Behind the Iron Curtain: Recollections of Latter-day Saints in East Germany, 1945–1989

Personal interviews with East German Saints, who survived World War II and rebuilt Zion under Communism, document moving stories of faith and dedication.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1939 when Hitler's armies marched into Poland, the LDS missionaries marched out—out of Germany and eventually out of all continental Europe. The missionaries left a strong and thriving Church in the eastern part of Germany. The major cities of this area—Berlin, Leipzig, Chemnitz, and Dresden—were among the few cities in Europe with multiple branches, many of which were old and well established. In Dresden, for example, the Church had been established longer than most wards in Utah; the Dresden Branch was organized in 1855 with a young convert, Karl G. Maeser, as its first branch president. Many of the people in these congregations were second-, third-, and fourth-generation members of the Church. The Dresden area of Germany had been sending a continuous stream of converts to Utah for almost one hundred years, yet approximately ten thousand members were still in Germany when the missionaries were forced to leave in 1939.

When Hitler's armies were defeated in 1945, the missionaries returned to Germany, but not to *these* members. A new geographical term now described the area in which they lived: *Soviet Zone of Occupation.* The Iron Curtain had been lowered, enclosing the members of the Church in eastern Germany. They had survived six years of war. On February 13–14, 1945, the city of Dresden had been burnt to the ground by several bombing raids,

and what happened in Dresden was representative of what had happened to all the major German cities. Many of the branch meetinghouses had been destroyed by the bombings, and many priesthood holders who had survived the war had been taken to prisoner-of-war camps. Members from the eastern branches had fled westward, and many ended up in refugee camps. The Church was battered and scattered but not defeated. Members had to be gathered; meeting places had to be found; missionary work had to go on. The Church had to be rebuilt.

For a time after the war, Berlin provided a door between East and West. Mission presidents and General Authorities entered through this door; many members exited. In 1961 the government of the German Democratic Republic (GDR, communist "East Germany," founded in 1949) decided to replace the door with a solid wall—the Berlin Wall, officially called *antifaschistischer Schützwall,* the Anti-Fascist Wall of Protection. Now entrance into Germany became more difficult for mission presidents and General Authorities, and except for the elderly and retired, exit was nearly impossible. The Church struggled on, but with no missionaries, no teaching manuals, no Church magazines, and no temple. In spite of their isolation, the members inside the wall carried on the programs of the Church with even greater determination.

At first slowly, and then more and more rapidly, a brighter day began to dawn. On October 22–24, 1969, President Thomas S. Monson visited the GDR, and at a meeting in the little branch meeting place in Görlitz, a city on the Polish border, he promised—as reported in the May 1989 *Ensign*—that members of the GDR would have all of the blessings other members of the Church enjoy. On April 27, 1975, President Monson offered a dedicatory prayer for the country on a small hill near Dresden. In August 1977, President Kimball held a special conference in Dresden. The Freiberg and Leipzig stakes were organized in 1982 and 1984. In June of 1985 came a day the Saints in the GDR had never dreamed would come—the dedication of a temple in their own country. In April 1989, the first foreign missionaries in fifty years entered East Germany, and by the end of that year, the newly organized Germany Dresden Mission reported 669 convert baptisms. On the night of November 9, 1989, the Berlin Wall fell, and the long

years of isolation were over. Following are selected excerpts from the stories of a few of the members living in the GDR. Many more of their stories will soon appear in a book published by BYU Studies.

THE BOMBING OF DRESDEN

Dresden was the oldest area of the Church in the Eastern part of Germany. In 1939, at the beginning of the war, two branches thrived, one located in the older part of the city, the Altstadt Gemeinde, *and the other located across the Elbe River in the "newer" part of the city, the* Neustadt Gemeinde. *In 1945, toward the end of the war, these two branches persisted in Dresden in spite of the loss of many men who were away serving in the German army.*

The bombing of Dresden on February 13–14, 1945, was as unexpected as it was destructive. Because of its location far to the south and east, Dresden had been spared the bombings German cities further to the north and west had experienced. By 1945 the war was essentially over. The German armies were retreating rapidly. The German air defenses were gone. The Russian armies were closing in on Berlin and were at the outskirts of Dresden. But then the unexpected and unthinkable happened. The "Florence on the Elbe" was destroyed, and with it went one of the branches of the Church. The following eyewitness accounts of the bombing are in many ways representative of the experiences of Church members throughout Germany.

I Saw the Opera House Burning — Erika Hermann

The air raid report came over the radio hourly. At eight o'clock, they reported no air activity, but at nine we got the report again, and it said, "Heavy enemy aircraft approaching over northwest Germany. Further information will follow."

By ten o'clock, we hadn't heard anything, but suddenly the sky became pale and then bright. Those were the first flares; we called them the Christmas trees [*Christbäume*]. I had experienced that in Berlin. When you saw the "Christmas trees," then you knew you were going to get it.

So the flares were out, and a moment later we heard the sirens—full alarm. We headed for the cellar. We took an old lady with us who could hardly walk, and then it started. It was terrible. The window panes were bursting in everywhere, and soot came out of the furnaces. And the bombs that didn't hit, the ones that went over you, had this whistling sound. You could hear this shrill whistling and then it stopped, and then you heard the explosion. Finally, we were so happy to hear the "all clear" sirens, and we went upstairs.

We swept up the broken glass. In the living room, a piece of the ceiling plaster had come down, and we cleaned that up. There was not much we could do about the windows at the time. We put up something, paper or cardboard. It wasn't long before the first dazed survivors started straggling out from the city. We had gone out into the street, and I even went down to the Elbe to have a look and saw this terrible ocean of fire. But The Church of Our Lady was still standing; I could see it lit up by the flames. And then I said—to show you how stupid we are—I said, "At least the opera house has been spared. Shouldn't we make some coffee?" I loved the opera.

Many who were coming out from the edge of the city were exhausted. We made this malt coffee [*Malzkaffee*] and some tea and stood outside the front door (the windows in the door were all gone) and distributed warm drinks. But this was nothing compared to what was about to come. Then came the night attack, and it was much, much worse. We really never thought we would survive it. But we did. Our Father in Heaven protected us. But the people who started coming out of the city then! So many fateful events!

