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I have a good feeling.

Me too.

Why I move in cooperation with Nike.

Now let's hear it.

So Tom Holland, that was a national anthem and 10 points to you if you can guess which anthem it was.

I thought you just tuned into Radio 3.

No.

It sounded kind of like generic, slightly boring Radio 3 music.

I think that's very harsh.

That is one of my favourite national anthems, it's the National Anthem of the German Democratic Republic, East Germany as was, a country that Tom, you and I would have taken completely for granted.

When we were growing up, yes.

When we were growing up as a fixture on the sporting map.

I mean, think about it in the Olympics.

But also, it was a sort of avatar, wasn't it, in the West?

But also a fixture in spy novels.

Yeah, exactly.

It was a sort of shorthand for the Iron Curtain.

The Iron Curtain, Warsaw Pact, all that kind of stuff, but now completely gone.

And therefore, one with Nineveh and Tyre.

And therefore, very much a suitable subject for a history podcast.

And fortunately, Dominic, we have just the person with us, don't we, who can tell us about East Germany.

We do.

Long term list is the rest of this issue.

We'll remember when we did Bismarck and Bismarck's Reich, the second German Reich.

And we had a wonderful guest called Katja Hoyer, who it turns out Tom is, or at least was, an East German.

So Katja, not were you in East German, but you have now written the book on East Germany, which is *Beyond the Wall, East Germany, 1949 to 1990*.

So this book is a bit different from your last one.

This is a bit more of a personal book, I guess, because it's about your own upbringing actually features at the end of the book, doesn't it?

Well, I did write it as a historian rather than as a personal history of the GDR.

But you can't ever quite sort of get away from your own personal background as a historian, I feel.

So I felt, obviously, I had to be a, honest about the fact that I am from East Germany

and that this is going to colour my perspective of the country to some extent.

And B, I didn't see why I shouldn't bring in my own perspective, my own family as part of the group of people

that I bring into the mix in terms of explaining what the country was like from the perspective of those who lived there.

So Katja, in your book, you have a very striking formulation.

You say that the GDR, so East Germany, was unique among the Eastern

Bloc nations in that its very existence was never assured.

So the other Warsaw Pact nations, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, whatever, I mean, these are kind of nation states.

But the whole thing about East Germany is that actually it's carved out of the Third Reich.

And the question of whether it should ever have existed in the first place is hugely debated,

not just by Germans, not just by people in the West, but also I learn from Stalin.

So its origins lie in that kind of massive, massive catastrophe that overwhelms Germany over the course of the 20th century.

So how far back do the roots of East Germany run back to the Third Reich, back to the Russian Revolution?

How far back does it go?

Well, they certainly, when later they rediscovered Prussia and Martin Luther and other things, they thought it went way further back.

But of course, that was a means of legitimising the fact that there was this fairly artificial line drawn in the middle of Germany after the Second World War, which is entirely a political decision, a decision based on where troops were at the time when they occupied Germany.

And it's certainly not a kind of natural line that evolved over centuries, as you find with many other countries.

And because of that, you basically have a country, one nation now split into two,

which will naturally try and revert to some form of unity, national unity.

And on the other side, you've got Stalin sitting there, not really keen on the idea that East Germany is part of his realm

that he has to look after, because it doesn't, in his view, fit into this kind of natural sphere of influence

that Russia deems Eastern Europe to be, the Soviet people, effectively.

So Germany is always going to be, from a Russian perspective, part of the Western world, part of Western Europe,

and therefore not necessarily a natural part of the Soviet empire, or more widely speaking, the Russian influence in Europe.

And as a result of that, there are various considerations across the early period of the GDR, certainly where the Soviets are basically thinking, can we trade this in?

Is it really worth having?

And so the GDR government is constantly going to look East and West for justification for its own existence.

I was amazed to learn that.

I had no idea that Stalin was so reluctant and that essentially the drive for it comes from German communists.

Is that right?

And it principally German communists who had fled the Nazis and gone to Russia and survived all the various purges, which claimed the lives of many German communists and who had been kind of battle hardened and forged into becoming the most loyal of the loyal, as far as Stalin was concerned.

And so they were able to essentially kind of pressure him and say, you know, we're here for you.

Yeah, I mean, it's that is an interesting fact that is often forgotten when you think, you know, out of the Communist Party's leadership that go to Russia to flee Hitler's regime.

At the end of the war, only two of them are left standing, literally.

And that's William Peake, who will become the first and only president of the GDR.

And Walter Albrecht, who was sort of lead its fortune for the first two decades.

And that's not a coincidence that those people survived while others didn't.

And at the same time, you now have a situation.

I mean, the fact that Stalin is reluctant is my opinion.

And many other historians think the same way.

There are historians, I should point out, who don't think this and who think that Stalin was always keen to hold on to East Germany and go as far into Western Europe as he could.

He's notoriously hard to pin down because he's so waffling in the way that he expresses his own opinion.

So reluctant to have them kind of written in in documents that it's really hard to sort of grasp what he actually wants from one moment to the next.

But there is this odd admiration for Germany, as well, that he's got kind of like a love-hate relationship with Germany.

And the idea that he should look after something that he, to some extent, views as a kind of another great European power, it's not to be a satellite state as such, is also there in the background, I think.

And there are people in this inner circle, you've got people like Beria, for example, the notorious chief of the secret police, who doesn't view the GDR as a proper country.

He says that quite openly and says, you know, what is this thing?

If we're not looking after it, it would just crumble into West Germany and their constant considerations, all the trouble, you know, all the troops that have to go into it at the front lines of the Cold War, the awkward situation in Berlin with the open city that's split into two.

All of that is there on people's minds and the question is always there, should we not just give in and, you know, leave it.

To go back to the leaders, so you mentioned Wilhelm Pieck and Walter Ulbricht, who were the sort of founding fathers of the GDR, and they had been in Moscow in the 1930s, how much do you think the tone of political life in East Germany was shaped by the fact that they'd been in the purges, in the terror?

Do you think that hung over the country right through to the very end? How much was that sense of mistrust and the sort of the lives of others, sort of tone of East German life that we're familiar with in the West, because that's become our stereotype of East Germany?

