

Dear Mr. President William Longrigg,
dear Mr. President of the European Chapter Mark Harper,
dear IAML Fellows and Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am asked to give you a Berlin Talk but what I am really going to do is telling you scenes from a lovestory.

As family lawyers you might sometimes be in need of that.

1st scene

shows a little girl falling in love with a great city: Berlin.

Though otherwise provided I have not been born in Berlin.

My grandparents lived in Berlin and my parents and me came to Berlin several times a year to visit them.

Berlin in my first years has been the nearly totally destroyed after war Berlin. Ruins wherever you looked, poorly dressed hungry looking people. Everything was so different from our place in Düsseldorf and highly interesting.

2nd Scene shows the girl

in August 1961 bringing back her grandmother from holidays in France to the western part of the city which found itself suddenly surrounded by a wall.

Everydays life changed totally from that day for a long time.

For many years to come West Berlin was an Island and – a geographical miracle – with the East in every direction, no South, no North, no West – only East like a belt around a huge body.

Wherever you turned to you just had to walk long enough you always ended in front of a wall closely observed by soldiers, machine guns visible, in their watchtowers.

People from West-Berlin where not any longer allowed to visit their relatives and friends in Eastern Berlin and the GDR and of course vice versa.

Those West Berliners who were lucky enough to have relatives and friends in Western Germany established dummie adresses to get a West-German-Passport.

Thus they were able to apply for a Visa to visit Eastern Berlin and the GDR.

The railwaystation Friedrichstraße just across the street has been divided by walls into two parts and was also closely observed by soldiers.

One part was reserved to passengers from Eastern Berlin and Germany and their trains which carried them to destinations in the East.

The other part was reserved to passengers arriving and departing from and to the West, a dead end station leading to never ending bordercontrols in underground catacombs with a very special smell.

The smaller glassy building you find rightward had been built for exits only.

People from the East were not allowed to enter.

This building was called the Tränenpalast – Palace of Tears – because of all the tears which were shed there when people had to say Goodbye to their beloved ones.

Nowadays you find there an exhibition I can highly recommend.

3rd Scene gives you some impressions of a lawyers work in those times

When I started in 1978 we were 1.200 lawyers in West-Berlin compared to about 15.000 nowadays.

We were kind of family. Nearly all of us did only local work, no industry, no business, no international or even national law firms and very special situations.

For example ... West Berlin citizens were not able to apply to the Federal Constitutional Court of Western Germany because West Berlin should not be governed by Western Germany's institutions as decided by Truman, Churchill and Stalin in Potsdam 1945.

In West Berlin it was within the competence of every single judge to decide about the constitutionality of the law which was not very helpful as you may imagine.

In 1981 I wanted the Federal Constitutional Court to decide about joint custody for children born out of wedlock which was not possible at that time.

The parents whom I represented had to move from Berlin to Hamburg otherwise the constitutional complaint would not have been possible.

Another speciality: Defending Spies

Berlin has been indeed in the cold war times a capitol of spies.

But don't believe there were mostly glamorous stories like in "The Bridge of Spies", the new Spielberg movie.

As a young lawyer I did some criminal defence and the "normal" spy from East Germany was a middle-aged husband and father caught by chance when he tried to steal some gifts for his family – the poor guys had not been given enough money to buy them ...

They spent a short time in prison and then were sent back across the border to their families.

4th scene shows us the fall of the wall in 1989.

It changed the situation completely, not only our personal but also our professional life.

Those were really exciting times.

I remember having been invited to a meeting of lawyers in East Berlin to inform them about the organisations and professional code of conduct in West Germany.

I remember meetings of women lawyers discussing the advantages and disadvantages of family law in either system.

I remember collecting books and money for books for our new colleagues.

I remember adventurous trips to court hearings in rotten Court houses in the surroundings of Berlin. You literally could find their old and useless law books on garbage dumps in the backyard.

Last but not least I remember all of us not being able to hide their emotions and always being at the edge of tears – over the edge indeed – out of happiness and thankfulness.

Last Scene

is the time shortly after reunification when IAML came to Berlin represented by Katharina Jank-Domdey from Düsseldorf who and later on Werner Martens adopted me in a way and invited me to the next conference in Salzburg.

Finally Berlin became part of the international world ...

and that is where we are now.