Across from us there lived a couple, an older couple, and they had a daughter who had a crippled hand. But through the Association for the Disabled, she had been able to find a husband. The parents were so happy that their daughter had finally been able to be married, so after the first attack, they went into the city to check on the couple. They never came back. None of the family ever came back.

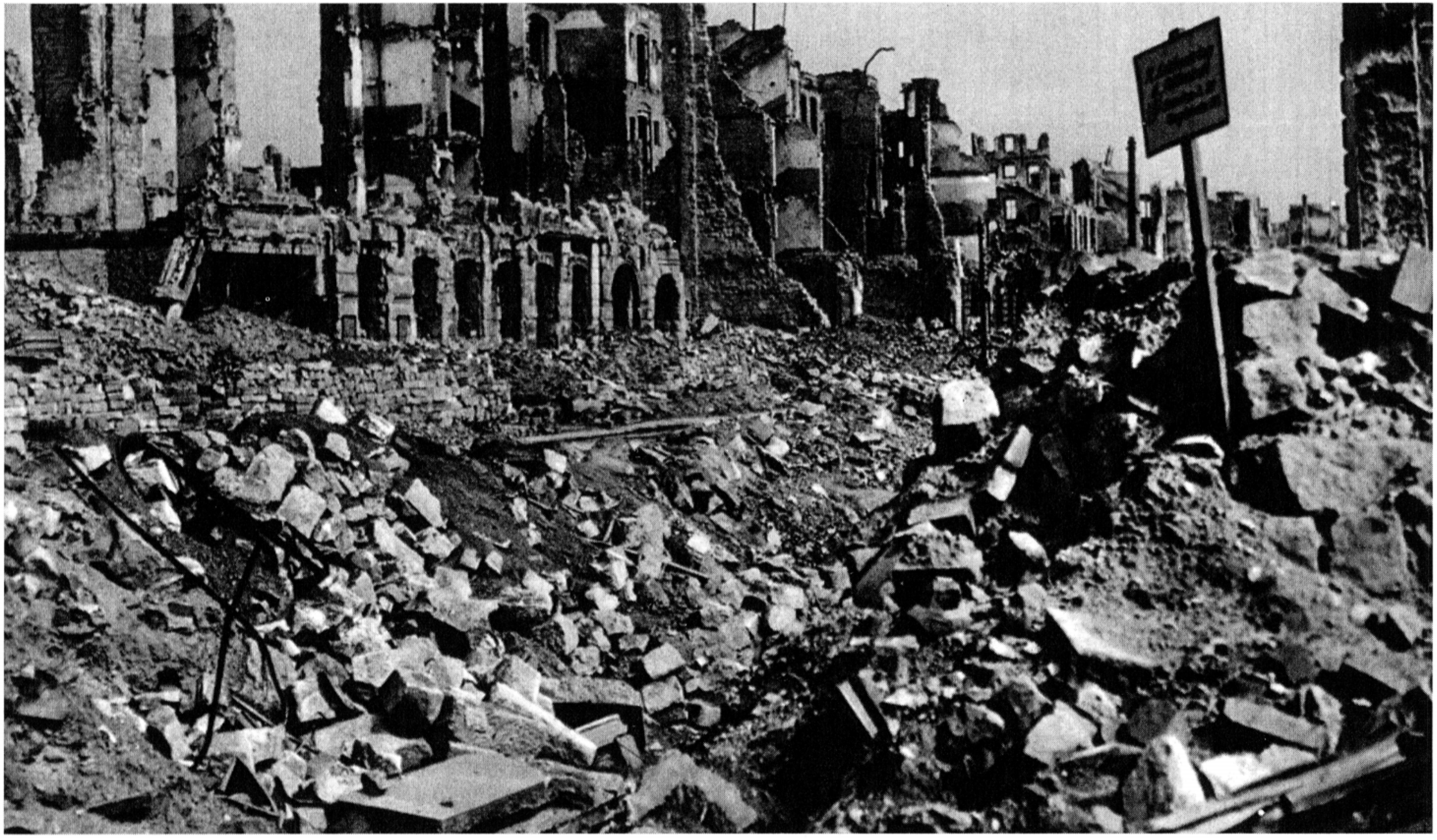
I walked down to the river, where I could see the city, and I saw the opera house burning.

The Dead Need No Water — Edith Krause

I was living at the time in Dresden-Neustadt. But on the evening of February 13, 1945, I was in Dresden-Altstadt with the Hubold family, Winterberg Street 86, doing genealogy work with the members. I was just saying good-bye when the sirens went off, so I hesitated a moment and then went into the basement of the apartment house with the other members. The so-called lighted Christmas trees were dropped from airplanes, and so we knew that Dresden would experience a bombing attack. It was horrible, but fortunately only one firebomb fell on this building. It fell directly onto a feather bed, which started a sulfur fire, but by working together we were able to put it out, and the building was saved. All around us the buildings were burning, and the sparks were flying through the air so that other fires were breaking out. We all joined in prayer. I lay on the couch—it was about four in the morning—and said, "Heavenly Father, now it is your turn. There is nothing more we can do." The water pressure was all gone. After a few minutes, it began to rain, and that was our salvation.

The next morning I started for home—on foot, naturally. It was chaos. All the streets were torn up and covered with rubble from the fallen buildings. I had to cut through the "Great Garden," a park about one kilometer long. Many people were assembled there with blackened faces and burned clothing. The wounded were lying on the ground moaning, "Water." There was no water, and for good measure a fighter plane came swooping down and shot at the helpless, confused people. The dead need no water.

At the branch on Sunday, we were able to determine that we had lost only one sister in the bombings and that the number of those who had been bombed out was limited. We young people of the branch organized an emergency service to get food and supplies to the older members. When the streets became passable again, the members from the Altstadt Branch came over to the [Church] services in the Neustadt Branch. Their branch house on Circus Street 33 had been bombed and was destroyed right down to the cellar. We also visited the members in the Altstadt Branch in their homes and held Bible studies and youth firesides. It was a time of great faith and inner harmony, but the marvelous old city of Dresden was no more.



