

The Berlin Wall

By Sharon Fabian

Berlin was an unusual city. At the end of World War II, it had been divided among the victorious Allies. The Soviet Union controlled the eastern half. The United States and other Allies controlled the western half.

Still, for the people of Berlin, life gradually returned to normal after the war. People went to work each day. They went to movies and dances. They visited family and friends.

The dividing line wasn't a problem. Families could travel back and forth across the line to visit relatives. People from East Berlin often crossed into West Berlin where the shopping and entertainment were better. Many workers who lived in the east crossed the line every morning when they went to their jobs in the west.

Something else was happening in Berlin too. Many people were crossing the line from East Berlin into West Berlin and not coming back. These people were refugees. They were leaving their homes in East Germany to find a better life in the west.

West Berlin was prospering. With aid from the United States, the city was rebuilding. Modern shops and theaters sprang up. Good jobs were created. More and more people decided to cross the line forever. By 1961, as many as 2,000 people were leaving East Germany every week.

The rest of the border between East and West Germany was closed, so refugees came to Berlin. There they could walk or ride across the line along with the other residents of the busy city.

This was a problem for East Berlin. It was losing its citizens. It was losing the workers that it needed.

So, the leaders of East Berlin came up with a solution. They kept the idea secret until one night in August. Then, while the people of Berlin slept, they put the plan into action. They built a wall across the center of Berlin.

In the morning, people awoke to find their city cut in half. They could no longer cross town to visit, or to shop, or to work. Families could no longer see their relatives who lived only a few miles away. Workers who had commuted into West Berlin awoke to find that they no longer had a job.

Over the next few months, the wall was built stronger and higher. Through the years, it was rebuilt several times. Finally, the wall was not just a wall, but a whole series of barricades.

First, there was the 12-foot high wall itself on the border between East and West. Beyond the wall was a brightly-lit area known as the death strip. Guards at the wall were trained to shoot without warning any refugees caught in this area. There were trenches designed to stop any vehicles that might try to get through. There was a track for patrol vehicles. There was a second wall. There were three hundred watchtowers where guards kept watch day and night.

People in East Berlin now lived under the economic system of Communism. They could not find good jobs like they had once had in the west. Supplies became scarce as the economy grew worse.

West Berlin had new problems too. It was now cut off more than ever from the rest of the western world, as well as from the east.

More than 100 people were shot and killed trying to escape over the wall. It would be 28 years before the wall finally came down.



Name _____



Date _____

The Berlin Wall

Questions

- _____ 1. Berlin was first divided _____.
 - A. in 1928
 - B. in 1961
 - C. in 1989
 - D. after World War II

- _____ 2. Berlin is a city in _____.
 - A. Germany
 - B. the Soviet Union
 - C. the United States
 - D. Italy

- _____ 3. The Berlin Wall was built because _____.
 - A. too many people were leaving East Berlin
 - B. neither
 - C. too many people were leaving West Berlin
 - D. both

- _____ 4. Good jobs were available in _____.
 - A. West Berlin
 - B. Neither
 - C. Both
 - D. East Berlin

- _____ 5. _____ was a Communist city.
 - A. Both
 - B. East Berlin
 - C. West Berlin
 - D. Neither

- _____ 6. People tried to escape from _____.
 - A. Both
 - B. West Berlin
 - C. Neither
 - D. East Berlin

- _____ 7. The original wall was built in one _____.
 - A. night
 - B. month
 - C. day
 - D. week

- _____ 8. The Berlin Wall was _____.
 - A. soon torn down
 - B. nine feet tall
 - C. rebuilt several times
 - D. guarded by West German soldiers