How much was that dictated by the fact that they had been there in the 30s? Or would that have been there anyway?

Because, Katja, you give the amazing statistic that only a quarter of German exiles in Russia survived the purges.

Yeah, it's really quite amazing when you think about this and the amount of terror and kind of, you know, the psychological impact that this would have had on these people as individuals, I think it's hard to underestimate when you think further back as well, they've always been persecuted for who they were politically for where they stood.

You know, you've got before the First World War, you've got very kind of harsh anti-social democratic, anti-socialist laws coming into place, then many of them sat in prison during the First World War for their opposition to it, and then throughout the 1920s they had, you know, these hefty street battles on the streets of the Weimar Republic.

And then Hitler obviously drives up to a whole new level and suddenly they run away from all of that and they end up in a situation that's even more deadly.

I mean, if you're German and you're in Russia during the Second World War, it's more likely that you will be dead at the end of the war than alive.

And coming out of all of that, a lifetime's worth of persecution, if you will, or looking over your shoulder for people that have got it in for you, has got to have some sort of political impact, I think, on the way that you act, that you set up a state.

And this goes for people like Eric Milka, who, for instance, fought in the, was deployed in the Spanish Civil War as a kind of underground terrorist, if you will. So again, constantly looking over his shoulder for enemies.

Eric Milka is the guy who goes on to found the Stasi, the secret police.

Yeah, absolutely. And with that, kind of, Russia as a role model in mind, so he openly calls his staff, for instance, the checkers, after the Russian secret police, but also with his experiences in Russia in mind,

where he actually witnessed some of the show trials that were going on under Stalin. So in many ways, I think, you know, people don't come out of nowhere in 1949 with no background.

And that, I think, plays into the early, certainly, of the GDR. And because the personnel doesn't really change, I mean, Eric Milka is there to the very end in 1989.

You've also got Eric Honaker, who leads the GDR for the second half of his existence, who also sat in Nazi prisons for years on end. So in many ways, you know, you don't get a fresh generation of people that have grown up during kind of a relatively peaceful era with less psychological baggage.

So just on the foundation of the GDR, I mean, Tom was asking that question about Stalin, which I also found fascinating, because I had always imagined that the decision to create a separate state was largely inspired from Moscow, rather than from within the

future East German state itself. So is there a future? Is there an alternative universe in which there is a united Germany going into the 1950s? Or do you think that the way that the Second World War ended, with the country split into the Red Army in one bit, the British, the Americans and another, do you think that meant the creation of East Germany was always inevitable?

Well, as historians, we don't really like the idea of inevitability, I guess. But it's hard to see how a united Germany could have come out of this, because both sides, you know, due to its sheer size and weight, there couldn't have been an Austrian kind of kind of scenario where you end up with a neutral country that won't get involved in anything that just doesn't work for where Germany is, for

how big it is, for how much potential it has. I don't think it's ever possible to have a neutral Germany in the center of Europe. And so it would have been, you know, even if you had it just for a short term, it would have been a playground for spies, undercover operations, people would have tried to influence the government elections, political parties from both sides. And I think it would have been unsustainable in the long run.

I mean, you would have shifted, obviously, the Cold War with the Iron Curtain effectively further east. But at the same time, you know, would the Russians have allowed Germany to become West Germany effectively? And it would have possibly happened.

You know, this kind of idea of Conrad Adenauer in the West, the first German, West German chancellor, pulling West Germany so far to the West that it becomes part of NATO and remilitarizes very quickly, that would have scared Stalin to a point where he couldn't have accepted that.

So I don't really see how it would have been possible to have one unified Germany without one side or the other chancellor to grasp it for themselves.

And so Volta Ulbricht, who I was delighted to read from you had an unusually high pitch, so very high pitched voice. He said that of the state that he and his fellow communists were planning to set up.

It has to look democratic, but we must have everything in our hands.

So that's a kind of cynical approach.

It's like he's in the room, Tom.

Oh, well, thank you, Katja. Thank you. But at the same time, you also have a fair measure of brutality.

So the Soviets are looting a lot of stuff. They're looting a lot of kind of the industrial base. They're looting prehistoric gold treasures, all kinds of things.

And people are going in and removing all the yonkers, the kind of the Prussian aristocrats, they're being kicked off their land. It's all being collectivized, all that kind of stuff.

So it's a kind of familiar story from other East European countries, and indeed actually from Germany under the Nazis, it's the combination of kind of democratic approach combined with violence.

Is that essentially how what becomes the GDR comes to be formed?

Yeah, I think a lot of its origins go back to violence in various forms of repression as well. I mean, you have former Nazi concentration camps turned into now special Soviet camps, effectively, and anybody who's vaguely associated with the Nazis.

And we're talking a lot of people here, you know, party members, people that were in the Hitler Youth and so on and so forth, end up in those camps at the same time.

And as you say, there's lots of violence from the Soviet occupiers. That's looting on all sorts of levels. I mean, it starts on the personal level with the proverbial bicycle being ripped out of people's hands and goes all the way up to, you know, sort of organized looting from organized really by the state where they go into museums and clear them out,

that kind of thing. And then, of course, you got horrific violence towards the women and children that were largely left by themselves because the men were fighting still or in prison of war camps is estimated that two million women were raped, for example.

So all of these things are going on and they collectively, I think, lead to a sort of foundation trauma on a personal level on a psychological level, as well as on an economic level. And that's something that the GDR has got to sort of try and recover from when the same level of violence does not apply

to West Germany.

Am I right in thinking that one thing that we would sometimes miss in the sort of Cold War historiography, if you like, is that East Germany is not just born out of trauma and violence and repression and paranoia, but there's also a lot of idealism.

So if you're young, let's say you're in the Hitler Youth, you're now in your teens, late teens or something. So you've known all the promises that Hitler made to you. They've all turned out to be false.

Society has fallen apart. And here are these guys who won the war, who beat you, and who are now saying, listen, a new world of freedom, of brotherhood, of internationalism, of equality.

I mean, there are a lot of people who believe in that, aren't there? I mean, it's not just imposed on them. There are people who willingly and enthusiastically go along with it.