Rubble-filled street in Dresden. After the bombing of Dresden, Edith Krause had to pick her way through streets like this one to get home. Source: Richard Peter, *eine Kamera klagtan* (Leipzig: Fotokinoverlag, 1982).

It Was the Hunger — Wilfried Kießling

After the war, the suffering in the GDR and in the other parts of Germany was terrible. The cities were destroyed. There was no money. The suffering was terrible. They had no widow's pension or survivor's pension then, so I got nothing from the government. [Sister Kießling's husband had been killed in the war.] Then when political conditions changed, that is, when the Communists took over the government, all the men who had been in the German army were declared war criminals, and so we women got nothing from them, either.

In 1948, I was called to be the Relief Society president in the Dresden Branch. I was the youngest Relief Society president around, only thirty-four years old. It wasn't so easy. I had only been president for a short time when the first welfare shipment came from the Church in America. Oh, you just can't imagine how this welfare aid helped us. We were literally starving to death at the time. Many people were cooking and eating coffee grounds with a little flour mixed in. Many of the children were not getting any supper. They were put to bed with just a cup of coffee. Conditions were terrible. We had never been so thin, that's for sure. The children would come in around two o'clock in the afternoon and say, "Mommy, I'm hungry." Well, what were we supposed to give our children to eat? We just had to say, "Go out and play, we don't have anything to eat." Oh, that hurt right down to the soul. But we couldn't help it; we couldn't help it. We didn't have anything.

But then, then the shipments came from the Church in America. Oh, what an indescribable blessing that was! Of course, our chapel was filled like it had never been filled before. If you came late, you had to stand up in the back, there were no more seats. That is the truth; I experienced it myself. Well, we had big sacks of food and got fat on it: peaches, canned milk. Oh, that helped us so much.

Of course, after the welfare shipments from America stopped coming, several members dropped out. Week after week, they stopped coming, they stopped coming, they stopped coming. It was very noticeable. And then from 1949 until about 1954—'53 or '54—there were ninety members from the Dresden Branch

who emigrated to America. That left a very big hole in the branch. They were all young people, too. That was the future of the branch, wasn't it?

REBUILDING ZION

By the time the war ended, the members had been scattered, and the meeting places destroyed. The Church had to be rebuilt. Many of the men who were returning from the war or from POW camps were immediately called on missions to help put the Church back together. No missionaries were coming from the West since they could not get inside the Soviet Zone of Occupation.

If the Lord Needs Me, I'll Go
— Walter Krause (edited by Manfred Schütze)

[Homeless like the others, Brother Krause and his family lived in a refugee camp in Cottbus and began to attend church there. He was immediately called to lead the Cottbus Branch of the Church. Four months later, in November of 1945, District President Richard Ranglack came to Brother Krause and asked him what he would think about going on a mission for the Church. Brother Krause's answer reflects his commitment to the Church: "I don't have to think about it at all. If the Lord needs me, I'll go." Here, Brother Krause describes the beginning of that mission.]

I prayed about it and then set out on December 1, 1945, with twenty marks in my pocket, a piece of dry bread, and a bottle of tea. One brother had given me a winter coat left over from a son who had fallen in the war. Another brother, who was a shoemaker, gave me a pair of shoes. So [with these and], with two shirts, two handkerchiefs, and two pairs of stockings, I left on my mission.

Once, in the middle of the winter, I walked from Prenzlau to Kammin (a little village in Mecklenburg), where we had up to forty-six members at our meetings. I arrived long after dark that night after a six-hour march over roads, paths, and finally across plowed fields. Just before I reached the village, I came to a large, white, flat area which made easy walking, and I soon arrived.

The next morning the game warden came to the house of the member where I had spent the night. "Do you have a guest?"

"Yes." "Then come and take a look at his tracks." Some time earlier, the warden had chopped a large hole in the middle of the lake for fishing. [The large, flat area Brother Krause had crossed was actually a frozen lake.] The wind had driven snow over the hole and covered it so that I could not have seen my danger. My tracks went right across the edge of the hole and straight to the house of this brother, without my knowing anything about it. Weighed down by my backpack and my rubber boots, I would certainly have drowned. This event caused quite a little stir in the village at that time.

Finding a Meeting Place — Elli Polzin

Our first meeting place [in Schwerin] was a rented room on the square called Pig Market [*Schweinemarkt*]. Brother Walter Schmeichel, a refugee from Schneidemühl in Pommern, was our branch president until 1952. By that time, we had exchanged our meeting place for one on Schloss Street. My husband was now the branch president, and the branch had to move again, this time to a place on Bornhöwitz Street. But we weren't able to keep this for long, and the branch leaders had to start looking for something else. Once more we rented rooms in a tavern on Goethe Street. At the Church's expense, we had to remodel the tavern to fit our needs. After two years, this tavern was taken over by the government, and we were obliged to give up our rooms once again. This time we were without any meeting place for more than a year and had to hold our meetings at the home of Brother and Sister Schüller, who made their living room available to us.

After many attempts, we succeeded in 1956 in buying a piece of property from a private owner on the Schloßgartenallee, number 18a. Since the Church was not allowed to own property, it was bought in the name of the branch president, Brother Hans Polzin. Naturally, this caused a multitude of problems. On the property, there was an old business establishment which had one apartment and an old horse barn. When we bought the property, the intention was to tear down the old building. But the application to tear down the building was not approved because it contained an apartment with a family living in it. Our plan was to build a chapel on the property. Toward the end of 1956, the branch acquired an

old workers' barracks, 12 meters by 20 meters, which we could tear down for material to build a new chapel so that we could finally have our own place to meet. On June 11, 1957, the work of tearing down the old barracks began. In a pouring rain, all the brethren set out on their bicycles for the barracks, which was about eight kilometers out of Schwerin. The work was under the direction of our district president, Brother Krause, and of Brother Wiese from Wolgast, whom he had brought along to assist us. The brethren all assembled for prayer to ask the Lord for protection and help.

