intermediate wings in the interior.

Interesting features are the rows of arches and the four storeys linked by tall window frames. The building's fortress-like appearance was achieved by the overhanging balustrade linked to the projections in the corners. The 74-meter high tower rising above its main portal is its defining characteristic and a terracotta frieze from 1879 traces and illustrates the city's history until 1871 in 36 panels.
Leaving Alexanderplatz, we make our way to the most famous of Berlin’s streets ... Unter den Linden (Under the Linden) street.

The Unter den Linden is a long avenue that stretches 1 mile / 1.5 km from the Brandenburg Gate (Brandenburger Tor), one of Berlin’s most recognisable landmarks, to the Schlossbrücke. Before it was developed as a showpiece road, Unter den Linden was just a simple riding path that connected the Tiergarten to the Berliner Stadtschloss. The enormous linden trees were planted in the 17th century, but the striking blend of neoclassical and baroque structures continued to be built for another 100 years. With heavy damage in the war, much of the architecture in this splendid avenue now reflects postwar tastes and the eastern parts have been beautifully restored. Some of Berlin’s most treasured and important buildings lie on this road and these include the German State Opera (Deutsche Staatsoper) and the German Historical Museum (Deutsches Historisches), which is housed in the Arsenal (Zeughaus) ... to say nothing of the Berlin Dom.

Berliner Dom (#12) was next on our visit.

The Berliner Dom (Berlin Cathedral), completed in 1905, is Berlin’s largest and most important Protestant church as well as the sepulcher of the Prussian Hohenzollern dynasty. This outstanding high-renaissance baroque monument has linked the Hohenzollerns to German Protestantism for centuries and undergone renewed phases of architectural renovation since the Middle Ages.

First built in 1465 as a parish church on the Spree River it was only finally completed in 1905 under the last German Kaiser -Wilhelm II. Damaged during the Second World War it remained closed during the GDR years and reopened after restoration in 1993.

The “old” Cathedral at the Lustgarten was initially constructed between 1747 and 1750 under Friedrich the Great (1740-1786) as a baroque church in accordance with Knobersdorff’s plans by Johann Bournmann. From 1817 to 1822, Karl Friedrich Schinkel redesigned it but the Cathedral retained its stylistic similarity to the high-renaissance baroque architecture of St. Peter’s Cathedral in Rome. Finally, official plans reconciling the different stages and stylistic developments were presented by Julius Raschdorff in 1885 to King Friedrich Wilhelm IV. When Wilhelm II ascended the throne in 1888 he authorized the demolition of the “old” Cathedral and the construction, began in 1893, of the much larger, imposing present Berliner Dom.

Heavily damaged during the war, closed until 1993, cycles of restoration have continued until 2006 including the unveiling of eight mosaics that decorate the Dome’s ceiling. The outer Dome structure was rebuilt with a simplified cupola and spires between 1975 and 1982. During the many years of division, the original parishioners – over 12,000 in the 19th century - were divided into two separate parishes. It was only in 1980 that the parishioners were able to celebrate Mass again and that Baptism and Funerals were carried out.

Known as the Hohenzollern family tomb, over ninety sarcophagi and tombs are on display including those of the Prussian Kings – Frederick I and Sophie Charlotte, by Andreas Schlüter, impressively cast in gold-plated tin and lead.

Walking the Unter den Linden (Under the Linden) street, we encountered a significant number of architectural and historic edifices.

The Neue Wache or New Guardhouse is a memorial to the victims of war and tyranny. Kathe Kollwitz famous Pietà sculpture - Mother and her Dead Son - can be admired here.

It is located between the Deutsches Historisches Museum (German History Museum) or former Armoury and the Humboldt University. This was Karl Friedrich Schinkel’s first important building commission in Berlin part of his classical architectural legacy to Berlin. Erected in 1818 as a monument to the victims of the anti-Napoleonic wars it has been the reunited Federal Republic of Germany’s main monument for the commemoration of the victims of war and tyranny since 1993.

