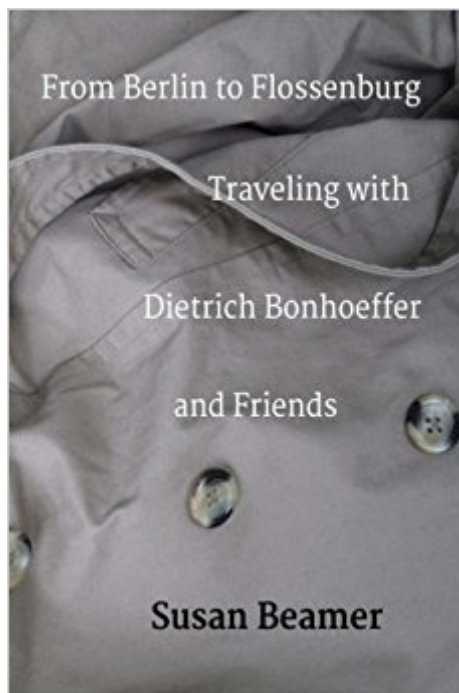




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From Berlin To Flossenburg: Traveling With Dietrich Bonhoeffer And Friends.



Synopsis

On the chilly morning of May 17, 2006, Susan Beamer began a three-week journey. She was scheduled to rendezvous with a group of pastors and lay people in Berlin for a "Bonhoeffer Tour" and follow in at least some of the footsteps of theologian, pastor, and martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. She was nervous, but the first leg of the flight from Indianapolis to Newark went smoothly--no turbulence at all. With plenty of time to find the next gate before boarding the dreaded flight across the ocean--she told her husband that under no circumstances did she want to be buried at sea--suddenly she noticed something which gave her a terrible sinking feeling. The date on the itinerary didn't match her arrival date! How could this have happened? She would be arriving a day late. Everybody else was already in Berlin! By the time she got there they would probably be on their way to Poland. She couldn't call anyone because she had no cell phone; that didn't matter much because she had no phone number to call. Tegel International Airport in Berlin was friendlier and more informal than she had imagined; baggage claim and customs went quickly. Stepping outside the terminal into the fresh morning air, she really wanted to kneel and kiss the ground but she hurried over to the long line of taxis. Surrendering everything to her driver--two suitcases and one tiny hand-drawn map of the guest house where she was to meet her group--she stepped into the open door of the back seat and heard the familiar cadence of National Public Radio. It turned out that the driver, Lawrence, a native of Ghana, listened to NPR to improve his English. Susan explained her dilemma to Lawrence--the late arrival, the need to hurry--sparing all the details of the faulty planning which accompanied it. He smiled, nodded, glanced at the crumpled map and started the cab. As they drove, the neighborhoods of Berlin flew past them, a blur of trees, neat houses, crowded outdoor cafes, beautiful automobiles and pedestrians. The cab pulled up alongside the curb of a tree-lined street; he grabbed her bags and said, "I'll walk with you to the door of the guest house because it seems to be hidden from view." Such kindness from a stranger. The guest house front door opened to a clean, sparse waiting area. A group of people all about her age, were seated together on red couches and looked up--was this her group? Their gasps, mumbling, sounds of relief and the biting noises of reproach filled the air. Someone loudly bounded down the stairs--it was a man with his arms outstretched with a look of joyful surprise--she knew in an instant he was the group leader. He was within minutes of making the necessary decision to leave for Poland without her. "Thank God! I am not taking my eyes off you!" he declared. Tired, in need of a bath, and very hungry, she put her bags in the trunk of one of the cars, silently said her prayers of thanks and settled into the back seat. They headed east. Little did she know that the grace she had received thus far was but a foretaste of the grace that was coming their way. Little did she know that

the friends of Dietrich Bonhoeffer--the living, the dead, and the ones Bonhoeffer never knew--would open their lives to her and to her traveling companions in a redemptive way. Susan is still trying to find the right words to describe it.

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Customer Reviews

Susan Bayless Beamer grew up in the desert southwest of the United States and attended college in California, earning a bachelor's degree in Social Sciences. In 1969 she married Richard Beamer and in 1973 they bought an old farmhouse on a few acres of land in Indiana; they have lived there ever since. There, they raised their two sons and over the years have tended many gardens, gathered many eggs, milked a few goats, and fixed up their 100-year-old house. At some point along the way Susan discovered she had a love of theology, history, and preaching and in 1995 began serving as a youth pastor of her home church. In 2003, she became a licensed pastor. She has served several congregations in northern Indiana and currently serves a church in the town of Bippus, Indiana. In addition to their two sons, Richard and Susan now have a beautiful daughter-in-law and three lovely grandchildren. At this stage of her life, Susan enjoys cooking, watching British mysteries on television, traveling, writing, making pies with her grandchildren, being a pastor, and spending time with friends and family, not necessarily in that order.

A friend recommended this journal to me; it turned out to be a gem. It had me pining for Central Europe, pining for the past, but also recalling the not-mentioned-enough realization that the unimaginable ugliness of the Holocaust occurred in the world's most beautiful green forests, hills, meadows, villages, and gardens. The author seems struck by this from her first crossing of the

German-Polish border and along her journey through Bavaria and toward some of the infamous KZ camps. We are following the trail of Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer deserves the honor for standing up to the wrongness, but "From Berlin" highlights other brave figures worthy of memorializing. Good to know there were such others though not nearly enough. I hadn't realized it was Niemoller who said, "When they came to get the Communists, I was silent, because I was not a Communist. When they came to get the (Socialists, Catholics, Jews) I was silent. And when they came to get me, there was no one left to speak." The author seems to appreciate that we need constant history. Also rightly appreciated: "I could go on like this forever--riding in the back seat, taking in the beauty of the countryside, stopping to eat yet one more German meal and sleep in one more comfortable bed." (p85) Then again she hits home with, "We each in turn have our photo taken with Felix in front of cell #30. We speak in hushed tones, trying to understand what happened here; perhaps Felix is trying to understand what happened here too; simply because he was related by blood to one of the great ones doesn't mean he understands what was endured in this dark place." (94) Theology is ever-present as well; I, as an open-minded atheist who has been around the block, read the scripture excerpts comfortably -- (nice reminders) -- and reflected on the courage that faith provided these men and women who kept chins up despite seemingly endless clouds. Most profound was the description how the imprisoned and faithful Bonhoeffer did NOT have one foot in heaven, but loved life, loved his bride-never-to-be, and yet encouraged other captives although their number was about to be called -- just a month before the war's end! "From Berlin" is written crisply -- the writing is stronger than is the journal's structure -- not bogged down in adverbs, adjectives, description; just the right amount. The formatting (and structure) could use another run thru on the next edition -- I've also been reading Patty Smith's journal, "M Train

Well written travelogue; written with empathy and good humor. Keeps you interested in what each day will reveal.

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