Well, one of them is Angela Merkel's father, who's a pastor who goes from West Germany to live in East Germany. And Bertolt Brecht, the great playwright, does.

Absolutely. And you get lots of people who believe that genuinely this is the new kind of Germany that hasn't been able to really found its foundation in the Weimar Republic.

And, you know, we go back to broken promises. That was another period where there was supposed to be real social change and social mobility and welfare and all of these kinds of inequality happening.

And it didn't and it fell apart. And now there is this new Germany that is being set up. And it did help that initially Stalin quite famously said the Hitlers come and go, but the but the German state remains, you know,

in this kind of idea that the Soviets were almost despite all of the horrific stuff that happened and the great sacrifice that they made in the war, that they were sort of almost willing to see the German people as a separate thing from Naziism when the

Western Allies weren't quite willing to do that just yet. Also gave people hope that things would maybe change. I mean, I've got one one example that springs to mind is a woman called Regina Faustman, who I've got in my book just as an ordinary East

basically was a teenager at the time in her late teens and just really wanted to get going. She joined the free German youth straight away. Once it was set up, you know, wanted to roll up her sleeve, collect scrap metal, start clearing the rubble way and sort of set up

this new Germany that many people genuinely believed in. And presumably also, I mean, going from the 40s into the 50s, just the fact that there's a relative degree of normality must have generated both relief, but a certain sense of loyalty towards

this kind of emergent communist state.

Yeah, although I think that was also one of its faults that it couldn't provide that as quickly as the West could where sort of economic stability due to the Marshall aid money effectively was able to be established a lot earlier than in East Germany.

But at the same time, yes, people did feel that they were creating something and they also felt they were creating it themselves. You know, there was a kind of defiance against the idea that they were almost like three steps back.

And now they had to fight for themselves and create their own country with their own heart graft as it were. And that really had appealed to a lot of people as well.

And at that point, so we're talking late 40s, early 50s, you can move quite freely from one Germany to the other. Am I right? So in other words, if you want to get a new job or if you just say, golly, this,

I hate this communism not working.

You can literally just pack your stuff in the car if you have a car or you hitch or whatever. And you move 100 miles to the West and it's as simple as that. Am I, is that, is that right?

Yep, to start with, absolutely. I mean, they did pretty early on and mostly 1952 onwards beef up that inner that long inner German border between the two states rather than the one in Berlin.

One stays open until the Berlin Wall is erected. So there is that choice and many, many people take it. That's one of the early challenges that this kind of young state and even the Soviet donors got to cope with as well.

And so in the early 50s, you have a continual drain. So we're talking about hundreds of thousands of people from East to West. And these are people who are anxious, presumably, it must be a combination of things.

So is it the economy must be part of it because the economy in the West is reviving more quickly.

But are people now beginning to think, so Tom was talking about the democratic means.

They have this very strange electoral system where they basically print out all the names of the winners and then you put it in the ballot box.

Also known as paper folding by the East German population.

Yeah. About that point to people thinking, actually, this is a terrible sham. I've now seen through the lies. I'm off. I'm going to Frankfurt or whatever.

But also you've got the Stasi, haven't you? So that's initiated in 1950.

Yeah.

And it comes very large, very quickly. So is that sense of oppression also something that people are fleeing?

Yes, although most of the evidence seems to point in the direction that economic factors seems to be by a long way the biggest pull.

Like the West German government, because they were overwhelmed with refugees both from East Germany and from the territories in Eastern Europe that Germany had lost after the Second World War.

They set up sort of like refugee camps. And when people arrived there, they filled in surveys as to why they were there and what they wanted to do with their lives.

And the results of those show that the vast majority of people are there because they seek economic betterment.

And that's not just to say I'm earning a little bit more, but actually having goods on the shelves.

The situation with food was still incredibly unstable.

East Germany had to keep rationing up much, much longer than West Germany did.

And there's this pretty fundamental economic stuff and people are wanting secure conditions for themselves and their family.

The West is a very attractive option, particularly if you have got a skill that's desperately needed in the rebuilding of Germany.

So these are skilled workers, for example, medical personnel, doctors, nurses, those kinds of people who are really taken in with warm welcomes in the West and will find much, much more stable conditions there.

Just one quick thing about refugees. Tom and I both have our hands up.

Please miss. Please miss.

It says how interesting this topic is.

So just on refugees, I was absolutely gobsmacked to read that a quarter of East Germany's population is made up of refugees who have fled presumably from the former East Prussia from the Sudetenland.

So that must be incredibly destabilizing.

I mean, you're having to house all these people who have arrived from somewhere else.

And all the housing has been flattened by the Red Army.

Yeah, absolutely. So there isn't enough housing stock to start with.

It's just a sheer number. You've got 12 to 14 million people fleeing those territories and the vast majority of them arrive for geographical reasons alone, basically, in East Germany.

My own family background, I've got three of my four grandparents come from there as well as East Prussia, Sudetenland and Pomerania, where they literally kind of walked for months.

One of them years, my grandfather only arrived and I think it's 47.

So it did take a long time basically for people to get there.

And then they arrived somewhere where people didn't want them because they were struggling with their own conditions and there wasn't enough housing.

And then local authorities would say, well, you can move in with this farmer because he's got a barn somewhere that he isn't using.

And the farmer didn't really get a say in this.

So, you know, people ended up basically working for free for a long time for the people that they were put up with. The local school children wouldn't be particularly nice to you if you've just arrived from the East.

So it wasn't a great situation to start with.

And I think one that's often underestimated in terms of how destabilizing that is for society.

So all kinds of pressures are all kinds of tensions.

And in 1953, there is an uprising.

So what's the story of that? What specifically precipitates it and how does the East German state deal with that?

Well, they tried to do too many things at once.

You know, all of the problems that we just mentioned on top of that, you've got a huge issue with energy in terms of actually producing heat.

You know, brown coal really is the only thing that they've got, which is ridiculously inefficient and obviously quite bad for the environment as well.

But all of these things come at once.

And at the same time, Walter Albrecht, the founding father of the GDR, if you will, presses ahead with this buildup of socialism program,

which entails, for example, a large restructuring or kind of reformation of the way that land is used.

