



HOW MY TRAVELS BEGAN

An EXCERPT from DAVID'S DIARY

by David Skillan

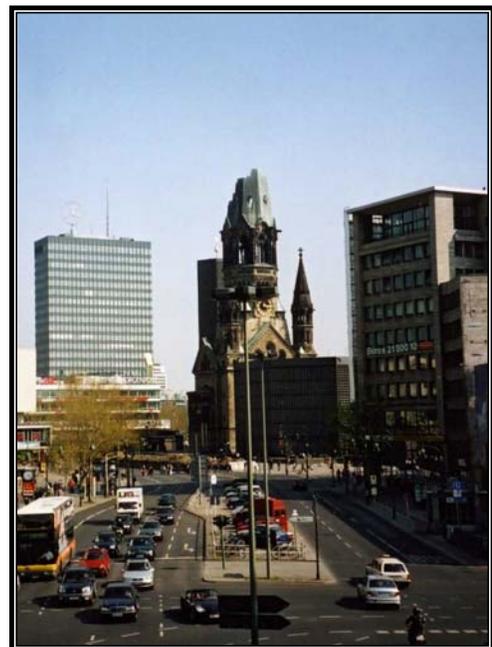
The first time I ever went abroad was on holiday with my family, from England to Germany to join my dad. A former London bus driver and soldier, his big break had come after the war when Britain's Control Commission of Germany (CCG) hired him as a transport supervisor, responsible for moving classified documents and VIPs around.

We went first to Bad Salzuflen for a month in the summer of 1949, then to Bad Homburg near Frankfurt for two weeks over Christmas in 1950. Then on July 16, 1951, exactly one month after my twelfth birthday, we went to live for several years in Berlin, then known as the Divided City. A twist of fate had taken us from very modest surroundings in a small Romford, Essex, bungalow to a lifestyle of privilege—for no other reason than that we were on the side that had won the war. I was not to know that the move was also the beginning of my lifelong love affair with travelling. I have been roaming the world ever since.

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Almost every Sunday afternoon during most of my teenage years (when I wasn't at boarding school in Wilhelmshaven, Northern Germany), my parents, older sister, younger brother, and I piled into the family Volkswagen for a drive.

Where did we go? We went everywhere in and around Berlin. We visited museums, markets, churches, and castles in Steglitz, Wilmersdorf, Charlottenburg, Tempelhof (scene of the 1948–49 airlift, when the Soviets tried to seal off the city via a blockade of rail and road), and Schöneberg (where, a few years later, on the steps of the town hall, President John F. Kennedy was to give his famous speech "*Ich bin ein Berliner*"). I soon came to know the bombed-out *Gedächtniskirche*, as well as the *Kurfürstendamm*, *Reichkanzlerplatz* (later renamed Ernst Reuter Platz), Brandenburg Gate, and *Friedrichstrasse* (which would become better known as Checkpoint Charlie), and know them well.



The Gedächtniskirche has never been rebuilt.

We also explored the outlying woods, lakes, and countryside. I learned to cross-country ski in the Grunewald, a large forested area, and learned to swim at Berlin's Olympic stadium, built by Adolph Hitler for the 1936 Games. And after learning to sail at school in Wilhelmshaven, on Germany's bleak North Sea coast, I spent many happy hours sailing on Lake Wannsee, Berlin's largest lake. As we youngsters became older, my parents ventured further afield, and during the long school holidays in summer we joined them once or twice on driving tours to the Black Forest, Swiss Alps, and French Riviera. When not touring or on Sunday family excursions, I was usually out by myself exploring places on foot and by bicycle, bus, train, and tram. I wanted to see and do everything.

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It wasn't long before I realized I loved being out and about, seeing new places, and going here, there, and everywhere. Travelling appealed to my restless nature, spirit of adventure, and strong sense of curiosity. As well as being entertaining, it was educational and extremely stimulating. I loved every minute of it! In a nutshell, I was hooked. I had caught the travel bug and been smitten by the wanderlust—in a big way!

Little did I realize, those many years ago, that despite my shy, reserved manner I had begun a life of travel and adventure that many people would envy and most could only dream about. The rest, as they say, is history.



DS revisited Checkpoint Charlie many years after leaving Berlin.



The Brandenburg Gate today.