With the help of all the members of the Schwerin Branch, we put in an average of twelve to fifteen hours a day. Brother Krause and Brother Wiese stayed at the site at night in a tent. The sisters were also active. A meal for the working brethren was prepared in Schwerin and was taken out to the work site on a bicycle by Sister Schade. Altogether, we hauled twenty-three truck loads of material to our building site in Schwerin. On Saturday, June 15, 1957, this difficult and dangerous work was completed without accident through the help of the Lord. Now all the members assembled at the building site in Schwerin to clean up and stack the building material, and as soon as all the required bureaucratic formalities had been completed, the building of the branch meeting place could begin.

On the twenty-fifth of June 1957, the branch presidency submitted their request for permission to build the branch house, indicating that they already owned the property and already had the necessary building material. . . . Unfortunately, this application was denied by the authorities. Consequently, the members turned to the local government officials with the request that they be permitted to remodel the horse barn into a meeting place. All the members and the district presidency fasted and prayed that this request would be granted, and it was granted.

Since the horse barn was old and falling apart, there were many difficulties to be overcome. We laid up blocks for new walls and a new chimney and built door and window frames. A new toilet, including drain pipes and water connections, had to be installed. We paneled walls and ceilings, brought in floor joists, and laid a new floor. Two new stoves for heating were installed. Most of the material came from what was salvaged from the barracks.

Schwerin Branch meetinghouse. Using a wheelbarrow as a delivery truck and the hand labor of all the members, the Schwerin Branch converted an old barn into a meetinghouse. Courtesy Edith Krause.

The city building commission had given permission to build only because the branch would not have to request building materials. Now, however, we needed cement, lime, gravel, and lumber, all of which could be obtained only from the Commission for People's Needs [*Bevölkerungsbedarf*]. That meant that the branch president had to pick up everything in small quantities by standing in line and by carrying it off in a wheelbarrow. He could not do this himself since he was working. And since all the other brethren in the branch were also working, Sister Elfriede Pawlowski said that she would take charge of getting the building materials. [Sister Pawlowski went every day to stand in line to get the necessary building materials. She then delivered these materials to the building site in a wheelbarrow.]

LIVING WITH THE COMMUNISTS

The following excerpts are mostly from interviews with younger members who were born shortly before, during, or after

the war, and who went on missions in the 1950s and early 1960s. These are the members who grew up in a communist country, went to communist schools where atheism was officially taught, and made their way carefully between church and state. Some of them hardly mention politics, the State, or communism in their interviews; for them politics were merely a background to their normal life in the Church. In some cases, this silence was, they informed us, out of a habit of avoiding any discussion of a political nature. Others were more anxious to talk about their confrontations with a political system that was in large part antagonistic to their religious beliefs. The following excerpts are from those members who kept the Church together in the 1960s, '70s, and '80s.

Book Burning — Joachim Albrecht, Kurt Nikol, and Marianne Nikol

Joachim: Until about 1949, it was permitted to bring [printed material] across the border in Berlin, but after 1949 it was strictly forbidden. When I was on a mission and was working in Rattenau, near Berlin, we had a lot of contact with the mission office in West Berlin, Dahlem. We local missionaries had to take the manuals in our pockets and get them from Berlin into East Germany. This was always done with a certain amount of fear and trembling and with a pounding heart. But then one day our mission president, Henry Burkhardt, said, "No more of that. That's forbidden, against the law; we simply can't do it. Period."

Before that, we smuggled in a lot of teaching materials. We had a saying in the mission: We go out without purse or scrip but come home with a box of books. I remember that I was sending new books here to Bauzen and had a box so big I couldn't get it to the train station because it was so heavy. I had to unpack it and put the books into three boxes when I sent all my things home from my mission.

But then suddenly one day I received a message from our mission president that all of the manuals, books, tracts, etc., we had smuggled into the country somehow, illegally, could be very harmful to the Church. The authorities had already searched a few of our apartments, and we were instructed that we had to destroy all of these materials. I sat down in front of our open stove with a big pile of books and kept telling myself, "You have to keep that one," and "You have to keep that one," and "You can't burn that one," but for two days, we kept the fire going without coal, just paper. In the end, I did keep one book. It was four years of priesthood manuals I saved and had bound into one volume. "I don't care if they throw me in prison," I thought to myself, "This is one book I am not going to burn!"

I can say that at that time I was actually an obedient person. I did it because I was told to. But somehow I couldn't see how anyone could get into trouble because of these manuals. And then one day I received an unexpected visit from a certain office.

G. Davis: Secret police?

Joachim: Of course! They asked me a few questions about the branch and wanted to know this and that. Then they wanted to have a look at my bookcase and wanted to know what kind of books I had. And I was able to open my bookcase without a pounding heart and show them what books we had.

G. Davis: What about those four years of priesthood manuals?

Joachim: I didn't show them. But I had the *Stern* [Church magazine in German] which we were permitted to receive up until 1949, and they wanted to see the later volumes. I told them I didn't receive them. Then they asked me if anyone from "over there" (West Germany) was sending them to me, relatives, etc. "No," I said, "You can see that this is all I have." I was so happy that

I was finally shown a reason, some sense, for burning my books. And I must say that I really mourned over my books. But in the end, this actually gave us more encouragement to study our lessons more thoroughly from the standard works. The whole thing made us a little sulky, but it taught us a good lesson.

Marianne: At the time, everyone here was saying, "Well, religion, that's going to be abolished. In this country, there will be no more churches. Religion will be abolished." That was really the big concern we had here, that there would be no more religion. Especially those in the government were saying it. We had a relative, a brother-in-law, who was a big party member. He was always spouting this rubbish. "Sooner or later, mark my words . . ." And when we were interrogated, it was always a frightening experience. What do they really want? Where did they get that information?

Political Isolation — Erich Ortlieb and Marianne Ortlieb

Erich: The Church was relatively small, and we were always isolated. We were not isolated because we wanted to be, but because at first the people in the government wanted to isolate us. They didn't want people to believe in God. They didn't want people to have ideals. Later on they decided that our ideals were not so far from their political aims, and then they tried through the media and also through individual politicians to get the Church to go along with them. That's the point at which we remained neutral.

