

## East German Checkpoint to West Germany

The officer came so close to Kristina that she was startled and drew back. He pointed his finger at her and hissed through clenched teeth, "And you - follow me! Bring your purse!"

Kristina quickly got out and hurried after him, farther and farther away from the car with the children and Walter, ever closer to a small concrete hut with barred windows. Everything, literally everything, seemed to be going wrong on this 9th of August 1989.

The heat in the room was as oppressive as the deathly quiet that surrounded them while the man in uniform slowly leafed through Kristina's and her children's passports labeled: GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC. Wordlessly he studied the almost blank document with deliberation as if there were pages of reports to peruse and not simply short notes with stamps.

*What is the point of this?* Kristina thought. *Surely everything must be in order; I just picked up the passports two days ago at the police station in the county seat.*

As if he could read her mind, the man looked up, and although they were standing face to face, he leaned toward her and with a loud voice asked, "Why are you leaving our country?"

Wide-eyed, Kristina stared at him. How could she possibly explain the past four momentous years of her life to him in a few sentences? Thoughts flashed into her mind one after another. Memories raced by in seconds. Everything had begun in that fateful winter of 1985.