So he takes away land from the Umkers, as you said earlier, but also from other sort of large farmers, cuts it up into small chunks

and then gives it to all of these people who are called new farmers.

Effectively, people, for instance, those that come from the East are now given like sort of several football fields worth of land and it just isn't big enough to be used productively.

And therefore, the agricultural sector breaks down.

So there's all of this kind of stuff happening.

Ideology clashes with the economic sort of realities on the ground and you end up with a situation

where there's just not enough of anything.

And on top of that, they're trying to build up the early sort of armed forces, security forces, police, Stasi.

They're trying to beef up the border from 1952 onwards.

It's just too much.

And they're asking all of that off the workers and it becomes more and more and more work for less outcome.

And even the little money that you do get, you can't actually buy anything with it because there's nothing on the shelves.

And so people are becoming incredibly unhappy.

They're looking west, you know, towards the economic miracle that's happening just across the border.

Many people have got relatives there who tell them how good everything is and how they've got all of the stability and the prosperity back.

And they're just unhappy with this.

And they see that this is partially caused by the actions of the regime.

And hence you get kind of a growing sense of anger, particularly amongst the working classes, which is somewhat ironic given that, you know, you have a workers and peasants state.

To workers paradise.

Indeed.

And so there's the summer of 1953, there's mass protests.

So around about the 16th of June, all sort of reaches a climax.

And I suppose the question is, at that point, why doesn't the East German regime fall?

Is it because there are enough people with a stake in the system?

Is it because they're backed up by the Red Army?

Why don't we have 1989 then in 1953?

Yeah, I mean, the main argument is that the Red Army intervened.

They declare a state of emergency and literally roll in there with tanks and kind of battle hardened commanders and, you know, suppressors uprising brutally.

I would say another reason is that many people just joined in.

So many, many of the people that were there where, you know, I kind of listened to their to their testimony or looked at the evidence.

The overwhelming sense was, you know, I looked out of my window and there were people out there doing things.

And I was a bit unhappy as well.

So I went out and joined them.

And those people immediately literally went back inside the moment the tanks rolled up and said,

Oh, actually, I'm not that happy.

It'll be fine.

And because straight after the Soviets basically said to all break, you need to sort this out.

We told you beforehand, you can't build up socialism as quickly as you have done because it doesn't work and it destabilizes everything.

So essentially, Ulbricht is more communist than Stalin.

He's more Stalinist than Stalin.

He's trying to prove to Stalin that he's more Stalinist than Stalin.

Absolutely.

Yeah.

And Stalin was, you know, kind of the main point was to keep East Germany.

I mean, Stalin's obviously dead at this point, but the legacy of that remains.

But you have the situation where East Germany needs to be there for the Soviets to provide resources to pay reparations and to be exploited economically.

And that doesn't work if your workers don't turn up and if the whole state erupts into chaos and you have to send your own forces and your own resources into hell power.

And this is what made the Soviets so reluctant to support this kind of really rapid and, you know, destructive buildup of socialism that Ulbricht is pursuing.

And afterwards, after it happened, the Soviets said to them, well, you can stay here.

And one of the reasons is that Stalin had just died and Khrushchev, who's just emerging as the sort of successor, doesn't want upheaval in East Germany whilst he's trying to deal with the zone upheaval in Russia.

They're saying to him, you need to now make sure that people have got decent living standards.

Focus on that first.

Everything else can come after.

And Ulbricht is thereby forced to sort of take a step back from his buildup of socialism, allow a little bit of economic freedom.

And the Soviets are also sending truck loads, literally, of kind of foodstuffs and other things to try and help with the situation.

It stabilizes a bit.

And repression is scared down as well.

Because one of the points you make is that actually Ulbricht, after all his experiences with the Nazis and so on, has actually quite a deep mistrust of his compatriots.

I mean, he doesn't really trust them to do the right thing.

And so that's one of the reasons why there's such a measure of coercion in his kind of approach.

Yeah. And he doesn't understand them either.

And I suppose in the long run, why the Iron Curtain and most notoriously the Berlin Wall in the end go up?

Because he can't rely on his fellow citizens in East Germany, not to head west.

Yeah. I mean, one of the fundamental issues with him, and I would say with Honika later as well, is that they weren't there during the war.

They didn't understand what had happened in Germany for this entire period.

And when you think how extreme Nazism is as an ideology, what it did to the country and the people that were there weren't the same anymore.

Yeah.

It's interesting as well when you look at, for instance, Wolfgang Leonhardt, who was one of the young communists who sent back from Russia to Germany to build up socialism.

He'd left Berlin as a teenager and then returned in 1945 to find that it's completely changed, not just physically, but that he doesn't get what people want, how they feel about things, the fact that they feel that the Russians, as they called them, or the Moscovites, coming back didn't, they weren't proper Germans anymore.

They'd betrayed the country in some shape or form, or that was the feeling that people had. You know, they were totally disconnected.

And the workers still want to talk in 1953 to Ulbricht.

They walk up to his ministry and stand in front of it and say, come out and speak to us.

And he just goes, I think it's going to start raining soon. They'll soon go. It'd be fine.

You know, it just shows how disconnected these people were from the people that they were trying to lead.

And I think that was one of the fundamental problems they never get rid of.

So it's a period of relative stability in the 50s, but there's a continuing drain then to deal with that drain of people.

In 1961, they put up the Berlin Wall.

We did a podcast, didn't we?

We talked with Emma Gregor about the Berlin Wall.

So one of the things you talk about the Berlin Wall that's quite counterintuitive is the Berlin Wall actually, I mean, it freezes the situation, but it ensures stability.

So there's almost an argument.

This will sound like an absolutely weird thing to say, but there's actually an argument to be made for the Berlin Wall,

in the sense that it means that the threat of instability recedes.

And actually, from the East German point of view, people just have to now knuckle down and make the best of the regime they have because there is no alternative.

Is that pretty much your view?

Yeah, I mean, that's certainly how it was viewed by most of the political leaders at the time.

You've got Ardenauer doing very, very little in West Germany about the saying very little about it as well, the same goes for Kennedy.

