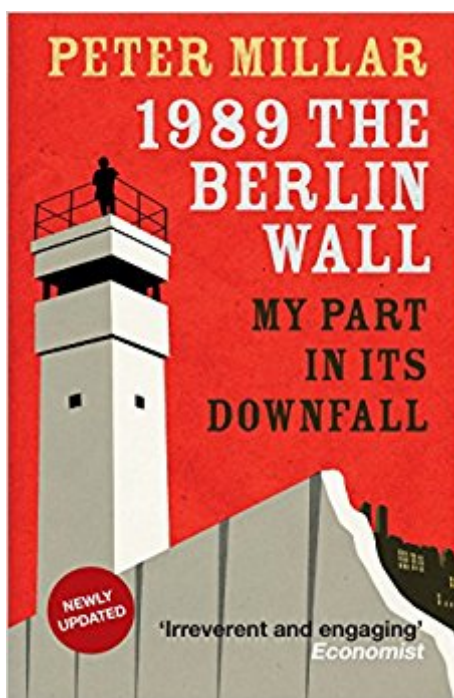


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1989: The Berlin Wall: My Part In Its Downfall



Synopsis

It was an event that changed history, bringing the Cold War to a sudden, unexpected end and seeing the collapse not just of Communism but of the Soviet Union itself. Stereotypes disappeared overnight, and the maps of a continent had to be redrawn. Peter Millar was in the middle of it, literally - caught in Checkpoint Charlie between bemused East German border guards and drunk Western revellers prematurely celebrating the end of an era. For over a decade Millar had been living in East Berlin, as well as Warsaw and Moscow, and in this engaging, garrulous, bibulous memoir we follow him on a journey in the heart of Cold War Europe, from the carousing bars of 1970s Fleet Street to the East Berlin corner pub with its eclectic cast of characters who embodied the reality of living on the wrong side of the Wall. We relive the night that it all disintegrated, and its curious domino-like effect on Eastern Europe. We find out how Peter Millar felt when he opened his Stasi file and discovered which of his friends had - or hadn't - been spying on him. A compelling, amazingly insightful and entertaining read, this book swiftly dispatches the mythology of the Fall and brings Peter Millar's characteristic wit and insight to one of the most significant moments in history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Planning my first trip to Berlin this September 2015 and wanted historical background information of what to look for and where. Millar's literary touch is wonderfully amusing and informative. Great little book but not easy to find. Get it for a better Berlin understanding of why things are the way they are now, because of the way they were in those dark East Germany days. Highly recommended.

"1989: The Berlin Wall - my part in its downfall" is an engaging narrative of Berlin before and after reunification. It was written by Peter Millar, a journalist assigned to Berlin and living in East Berlin at the time. His description added depth to my understanding of what I saw and heard while in Berlin last year, attending a conference held in Alexanderplatz, in what had been East Berlin.

A Reuters reporter living in East Berlin before 1989 for several years with his wife splendidly details the gradual erosion of Russian power there and the adjacent countries behind the wall.

This excellent autobiography of Peter Millar's life as a reporter takes the reader through the years before, during and after the collapse of the Berlin Wall in a clear, easy to read manner. Although this book is primarily about East / West Berlin, it includes what was going on in the rest of the Eastern bloc before the Wall came down. In doing so Peter takes us through his early days working for Reuters at Fleet Street, before moving to East Berlin as their correspondent. There he meets many people, mostly at his local bar, who give him the story of the building of the Wall, and the appalling outcomes. He mentions, almost in passing, the surveillance and bugging of his flat although this becomes much more scary when, many years later, he actually gets to read his Stasi file. It is not all horror and misery though, we are given amusing anecdotes about the reality of Germans versus the British stereotype of them. There are some laugh out loud moments when the author returns to the UK and works for the Daily Telegraph foreign desk where life was not as exciting as he had imagined it would be, despite the revelation that they had a special way of using paperclips. There are references to the marital strain that being a frequently travelling reporter brings, including an instance of attempting to put snow chains on their stuck in the mud vehicle in the -10C Soviet Union and the annoyance that just when you need a surveillance team to be following you, there isn't one. I would have been interested to hear more detail of what it was like for his wife living in East Germany, but this is very much Peter's story and not seen from the perspective of his wife. The story moves between Germany, Poland and the birth of the Solidarity Trades Union, to the Soviet Union plus many other countries in the communist bloc, giving the full picture of the lead up to the fall of the Wall and The Domino Effect.

Wall's coming down had. For the visitor to Berlin there are lots of references to places and monuments, including the bar the author frequented which is, according to the book, still there, substantially unchanged, and remains the best bar in Berlin. At a first glance into the book my heart sank at the print style used, but this was soon forgotten when I started reading. There are some great photos included. Any German words/phrases used are immediately translated afterwards (thank you!). I recommend this book to anyone who is interested in how the Wall came to fall, and about the events going on around that time. Peter talks to us about being a travel writer and the importance of language and understanding dialect:

<http://www.tripfiction.com/memoir-set-in-berlin/>

It's a great pity that this book came out in 2009 as seemingly one of a mass of history books about the events of 1989 because it is more than just yet another repeat of the main events leading up to the break-up of the post war "Russian Empire". As one of very few Western journalists, Peter Millar actually lived and worked (as the Reuters correspondent) in East Berlin in the early eighties and although he was no longer living there by 1989 he - as Central Europe correspondent of a major British Sunday newspaper - visited there a lot and was able through his earlier contacts in East Berlin to get more (and more accurate) information than most of his colleagues about what was going on (and even managed to get arrested - and put in the same vehicle with demonstrators - while covering a demonstration). The book is a combination of an interesting, brief, auto-biography that concentrates on how he came to be in East Berlin as a journalist and what life there was like for him (plus some stories about living/working in Moscow and visiting other Central European countries as a journalist) interwoven with background information interestingly told about what was happening in Central Europe before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Because there are real people involved throughout - even some East German border guards are shown as human beings not the unsmiling clichés of most spy fiction - the story is also interesting throughout with nicely timed small pieces of humour to add to the enjoyment I got from reading this book. How he experienced the opening of the border for instance is greatly enhanced through the fact that he experienced it partly together with people from his earlier local East Berlin pub (bar). And while I did occasionally put the book down, I found myself looking forward to going back to it and doing so fairly quickly even though I had bought this book (so I could have taken my time reading it) and had lots of library books with deadlines that I normally would have read first. Highly recommended, but if you want 400 pages of dry historical background to 1989 with masses of details about what was happening in the late 1980's in Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia; and the DDR, go elsewhere. This is a book to be

enjoyed and even so you will learn quite a lot about what happened and why.

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