The Church teaches—and this is an important point which I consider correct—the Church says that the State and the Church should remain completely separate from one another. And so, if we as a church attempted to have a strong influence on the politics or on the economy of the State in which we, as members, became politically engaged—well, in the GDR

that would have meant that we identified ourselves with communism or with atheism, because Marxism is fundamentally atheistic. And as members of the Church, we didn't want that. And so that is why we withdrew ourselves, and as a consequence, we were naturally quite isolated for several years.

Now as a result of this isolation, not only could we not get permission to build regular church buildings, but it also meant that very few members of the Church were allowed to attend the universities or choose the profession they wanted to follow. Wanting to become a teacher, for example, was out. "Maybe you could be very good teachers, but you could never educate the children properly in the Marxist philosophy." That was the program of all the schools, in all educational institutions. It was that way in the preschool, kindergarten, elementary school, high school, trade school, and university. This Marxist philosophy was always in the foreground, was always the basis for the educational methodology.

Marianne: Yes, that was more important than anything else. If you got an "A" in these areas, then it didn't matter if you did poorly in your other studies; that was no sin. But if your grades were the other way around, that was bad. You couldn't continue.

Students at the university were actually obligated to spend three years in the army. Everyone had to spend one-and-a-half years anyway, but if you wanted to study at the university they wanted you to do three years and become an officer. Our Olaf, our oldest son, really wanted to go to the university. At first they wouldn't let him, and then he applied again and applied for an area where they really wanted students.

Erich: Construction engineers who specialized in equipment installation.

Marianne: Yes. And he was accepted, and then they wanted to make him serve three years in the army. He had

already served his one-and-a-half years before he went to the university—that was obligatory. And now they wanted another year and a half from him, and he was supposed to enter officer training. He wouldn't do it, and there was a big fuss about it. They called him in for consultation. In the end, they finally let him become a student, but they told him that he would never receive a leadership position in the profession. There was nothing he could do about that. Someone who goes to church and does not follow the party line would never get a leadership position.

Erich: You see, as a Church, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we were a very small group inside the GDR. And it was quite natural that the State authorities who decided on the admissions policies for the university looked on us as an American sect. The Protestant and the Catholic churches had a lot more influence in these matters, in political matters. They took advantage of this influence insofar as it was possible, whereas we were, as a church, quite isolated. In the early years, we never attempted to make any contact with the local or with the state authorities, and consequently there was no possibility that we could do anything in the way of influencing them. That was simply not possible for us. In the beginning, we were only about four-and-a-half or five thousand members in the GDR, and that is a small percentage out of a population of seventeen million.

Church or School — Wolfgang Zwirner and Karen Zwirner

[Not all families in the Church stayed together. In some cases, communism separated families.]

Wolfgang: My father joined the Church in the 1930s through my mother, but he was never very active. He is a very nice man, very nice. He is still living, but he never

received the priesthood. During the war, my father ended up in a Russian prison camp. He had something to do with Marxism, with Communism, but he didn't have any trouble with the National Socialists as far as I know. But he was still thinking about these things when he ended up in the Russian prison camp, somewhere beyond Brual. He was sickened by the war and had seen so much suffering. The suffering of the children was particularly abhorrent to him. He wanted to do something for peace so that there would never be another war.

Well, the Russians had their own ideology. He said he was standing in a row of POWs, and he was called out. He didn't know why they selected him, but he was sent to the party school in Moscow, and so he went in that direction. He became a Communist. But he is a good man. He has never said anything negative about the Church. He has kept the Word of Wisdom. He has never smoked. He told me once that he always spoke well of us with his party comrades. In 1949 he returned from his prison experience, and we have always had a good relationship with him, but he no longer came to church. He has never been excommunicated; his name is still in the records, but his experiences have led him in another direction.

When I was in high school—that must have been 1953, when I was seventeen—those were hard times. I remember it was just before the uprising of June 17, and the authorities were pretty hard on the churches, and several young people had to leave school.

I was in the tenth grade, and I really didn't like school much anymore. I wanted to quit. Well, we had a conference coming up, and the Church had permission to print flyers announcing the conference. I was given the assignment of distributing the flyers, which was something of an honor to me. So I passed them out at school. I came up to one of my teachers—he

was a fine man—and I gave him one. He said to me, "Watch out. You can give that to me, but don't give them out to anyone else." He warned me, but I was too thickheaded to pay attention. There was no explicit reason for not distributing them, but I shouldn't have done it.

The next teacher I gave one to, a white-haired woman, went straight to the director's office. While I was in class, in the class of the teacher who had warned me, my biology teacher, someone came in from the director's office and said that I should see him during the class break. I went, but didn't realize what was up. When I entered, there was the white-haired teacher and right beside her was the secretary of the FDJ [*Freie Deutsche Jugend,* Free German Youth, a communist youth organization] and they laid into me, first about distributing the flyers—What did I think I was doing?—and so on.

And then it occurred to them that I was not a member of the Free German Youth. They knew my father; they knew that he was a Communist. He was a loyal Communist. A fine man. He really believed in what he was doing, that he was fighting in his way for peace, and I have to emphasize that here since nowadays it is easy to defame the Communists. But he was very sincere in his beliefs. He wanted to give. I know that he would not even take money for his lectures. Well, anyway, they knew him and thought that since I was his son I should have been in the Free German Youth from the time I was fifteen. But I had never joined. I was a member of the Church.

And there had been another matter. My class had gone for a weekend into the country. My teacher was a very nice woman, and she wanted everyone to go. But for me the problem was that we would be gone over Sunday, and I wanted to keep the Sabbath day holy. Looking back I know that was a little pharisaic

on my part, but that's the way it was. What was I supposed to do? I wanted to be at church on Sunday. I should have talked to my teacher about it. She would probably have fixed it up for me so that I could keep the Sabbath holy even on this outing; I could study or something. She was a nice woman, but I didn't do it. What a thick skull I had then.