And obviously, Orbeck himself is happy in East Germany because it stabilizes the situation, but it's interesting how little kind of political resistance there is and also how little resistance there is on the ground.

I mean, yes, you do get a lot of unrest in Berlin itself, particularly actually more on the Western side than in East Berlin.

You do get that.

But the rest of the country is surprisingly quiet.

And I asked almost all of the people I spoke to, you know, this was one of my key questions irrespective of what I actually wanted from them interview-wise.

Like, what did you make of the building of the Berlin Wall?

And the vast majority of them kind of struck their shoulders and said, well, I was on holiday, I read about it in the newspaper.

I suppose it was quite good because our doctor now had to stay, but they had no particular feelings about it because they were working class people who had never traveled anywhere beforehand.

They lived in their communities where they always lived.

And there was no possibility whatever happened, you know, of them to move away and go somewhere else.

So in many ways, it economically stabilized the situation.

And it also now meant that Orbeck was put in a situation where he had to make life worthwhile in

the GDR now that he'd locked people into it.

And that in itself created a lot of social and economic change in the 60s because he had to ease the sort of tensions a little bit economically in China, build a stable country.

So the Berlin Wall has gone up.

And when we come back, we'll look at the decades between that and the Berlin Wall coming down again in 1989.

We'll look at trabants, fridges, steroids, all the kind of stuff that we associate with East Germany.

So we'll be back after the break.

Also, we'll hear from Nike coaches and trainers who give their expert tips on how to integrate every movement in their lives.

I have a good feeling.

Me too.

Why I move in cooperation with Nike.

Now let's hear it.

I pointed downwards eagerly jumping up and down so I could see better and look there are police cars everywhere.

These last words made my father stop in his tracks looking down at the increasingly crowded square at the foot of the fern situm.

His face went white.

He recognized the armored vehicles as belonging to paramilitary people's police units.

Many of the people I was pointing at were protesters.

So that was from Katja's new book, Beyond the Wall.

And Katja, that is your experience in 1989 watching.

Tom, it's a gallant of you to read that yourself rather than to let Katja read her.

It's very weird watching Katja listen to you ventriloquizing her.

It's a whole of mirrors, a whole of mirrors.

So an amazing passage and it kind of introduces you as a character into the story that you're describing.

It reminds, you know, it's kind of lived vivid personal history and we left the first episode, the Berlin Wall had been set up.

That's 1989, the downfall of the Berlin Wall.

Let's look at the decades between those two great events.

So first of all, the politics of it.

Albrecht is kind of hanging around like a slightly rotten smell, but coming up on the outside track, we have Eric Honaker, who you mentioned before.

And he also has a very high-pitched voice.

And additionally, he likes to mumble.

So what is it about East German politicians and high-pitched voices?

I think people forget to some extent that these, you know, they're not career politicians.

They're sort of working class people that come from fairly, you know, sort of down-to-earth, if you want to call it that, so backgrounds with no pretence of being particularly polished or particularly apt at kind of portraying a certain image in public.

And they found it incredibly awkward at times to do just that.

And especially Honaker, you see him a lot with like foreign politicians and he stands there almost

shyly sort of bringing his hands
or mumbling in, you know, literally sort of what literally hasn't got a beard, but mumbling into his beard.
It's easy to forget that these aren't people that come from a well-bred and well-educated background,
but, you know, they are Rufa and a carpenter.
And they come from backgrounds where you don't, you know, speak particularly eloquently or present yourself particularly confidently.
And Honaker, fascinatingly, is not from the territory of East Germany.
So he is from the West, right? Where's he from?
Yeah, he's from the Zaharland.
And they naturally have kind of like a very soft accent.
It's hard to describe in English, but it lends itself to being rather difficult to understand.
Yeah, all that kind of stuff.
And he grows up with a pig, I gather, again, from your book, which is a wonderful detail.
And he comes in 1971.
Ulbricht basically gets deposed, doesn't he?
It's kind of the Soviets lean on him and he gets pushed out and so Honaker comes in.
So Honaker made his name, well, not made his name,
but Honaker in the 60s had been a great critic of the Beatles and of long hair and of youth color.
So Honaker is the sort of...
He is precisely the wrong person, you could argue, to take over, isn't he, in the early 70s?
Because he's so backward-looking and puritanical.
But I thought that he was piling in and allowing all these German youth to buy jeans and things.
Yeah, those things are both true.
So, I mean, this is one of the things I find fascinating about the GDRs,
just how much it oscillates between trying to open itself up and becoming more reformist and then drawing back in on itself.
And I think that's reflected in both Ulbricht and Honaker.
So Honaker actually opposes some of the opening up that Ulbricht does in the 60s when he genuinely sits down with some youth leaders and says,
well, why is it that you're bored with our regime?
Why are people leaving the free German youth?
And then is trying to open up by allowing a bit more Western music in, for example, and other things.
And Honaker at that point is opposed to it.
And then it almost turns around on its head when Ulbricht is ousted for being too old, too stubborn, too lectury, basically constantly trying to tell East Germans how to live their lives.
And Honaker comes in and presents himself as the fresh breath of air who will bring in reforms and create a new country.
Because it's not just jeans, is it?
It's also Dean Reed, the red Elvis, who's an American enthusiast for communism who comes over and it becomes that kind of Elvis, great rock and roll star.
Yeah, he suited Honaker perfectly.

I mean, you've got this kind of brash, brash, handsome American with the great flashy smile who comes along and sings Western music and country songs and things that look and sound like the West does to East Germans.

But at the same time, he's a convinced communist and has been sort of touring the Soviet Union and become a huge star there.

And it's kind of ideologically reliable, if you will.

So he settles down in East Germany, marries an East German woman and becomes kind of Honaker's pet cowboy, if you will, to some extent by projecting a Western image but doing it in a communist way.

Since Tom's brought some music, are they called the Pudis?

How would you call them?

Yeah, Pudis.

P-U-H-D-Y-F. The Pudis.

And they're the biggest East German band, massive.

If I went to Leipzig now and started chatting to people about the Pudis, they'd know who I was talking about.

Yeah, they're still around.

They still give concerts to thousands of people now.

