

# PRESS RELEASE

## Women Welcome Women World Wide (5W)

### Celebrating Freedom!

Women Welcome Women World Wide (5W) has been promoting friendship and understanding amongst women around the world for 25 years! Our Founder, Frances Alexander, visited 5W members in East Berlin just before the Wall came down and remembers the emotions of that historic time.

"I have been looking at the pictures of the Berlin Wall coming down today, and remembering 20 years ago.



Three weeks before I had visited Berlin with a member of our Board of Trustees to set up a Gathering for 1990. The Gathering would be called "Berlin and Europe. Past, Present and Future." We had planned to meet a few of our East Berlin members while we were there.

We took the train to the border station and had to get out. We waited in a long queue in a great hall and I was so glad I was not alone. Finally, we got to the front of the queue and went into a brightly-lit kiosk where the official took the passport and examined it and me for a long time and finally handed it back.

We were met from the train by 5W member Barbara and her husband and travelled to the home of another member in their noisy Trabant. They were frightened. They knew that the Stasi knew that we were coming, as their letters had been opened. They knew that we had more people in the house than we should have done - it was a public meeting and therefore banned. They had seen the pictures of Tiananmen Square and feared that it would happen in their country too. But they were thirsty for meeting us, and we hugged and wept and smiled. I asked what they would like me to tell everyone when we got home again.

"Tell them I want to see my grandchildren when my daughter marries a man from the West." They bred pedigree dogs and had met at cross-border dog shows. "Tell them what has been happening in Leipzig - the people marching round the city square every Monday". They were

fearful that it would end in bloodshed. "Tell them we want to be friends ... to live in peace ... that this wall is a monstrosity!"

And then three weeks later, the wall came down. I watched, and wept, and wondered whether this would be a happily ever after, or would there be a flip side. I have among my 5W treasures a small piece of that wall.

I wept again on Christmas morning 1989, when Leonard Bernstein conducted the orchestras and choirs of East and West Berlin together to perform Beethoven's 9th symphony, the Ode to Joy. But instead of singing Freude - joy, they sang Freiheit - freedom.

I telephoned Barbara later that day to wish her Happy Christmas. The line was so clear, and we communicated with our minute knowledge of each others language. She could not believe that she was talking to someone in England!



Frances Alexander

May we all be grateful for the freedom we have, and work to ensure that all may share it." *Frances Alexander, Founder of Women Welcome Women World Wide.*

5W is based on the simple concept of encouraging ordinary women to forge friendships with other members around the world, providing the opportunity to travel and visit one another in their own homes, experiencing different lifestyles and cultures. There are currently around 2500 members in over 80 countries.

**For further information, please contact:-**

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