Anyway, this all came out, and my teacher told me I would have to choose. Either I would have to go with the class on Sunday, or I could go to church. She couldn't force me to make this decision, but why had she sent me to the director's office? She probably had her instructions, and they wanted to put some pressure on me. They said they would never forbid me to go to church, but they never gave me any instructions in writing. Anyway, they gave me the alternative, school or Church. I left school and never went back. I didn't graduate; there was no going back.

[We asked what they did for teaching manuals for the classes in the Church.]

Karen: Yes, I was right in the middle of this because I had wearily copied these teaching manuals. Brother Burkhardt had provided us with a typewriter, and Dori Menzel and I had to copy the teaching manuals. Oh, that was hard. With carbon paper, six or seven copies, and they were hard to read. But then Brother Burkhardt got some good carbon paper from the West, and they were a little easier to read, but it was still a wearisome work.

[We asked Sister Zwirner about the problem of depletion of the branches through emigration before the building of the Berlin Wall.]

Yes, the problem with emigration. Well, I had a personal experience with that; it was in the 1950s at a district conference. I don't remember which year exactly. Our district president left. And on the Sunday

before, he had stood before the congregation and had said, "Brothers and sisters, stay here. Stay where you are; that is where the Lord has put you." And on Monday he left with his whole family. That left a lasting impression on me. They were my friends, my same age, and from one day to the next, they were gone. I will never forget that. I can still see his face as he stood there at conference. That was the first time in my life that I understood clearly that a man's word and his actions were not always one and the same thing. That was a big shock in my life.

Wolfgang: But when he said, "Stay here," that was in quotation marks, you know. He was always a good example to me. He had political problems and had to get out. They were after him. There were cases like that. They had to go. I heard that from another brother. He was really afraid. He had to get out.

But I never wanted to go. I am not a man of action. I am not one who wants to do something adventuresome like that. I am more settled, you see. I just want my peace and quiet, to be able to think and to read. . . . But I have to be honest. I didn't want to leave, either. But once I prayed, once I wished, "Oh Father in Heaven! Just for once let me be able to buy all the things that the people who have been in the West tell about, all the things they can buy over there. They tell us the stores are full of everything."

A brother who was permitted to go to the West once told me that he got physically ill when he saw all the tools in a hardware store. He was a craftsman, you see, and the hardware store was full of tools, and he so wanted to just hold some of those tools in his hands. "I got sick and had to sit down," he told me. And I said, "Father in Heaven, I want to have that experience, just once." Oh, I wanted that experience. To never have to stand in a line again. Never stand in a line. Always these long lines.

Dresden Branch, December 1953. Wolfgang Zwirner is in the next-to-the-bottom row, third from the left. The branch is posing in front of their meetinghouse. Courtesy Käthe Wöhe.

[The following conversation came in answer to a question about their children's schooling.]

Karen: We never had any trouble with our children at school. We always had our own strategy. Right at the beginning of the year, when they were having new school orientation, we went in with the children so they could get better acquainted with our family. We told them right from the beginning what church we belonged to and that they shouldn't make a big fuss when they had an outing on Sunday because our children would not be there. They accepted that, and from then on, they left our children alone. Our children always knew where they belonged, and they got along very well with this procedure. From the first grade on, all the other students and all the teachers knew where our children belonged, that they attended church and conducted their life accordingly. That's the way they were raised. But your behavior has to be in order before you can stand up and say that.

Wolfgang: Let me add that we had the impression that many of the teachers were also Christians, you know. Inwardly, you understand. Inwardly, they were good people and inclined toward God. I often had this impression. Many of them as much as told me so, that they only, that they had to make a living. They were not all inhuman or dedicated atheists. They all wanted to survive. And then there were some who were, I must say, noble Communists. I got to know them and can say they were fine people. They really believed in what they were doing. I mean, they believed like Mormons and Catholics believed. And after the political change took place, many of them were mistreated by those who came to power, when everything fell apart.

Housing and the Economy — Manfred Schwabe and Elke Schwabe

[Housing was always a major problem in the GDR. All apartments were assigned by the Central Housing Authority. Whether or not the people in the apartment were married often had little to do with the assignment, as the following conversation indicates.]

N. Davis: Did I hear you say that your former husband was still living in your apartment in Potsdam with your family after you were divorced?

Elke: Yes, I was living in Potsdam, and my former husband was still living in the apartment. He had one room to himself, but we had to share the kitchen. And he always had to come through my room to get into the kitchen. It was a little difficult. And besides, the apartment had been tacked on to make it larger, for a doctor's family I believe. There were actually five or six rooms. Two families lived on that floor. The back part was divided off. We had the back part, and another family lived in the front. There was only one bath for both families, and it was just divided off by a curtain. It was a little complicated.

[We asked Brother Schwabe what youth did for entertainment.]

Manfred: We had very little money, so there were not many possibilities. But we traveled. We traveled by bicycle. On Saturdays we worked until noon, and then we jumped on our bicycles. We rode out to see the Fuchs family. They had seven boys. They belonged to the Naumburg Branch. They lived about twenty kilometers away. And then, if there was someone there, we took them along. We went on to Jena. Sister Kolbin's sister lived there. At that time, her name was Bock, Anna Rose. And, well, we visited. Then we went on to Weimar. That was another twenty kilometers. That makes forty, sixty kilometers on a Saturday afternoon. Oh boy, the members in Weimar were happy to see

us. "Man, we were just going for a bike ride, over to Badberger. Come with us. We'll make a picnic out of it." Of course, we went along.

We had a good relationship with the members in Weimar, and they always invited us over to the National Theater. They got good tickets for us, and the Naumburgers and the Weimarers went to the theater together. I can still remember as well as I remember today my first great opera performance, *Tannhäuser,* organized by the Church. Well, there was always something going on. We were always going somewhere. There was no TV. We didn't have that problem, yet, of sitting in front of the TV. And we put on plays or did a little scene or just spent the evening talking. At MIA there was always something, but we had to do it ourselves. Oh, that was a lot of fun. Everyone brought out whatever talent he or she had. Everyone did what he or she could. One person set up the stage and decorated it a little. The others put on the play. Oh, there were many, many, many beautiful hours that we spent together.

[We asked Brother Schwabe if he had problems at work because of his membership in the Church. He answered this question and then went on to describe the economics of the last days of the GDR.]