I mean, the kind of line-up has changed a little bit over the years, but they're still going.

So the point of those bands is they're not covering Western songs.

They're doing their own songs in German, and they're not tainted by imperialist capitalists.

Forward to the future with Konrad Honaker.

Yeah, absolutely. Smash it.

No, they are an interesting one, actually,

because they started off playing Western music as cover songs, as many GDR bands did in sort of just pubs and village halls and stuff like that.

And then the local Stasi got a bit annoyed with that

because they were so effective, lack of a better word,

in creating a kind of exuberant atmosphere that they got young people up dancing, and it was incredibly rowdy, and they weren't happy with that.

So they told them they can't play anymore and banned them from public appearances.

And the Pudis, actually, to their credit, went back and said,

like, well, what is it that we need to do to try and please you so much that we can play again?

And the authorities said to them,

if you write your own songs, rather than covering Western songs,

and you play them in German, absolutely fine, go back.

And so they kind of stayed with their heroes in the West,

like Uriah Heap, for example, that entire era, style-wise,

but wrote their own German lyrics to go with it.

And that worked so well.

They were really, really popular, both East and West Germany.

They actually played concerts in West Germany as well,

and became one of the most, the most successful band in the GDR.

So they're influenced by Western bands.

And that raises a bigger question, which is,

if you were there in East Berlin, or wherever, Karl Marx start, or in East Germany,

I mean, do you get West German TV?

Do you get West German radio?

Do you get so you're conscious of everything that's going on,

or are you living in a little prison, not knowing that this is happening?

Both to some extent.

I mean, you get West German TV and radio almost everywhere in the GDR,

apart from what was dubbed the Valley of the Clueless in Saxony,

where you couldn't get some of my family out from there,

and they joke that they still live in the Valley of the Clueless.

But other than that, it was very possible, and very commonly done,

like the authorities themselves reckon that the vast, vast majority of people watch Western TV and listen to Western radio.

And to the point, actually, where they adapted their own programming,

if there was something, you know, like a crowd, please go on in the West,

they'd kind of make sure that what they wanted people to see wouldn't be on

at the same time, because they knew that people would watch West German TV.

So it was commonly known that that was a thing that people did.

And you were also legally allowed to play and listen to Western music in the country,

so long as you follow the ratio of 50 to 60.

So it had to be 60% music either from East Germany or the Eastern Bloc.

So it's like France?

Yeah, in many ways you could say that.

But the thing, I mean, the thing is, in the 60s and 70s,

there is a kind of consumer society developing in East Germany.

So they have more fridges by what's the figure.

By 1970, 56.4% of households had a fridge as against West Germany's 28%.

There are holidays, so you have 18 days holiday a year.

And famously, you have the Trabant.

So tell us about the Trabant, which is kind of the ultimate symbol, really, of East Germany, isn't it?

It is, and it's become a symbol of how decrepit the socialist system is,

because people looked at them kind of rolling over the border in 1989 and stinking its men.

So these are cars made in?

Yeah, indeed, like two-stroke, little two-stroke cars,

which were terribly outdated, really, by the end of the GDR in 1989.

But when they first introduced them, they were actually quite modern and decent cars.

They were sort of modeled on the same design principles as the Triumph Herald in Britain.

And they look quite stylish the early ones when you look at them.

People were quite happy with them.

The problem was that they didn't get developed any further.

So basically, you ended up with the same car model that people were driving in the 1960s, still kind of pretty much the only affordable model in the 1980s, still on a two-stroke engine, which was just outdated and just a kind of slightly improved model from the previous one, for which you had to wait a long time, you had to apply for it years in advance. So people looked after these cars and they had them. And I think it's worth pointing out that car ownership is nearly the same in the East Germany as it is in many Western countries on a par with Britain. But people just didn't update them. They couldn't because they couldn't get kind of new car models from anywhere. And the regime, I don't think, recognized just how car loving the German people are on the whole and didn't make that the focus, but focused on other things like fridges that became the flagship figure that they would constantly trump as well, that they'd temporarily overtake them. And gold medals in the Olympics. And that, yes. So the sporting thing, that kicks in in the late 60s. Is that right? Yeah, from the time really when East Germany gets its own national team, for a while they had to form one all-German team together with the West Germans, which must have been an interesting diplomatic exercise in itself. Once they've got their own, they're really using that to try and create kind of like a national spirit, if you will. So a lot of time, money and thought goes into how to create the sporting success. And so the stereotype is that they're pumping particularly women with steroids. And so you have all these kind of bearded women with huge muscles who are chucking shop puts out of the stadium. Yes. And I mean, they did. Absolutely. They did. And you can really see that in the, you know, in the records that are still there. There is no way of getting around that, especially as they identified that if you give steroids to women early when they're still in their teens, it permanently alters their physique. So you can kind of temporarily stop giving them the steroids and they will still perform better in the actual competitions than without them. So this happened and it really permanently damaged the female athletes that were involved in these programs. So it's interesting story, isn't it, with East Germany? Because your book, your pains to sort of say, you've got an extraordinary rate of kind of gender equality. So more women working than in most comparable Western countries. You have the paid holidays, which Tom mentioned. You have the consumer society. And you still have people who are quite idealistic. And yes, on the other side of the equation, as it were, you have the regime that is pumping the athletes full of steroids.

But you also have, for example, the Stasi.

So the image that most of our listeners, I guess, will have of East Germany is a society in which you're being spied on the whole time.

And it's very repressive.

I mean, I've been to the Stasi Museum in Berlin.

Lots of our listeners probably have where they've got sort of examples of cameras in trees and cameras hidden in cars or something.

And everybody is watching everybody else.

And do you think that latter image is overstated?

So in other words, do you think East Germany was a better place than we commonly think in the West?

Or am I now swinging too far to the other extreme?

I think it was a more normal place than people think it is, rather than better, I'd say.

It completely, literally completely depended on who you were, what you made of the state.

I mean, if you were somebody who comes from a working class background and suddenly all those opportunities open up for you, you can go to university, you get paid while you study, you can have children while you study.

My mum was at university when I was born.

And the way that it worked was you would just put in a larger room which had a nursery attached to it.