It served as a monument in three distinctive phases of German history. Until 1918, it was a memorial to the Wars of Liberation. From 1931, under Reichspresident Paul von Hindenburg, the monument was converted into a memorial for the victims of the WWI by covering up an inner courtyard that only let through a slither of light. In the period following the end of WWII and the memorial’s destruction the GDR leadership turned it into the monument for the victims of Fascism and militarism. An eternal flame was placed in a cube above the ashes of an unknown concentration camp prisoner and an unknown fallen soldier.

Today the underground room includes the remains of an unknown soldier, a resistance fighter and soil from battlefields and concentration camps.
The Humboldt University (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin) cannot be missed while strolling down Unter den Linden because of the throngs of young students who populate the immediate vicinity of the building. Berlin’s oldest university, completed in 1766, is located in a former royal palace; its illustrious student body and professors once included the father of German idealism and the ‘dialectic’, philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who transformed this into dialectical materialism, by turning Hegelian idealism on ‘its head’ as well as Albert Einstein, Max Planck and the Brothers Grimm.

In the main lobby a statue of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels with the memorable inscription that set them off on their quest for historical materialism, ‘philosophers have only interpreted the world; the point is to change it.’ The building which today houses the Humboldt University was the third to be erected as part of Friedrich the Great’s (1740-1786) Forum Hedericum project - originally as a palace for Prince Heinrich, his half brother. The Friedrich Wilhelm University was founded in 1810 at the instigation of enlightenment linguist and philosopher Wilhelm von Humboldt, brother of the similarly accomplished explorer and humanist Alexander von Humboldt.

The 20,000 books by so-called ‘degenerates’ were removed from the university’s library and burned by the Nazis on May 10, 1933 on today’s Bebelplatz. After 1946, as the GDR’s communist regime of the SED (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands) increasingly forced students to comply with communist ideology, the Free University of Berlin was founded in 1948 in the western sector in Berlin’s leafy district of Dahlem. The university’s ideologically conforming students did not take part in the East German civil rights movement and Heinrich Fink, the university’s Director until 1990, was known to have Stasi affiliations.

The former palace’s architectural highlights consist of a three-wing complex elongated in 1920 by Ludwig Hoffmann to produce a second courtyard, around the one facing the boulevard. The complex includes statues and a Corinthian column structure that recalls that of the Opera House on the opposite side of the boulevard Unter den Linden. The statues of Wilhelm and Alexander von Humboldt are immediately recognizable, towering above students and visitors alike at the main entrance.

By now, I am certain that the reader is overwhelmed by touring and needs relief. Therefore, here is some … the official symbol of Berlin … The Bear. But no ordinary bear … a stylized bear, similar to the Painted Ponies of New Mexico. Take a peek at two we found in our walk-about about town …

By now it was well past 6 PM … we returned to our hotel, rested a bit and headed out to our favorite (fact is, the only one we found) restaurant for our evening meal … Maximilian’s. Our fare this evening was … Hausgemachte Gulasschuppe in der Löwenkopfterrine (Home-made goulash soup in lion-head tureen) for me (not shown) … Zwei Buletten mit Rahmőhrchen, Kartoffelbrei und Bratensoße (Berlin meatballs with carrots and mashed potatoes) for both of us (top) … and for dessert (for me only) … Machter Tiroler Apfelstrudel mit Einer Kugel Vanileeeis (home-made Tyrolean apple strudel with home-made vanilla ice cream) (bottom.) What a meal!

My friends … enough about Germany and Berlin. The intent and purpose of this 2009 trip was to meet … for the first time … my newfound 2nd cousins in Poland. This event will take place tomorrow when cousin Tomasz, and wife Danuta (Danka for short), drive to Berlin to pick us up. It is with great anticipation that I look forward to this meeting.

I hope that the following pages of this journal will reveal my experiences with my new family that will delight and perhaps surprise the reader.