Manfred: Well basically, I could say that when one makes a firm decision for the Church, when one makes it clear where one stands, then they watch you pretty closely. You are not looked up to like those who join the party. That much is clear. The party comrades had their own circle, and I was not a part of it. And whatever was decided by the party leadership became the law in our firm. Consequently, there was not much of an opportunity to influence what was done. But, all in all, when you did your work, there were no major problems.

There were disadvantages, however. Your "social contributions" were also evaluated, and when

it came to bonuses, well, you would have to figure that you would earn considerably less money in comparison to those who belonged to the party or who went along with the party. That was normal procedure. I might have done just as much work as the person next to me, who was a member of the party, but we both knew that when our "social contributions" were evaluated, we, who did not belong to the party, would be rated lower and consequently would be left out when the bonuses were distributed. It made no difference how hard you worked. The other guy could be a terrible worker, but if he belonged to the party, then he would get just as much as you. That's the way it was.

Well, getting back to the political developments; they began coming to a head in 1989. You could see from the economy how things were developing. There were a lot of people who were saying openly that we were returning to a "natural" economy, that is, an economy based on the barter system. You give me that, and I will give you this in exchange. Money had become useless, you see. The system was I need this and that for my firm, and if you can get that for me, then I can provide you with this in return. One firm needed heaters, and the other firm needed heating elements. And one firm had the elements, and the other had the heaters, or he knew where he could get them, from a guy who needed something else. The whole economy was being run by this method. You needed something for your work and you had to get it one way or another and that was usually by knowing someone who needed something you could supply. The whole thing was very official, no deception, no smuggling. We called it "mutual socialistic assistance" [*gegenseitige sozialistische Hilfe*].

Here's how it worked. I go to this firm from which I need something, and he gets from me a piece of paper which says, "We request in the form of mutual

socialistic assistance the following," and then we declare that we are prepared to exchange this thing or the other. In that way, each firm had a bill, and the bill was marked "paid in full." The value of the goods was immaterial; it was just a formality. It was just our goods for your goods.

Public Schools — Ursula Schlüter

Ursula: It is no accident that less than 40 percent of the people in our area, in the former GDR, are religious at all. The large majority of the people are atheists, and this is a direct result of forty years of education. Because whether a child in school was Protestant, Catholic, or whatever, the others were always of the opinion that she was a little strange. Someone who could believe that must not be all there. That's the way it was, and it was very hard on the children, and it was not so easy on the parents either, to be hearing these remarks all the time and that "those people who go to church have something wrong with them." That was the opinion. And in my profession [elementary school teacher], it was made very clear to me that I was not to talk about religion if I wanted to keep my job.

G. Davis: Yes, I wanted to ask you about that. You became a teacher. That is a little unusual for someone who belongs to a church, isn't it?

Ursula: Yes, but I became a teacher back at a time when things were not so strict. When I was a student, I put my religion on the application. They asked about your religion then, but later, in the '60s, it started to get even harder. There was a girl who had been in my class at the university, for example, who made a little mistake. She sat down in the school cafeteria and prayed over her food, in full view of everyone. We usually did that very privately without drawing any attention to ourselves. Well, she was told that she

would have to give up her profession. That could not be tolerated in this State, which was raising the children to be atheists, that someone would do something like that in public. That's the way it was, and I must say I was always a little uneasy when I met a colleague in the streetcar on Sunday morning when I was on my way to church. Because, well, as I have said, we were always under a little pressure, you see.

Church and Profession in the GDR — Reiner Schlüter

I conscientiously avoided the party, and I went to the university anyway. Of course, I have to add we could not come out against the State. That would have been unthinkable. We would never have had a chance. And we had to at least give the appearance of doing one's duty for the State. That would be recognized, but at the same time it was recognized if one was a Christian.

In my professional career as a doctor, it was assumed I would have certain administrative responsibilities. For that reason, they came to me and said that if I would become a member of the Party [Communist Party] I would have a chance to advance to these administrative posts. Of course, I declined, and they knew exactly why. Without going into detail, I can say that I was watched very carefully. But in the later years of the GDR, say after 1984, after we had the temple, they trusted in the people who were Christian or who belonged to a church a little more. There was a clear tendency in that direction. As a result, even though I could not officially assume an administrative position, as I have said, I was unofficially given full administrative responsibilities. That was, of course, somewhat contradictory. On paper I was not permitted to do what I was actually doing, which was acceptable. It was all officially recognized. I had no fears.

[We asked Reiner Schlüter what he felt about the Church making what some have called "compromises" with the communist government in the GDR.]

It was very important to make compromises at that time, or we could never have had the development we had with any security. The way it was done was the right way. In addition, I believe that

such compromises actually hastened the political changes. For the Church here in this part of Germany, the willingness to make compromises was the only way these things could be possible. And the results have shown this was right. I would give my approval to this procedure any time. Without question. To have taken a hard line would have made it much more difficult for the members of the Church to do anything.

It should be understood that this willingness to compromise was not done by the State only out of the goodness of their hearts. They could see the economic benefit to them just as we could see the spiritual benefit to us. They could see that we could build chapels with hard currency and that they would naturally benefit in some ways from that. On the other hand, what the Church officials told the government at that time was not unknown to them. We members of the Church had gained a reputation in our own society as people who could be relied upon, as people one could look up to, as a people who did not need to be restricted merely because of their religious philosophy. Those who performed their church service loyally were "seen" as people who were reliable citizens of the State. And there was no contradiction in that. Our Church was composed of reliable people. The State officials were more afraid of other religious organizations where the leadership can exert less control. Certain parts of the Evangelical Church, for example, where the reform movement is particularly encouraged. But political reform and nothing else has little to do with religion. That is simple political engagement.

I accept the Article of Faith given by Joseph Smith that tells us to be subject to rulers and magistrates. I still accept it today as we are moving in a more democratic direction. Of course, there were exceptions, and I don't want to say that everything that glittered in the GDR was gold, but I did find this decision at that time to be the correct one. I have no criticism on this point whatever.