You could take your child literally up to the lecture room, drop them at a childcare centre there, go to the lecture, come back out, pick them back up.

But that all worked.

You kind of never had to worry about the existential things that Western working class people worried about.

The stability of your job, how much you'd earn from one day to the next.

Could you afford your rent?

Could you afford to heat your house?

None of that was an issue.

And if you were happy to live within this kind of relatively small world that the state set up for you,

you could do that without existential fears kind of bearing down on you because all of the basic goods in life were stabilised.

As far as the Stasi goes,

people just obviously knew that they were being watched and this is something that happened to the vast majority of people.

They knew that the Stasi was around and watched their lives.

But for the most part, the Stasi didn't really seem to know what it was going to do with the information.

I give an example of my dad in the book where he was basically implied that you shouldn't marry my mother because she had Western relatives and he was in a very sensitive area in the army where he dealt with radio signalling, which they didn't want to trust to somebody who had potentially relatives in the West. They kind of just suggested that to him and kept saying things like, did you know that your parents-in-law had gone to Hamburg again over the weekend because they were visiting family or something? And he said, well, of course I do. They're my parents-in-law, of course I know that they went. And they just let him know that they knew and he knew that nothing would come of it other than the fact that they wouldn't trust him with really sensitive radio technology. But it was just a part of life. And I've asked him, I don't know how many times, did that not bother you? They knew everything about you. There's a whole file somewhere that he hasn't even looked at and doesn't want to look at because he says he knows what's in it, what's the point. You know, this is kind of just a fact of life that people dealt with, I think. Because that's the world of Deutschland 83. Brilliant drama about an East German who goes to the West to kind of infiltrate. And I suppose that's the other thing that people in the West would know about East Germany, is it's kind of an outsized role that it plays in Spider-off. All those kind of things. And the idea of the stars, he has incredibly effective and it's also, it's some foreign mission. So what is it? Markus Wulf? The man with up face. The model for Carla in the Carrey novels. That in that sense, the impression of East Germany is actually, it's quite an impressive state that it's a significant player, a significant actor in the Cold War. But at the same time, the impression I get from your book is that the blue jeans, the fridges almost serves as a kind of sugar rush for people in East Germany. And when that starts to crash, that is a problem for these Germans, because basically they're starting to run out of money.

So you have this as early as 1977,
this crisis in sourcing coffee,
which is incredibly important,
Erich's brew and Mukerfuck,
who knows what that means.
You set that very carefully, which is good.
But it doesn't sound good.
I mean, it's a kind of, what is it?
It's kind of basically dust and shavings.
Chickory apparently.
I think the basis of it.
And it's horrible.
And these, reading about the coffee crisis,
actually it sounds quite significant.
Coffee presumably is quite important.
It is.
I mean, Germans do like their coffee.
Yeah.
I mean, and this is something I try to get that across in the book.
This is something that was associated with post war,
stability, having coffee ready and available to you at all times.
It's like a little comfort blanket, you know, whatever happens.
I suppose it's the equivalent to tea.
People say like, I'll just put the kettle on and everything will be fine in Britain.
I think the equivalent to that in Germany is coffee, I think.
And when that wasn't available,
just imagine like tea wasn't available in Britain.
You know, people would freak out.
And it's the same sort of thing, I think,
in the regime notice system.
Is that a canary in the mind?
So in the 80s, is there a sense that the economy in East Germany
is starting to run down relative to the West?
And are East Germans becoming resentful of that?
Yeah.
I mean, their problem is that they're trying to create a socialist society.
So basically a society where everyone has enough of everything,
but nothing luxurious or kind of on top of that.
So you have things like rent, food, holidays,
all of those kinds of basic things are all subsidized to a point
where they are very, very easily affordable
and people still have lots of money left over to do things.
And then they can't buy anything without money.
So that was, you know, they look at their Western relatives

and the Western relatives don't tell them that they're struggling to pay the rent next month, but they're wearing a pair of jeans. You know, and so I think you get a very, very slanted image in East Germany as to what the West is like because you view it through this very narrow lens of Western television. And Honega is trying to do both. He's trying to keep this welfare state that people are used to, which is incredibly expensive, you know, free education as well, all the way through to university, all of that's happening. If you're an adult and your employer looks at you and thinks actually you're a bit too clever for the position that you're doing, don't you want to do something else? They can send you back to university even at an adult age and you're getting that paid for. So all of that's happening. And at the same time, Honega is now trying to give people, you know, TVs, colour TVs and radios and later Walkmans, you know, in the 80s and all of those stereo things for people to have at home. All of these things that in the West only a small portion of the population can actually afford. But it looks to people because they see the adverse and they listen to their relatives in the West. It looks to people as though everybody has it. And you can't have both of these things by definition. You can't have a society that's got everything for everyone and then luxury on top of that for everyone as well. That just doesn't work economically. And Honega over stretches himself massively and they find that out in the 1980s. But even at that point in the 80s, so when they've cheap oil deliveries on which they've relied from the Soviet Union have been cut, they're running into massive economic problems. East Germany has at this point existed for about 35 years. So it's looking forward to its 40th anniversary. There are an awful lot of people who have known nothing, who are now alive, who have known nothing but East Germany. You know, you were four in that story that Tom told, but there are lots of people who would have been older than you were at school who take East Germany for granted. And the regime is also creating, I mean, one of the things I find fascinating is they're creating a separate East German historic identity

based on Martin Luther and on Prussia
and on a sort of separate history.
So is there a point there in the 1980s
where most people genuinely believe
East Germany is its own thing.
It's not just some sort of mutilated appendix
of a greater Germany, but it's its own thing
with its own history, its own culture,
and it will last for generations.
Do you think there are people genuinely think that?
Most people did.
I mean, if you speak to people even about 1989,
there's a tiny minority who say now that they knew
that the state was going to collapse and Germany
was going to reunify, but the vast majority of people
thought that, you know, there were two German states
for the foreseeable future.
And you see that even in the conversations
between the West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl
and Erich Konecker that they're working towards
kind of what they call a neighborly relationship
between the two states, because they both accept
at this point that for the foreseeable future
there will be two German states.
East Germany has got its own, you know, citizenship,
for example.
There is through sport to some extent as well
a kind of East German identity on the world stage.
You've got your own team basically that you look up to.
So I think that there was certainly a sense
that maybe it was the one nation, but it would live
in two separate states for now.
I mean, catch it, the transcripts of the dialogue
between Erich Konecker and Chancellor Kohl
of West Germany, and you reproduce some of it.
I mean, it's magnificent.
So Konecker, phoning up Kohl, yes, hello.
Yes, and Kohl saying, yes, this is Kohl.
Good day.
Good day, Chancellor.
This is Konecker.
Yes, good day, General Secretary.
How are you?
Excellent.

