

**The 20th Anniversary of the Fall of the Berlin Wall –
By Susanna Ludwig-Ruppert**

My husband grew up in East Germany and I on the other hand grew up in free, democratic Austria with borders to the Communist World. As children we saw the borders. My husband lived very close to the border. The proximity can be compared to the distance from Galena, Illinois to the Wisconsin and Iowa state lines. Imagine not being able to cross these lines because of barbed wires, minefields, watchtowers, and guards with the order to shoot anyone trying to flee.

Twenty years ago, on November 9, 1989 the Berlin Wall fell. People poured out into the streets dancing, weeping with joy and celebrating one of the greatest moments not only in World history but also in Human history. There was this immense joy. Hope had won.

I had traveled through East Germany in April of 1987. I was deeply saddened by the poor standard of living, the environmental destruction, and touched by the individual stories of divided families.

In part, November 9, 1989 is the story of visionary leaders like U.S. President Ronald Reagan, Soviet Union General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, and many others who were willing to fight for liberalization. They came together at the right moment in time.

The beginning of the information revolution in the late 20th century also started to create a major obstacle in upholding a totalitarian system. The rapid changing technology made it more difficult to withhold news about the rest of the world from the Soviet Union dominated Communist World.

In August 1987, President Ronald Reagan challenged General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev to “tear down this wall”, and to give the Eastern Bloc countries freedom.

President John F. Kennedy had called the Berlin Wall in his visit to Berlin in 1963, “an offense not only against history, but an offense against humanity...”

Some of the effects of the fall of the Berlin Wall are the end of the Cold War, the re-unification of Germany, the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, the predominance of capitalism over state-directed economies, and the re-unification of Europe.

The display about the Fall of the Berlin Wall at the Galena Public Library
is dedicated to Mrs. Ludwig-Ruppert’s husband and his family.

Andreas Ruppert remembers that the night of November 9, 2009 he saw a line of cars going towards the border to West Germany which was very unusual. Something must have happened. He had not heard any news. At home everybody told him, the borders are open. The next day he crossed the border into West Germany in the afternoon on his motorcycle.