[We asked Reiner Schlüter about the problem of emigration, about members leaving the GDR for the West.]

On this matter, I do not want to generalize. There was a particular time for me when this question was connected to my profession, in 1988, 1989. Things were reaching the point economically where many were certainly saying to themselves, "I have

a responsibility to my children and cannot guarantee that my roots will remain here." There were certainly cases where raising this question was justified. We had discussed this in our family and, right or wrong, there was this saying going around that maybe it was time to "put out the lights" in the GDR. It would be wrong for me to say now that this question did not come up in our family. It wasn't just a personal decision. We had the responsibility for our family and our children. Under what conditions would they grow up? We haven't talked about these things yet, about how socialistic the educational system was and such fine points. At some time, one had to make a decision. Nowadays this decision doesn't have so much to do with the Church, but back then it could divide you in half.

And, of course, there were some families who emigrated, families who belonged to the Church. And I must say that the Church at the present could have been much, much stronger if these families were still here. And I don't mean only the parents, but the entire family. It's too bad they finally made the decision to get out. But, personally, I must say if that was the decision they came to then I accept it. That is, I would never say what they did was not right. That is something hard to evaluate, and I would never feel so confident of myself that I could say whether he or she should have stayed or not. There were also cases I could point to where families came back.

THE REWARD OF A TEMPLE

During the forty years of the German Democratic Republic a major problem members of the Church faced was their inability to attend the temple and receive temple ordinances.

A Temple in Our Country! — Elke Schulze

On Sunday, October 10, 1982, our entire family was together—my parents [Günter and Hannelore Schulze], my brothers Olaf and Bernd with their wives Heidrun and Maja [Ortlieb]—and our papa invited us to go with him on a drive, an outing, on the following Saturday. Of course, the questions began then: "Where?" "Will we need to pack a lunch?" "What should we wear?" "How far

are we going?" But we got no answer to any of these questions out of him. He just sat there silently smiling. We tried our questions out on Mom, but she just said, "I'm sorry, don't ask me. I've just heard about this for the first time myself." That seemed somewhat strange to us, since our parents nearly always did things together. Suddenly we were all talking about a "pilgrimage," but no one knew where we were going, how far, or when we were coming back.

In the course of the week, my brothers called Papa to find out when we would be leaving. The week went by much too slowly to satisfy my curiosity. Finally it was Saturday, October 16, 1982. Our pilgrimage began at 9:30 A.M. When we were all seated in the car trying to guess which direction we would be going, we soon found ourselves on the little highway leading over to Freiberg. At a special conference held on August 29 that year, the Freiberg Stake had been organized. The stake president [Frank Apel] lived in Freiberg, but why were we going over to see him, or would we be going further? No. Papa stopped the car outside the city overlooking a small, rising piece of ground surrounded by a hedge and bordered by a small sports field. We all got out. We crossed the deserted street and walked out onto a large field. At the far end of the field, we could see a small housing development.

Papa became very serious, and with tears in his eyes he put his arm around Mama's shoulder and said to us, "On this piece of ground, a new chapel will be built for the Freiberg Ward—and—a temple of the Lord." It was unbelievable. A temple in our country! He then explained to us when the construction would begin and where the buildings would stand. We were speechless, and then the words from my patriarchal blessing came to mind: "You will experience the covenants, the holy covenants in the house of the Lord, which are necessary." Now this promise was going to be fulfilled so soon? I had often thought of these words. What possibility would I ever have of going to a temple—unless it would be after I was old enough to retire. This promise, which had always seemed something far, far off in the future, would now be fulfilled before any of the others. It was all so wonderful!

Then Papa said to me, "Elke, now you can understand why I could not satisfy your curiosity, but had to be silent. I was not

even allowed to tell Mama. Since 1978 negotiations have been going on between the Church and representatives of our government, and we—the mission presidency of the Dresden Mission (Papa was second counselor at that time; Henry Burkhardt was president)—gave President Monson our word that we would not discuss this with anyone until the prophet made an official announcement about the building of the Freiberg temple. And that is what he did at the fall general conference."

I was so proud of Papa. Mom didn't even know, and she had never asked him about it in spite of the many rumors that were going around. I had often thought to myself, Papa must know, he works for the Church. And after he told me, I was ashamed of myself because of my curiosity. And then Papa answered all of the many questions that were buzzing around in our heads. In the true sense of the word, this had been a wonderful and beautiful pilgrimage for us. We were very happy.

The ground breaking took place in the spring of 1984, and the construction on these beautiful buildings began.

The beautiful time of the open house was June 1–16, 1985, and I had the privilege of doing "temple duty." I helped people get their overshoes on and off in front of the temple, or I helped maintain silence in the temple, or I helped do missionary work in the chapel and on the temple grounds. It was a beautiful time of service and sacrifice. On a single day, there were seventy thousand visitors, and in all, ninety thousand people stood up to five hours in the rain and storm in terrible weather in order to see our temple. The earlier prayer of Apostle Monson as he dedicated this country, that the people would come and ask about the gospel, was now being fulfilled.

The laying of the cornerstone of the temple was held on June 28, and dedicatory sessions were held on June 29 and 30, 1985. It was so wonderful to see the General Authorities and to hear everything and to be permitted to participate!

Thursday, July 4, 1985, was a beautiful, sunny day. This was the day on which the members of the Dresden Ward were permitted to go to the temple for the first time. My mother had a responsibility in the nursery, and so I went through the temple alone. I needed a lot of strength, and I received it as it beamed forth from

Open house for the Freiberg Germany Temple. June 1–16, 1985, long lines of people waited their turn to tour the temple, sometimes in rainy weather. Elke Schulze was one of the Saints who helped host the visitors. Courtesy Elke and Manfred Schwabe.

the brothers and sisters in the temple. It was so beautiful to see all of the members of our ward united there together.

It is beautiful to receive the blessings of the temple. Since that day, I have been to the temple often to do work for the dead, and it is also beautiful to do something for others. But the thing that has brought me the greatest happiness has been that I have been able to feel a peace, a calmness, and a security about my own future. Because now I know that if we are true to our Heavenly Father then all of the promises he has given us will be fulfilled.

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