I would like to say if only the weather was a little better.
How is the weather over there?
Misty, fog.
I mean, this is almost British level conversation.
I mean, it's quite interesting.
So it all seems so normal.
Yeah, that's exactly it.
That's what I was trying to get to with that,
is that it was just normal.
And I mean, Kohl, obviously, once he gets a chance in 1989,
styles himself as the unification chancellor.
But he certainly had a fairly, you know,
workable, amicable relationship with Konecker.
You suppose when they first met in Moscow
at Andropov's funeral the first time,
and then for their first formal meeting at Chernenko's.
But the first time they met, he's supposed to have said to him,
you know, if we speak in dialect,
then people won't understand what we're saying.
You can't be stroked upon,
because their birthplaces are only 100 kilometers apart,
which is quite remarkable.
So they do have this unlikely,
sort of relatively personal relationship with one another,
where there is, I think, a degree of goodwill on both sides
to try and make this work.
So 1989 comes.
And the description you gave,
which I read so beautifully impersonating you,
at the beginning of this episode.
It's like I was here.
It really is. It really is.
Tell us what happens.
So first of all, what happens when your father sees this?
What happens to you? What's the process?
And then how do you fit that into the broader context
of what happens in 89?
Well, he genuinely got quite frightened
when I pointed out all of this kind of mayhem
that was happening at the foot of the TV tower.
Because it was 1989.
It was the last day of the Republic, the 7th of October,
which was a nice sunny day,
because it was the day of the Republic.

Everybody had the day off,
and most families like my own used it to just have a day out.
But we chose to go to Berlin and go up the TV tower,
which was perhaps bad timing,
because that's when there was a huge ceremony in Berlin
to try and sort of celebrate the last day of the Republic.
Gorbachev had come along to witness it.
And as a result of that,
you get mass demonstrations against that at the same time.
And there was no telling whatsoever what the police would do,
or the security forces would do,
because the authorities were still talking about
a Chinese solution to this,
meaning the massacre that had happened on Tiananmen Square.
And they're still kind of at least threatening
to dangle that into the air, that threat.
Katja, why the demonstrations?
And the reason I ask why is because,
surely at that point, most people in East Germany
are better off than they have ever been.
So much as we look at it from the viewpoint of 2023,
and we say, what a ghastly regime,
what a terrible place,
even though you've made your case about its normality,
it's not like they're suddenly terribly badly off.
It's not like the regime has suddenly become
loads more repressive than it was before.
What's driving people out onto the streets?
I think that's part of the problem,
is they put people in a position where they are incredibly well educated.
East Germany is one of the most widely read societies
in the world at that point.
People read a lot, people are very intelligent,
because they've been basically well educated to a much.
They all take the same schooling to year 10,
which is kind of really high quality,
and there is no streaming as such.
So you've got a very well educated, highly politicised,
quite comfortable population,
and confident population,
who are now saying, why isn't this changing?
Why can't we have reform? Why can't we get a say?
And this is very, very different from the early years
where people just wanted peace, stability,

and wanted to basically just get on with their lives,
regardless of what was happening at the top.
So people accept a high degree of kind of authoritarianism
in the West as well, under Konrad Adenauer to start with,
and then you see that developing into protests
in the late 60s and early 70s for similar reasons.
And nothing changes at the top.
There's no attempt whatsoever to listen to people,
to try and bring reforms in.
Honecker is at that point quite old and also getting ill,
so he's increasingly even less likely than he had been to start with,
to engage with people and to engage with their arguments.
And this is really quite upsetting to a lot of people.
I spoke to one man, Wolfgang Wolinski,
who stood for the Liberal Party in 1989 in the local elections,
and they always had to have a pre-election discussion
with the electorate, and he said it was so hostile.
People were just sitting there,
even though he wasn't actually part of the ruling socialist party,
but they were sitting there and saying, look, we need change,
we need reform, we need to do something about the environment.
There still isn't enough housing.
Why aren't there enough consumer goods on the shelves?
Why can't we have more rights? Why can't you introduce a degree of...
Just trust us.
This is kind of the saying, the kind of phrase that came out of it.
And he said he didn't have any answers
because he was trying to perform things in his own political party
but didn't get a say himself either and felt pretty helpless.
And that's something that many people,
moderate people that I spoke to who could sort of live in the GDR,
said that they failed in 1989.
So there's the demonstrations.
There's also the issue about people literally leaving the country,
so people have been leaving through Hungary.
Hungary has opened its borders to Austria, so you've got a flight of people.
And in this sort of shambolic moment,
they decide they're going to open the border
and they're going to do it in a sort of slightly staggered way,
but the spokesman gets it wrong famously
and says it's open right now and everybody piles across.
So it's a similar question to the last one about demonstrations.
So, okay, they've opened the border
and great sort of torrents of people pouring into West Berlin

and looking goggle-eyed at the neon signs.
And I mean, that's those sort of stereotypical images and stories that we've all heard.
But why does the regime then collapse so quickly?
So in other words, you make this point, which I think, again, is really counterintuitive and fascinating, that most people at that stage don't want East Germany to end. They've got a stake in their own society. They believe in it.
There are people publishing open letters, right?
Famous writers like Christopher Wolf saying, you know, we've built something, let's not throw it away. Why do they throw it away?
Yeah, it's an interesting question that because you do get like really existential fears from a lot of people as well.
When, you know, I spoke to people, I heard everything from, you know, finally I could go and travel west and see my relatives, but really I just wanted to carry on with my life, you know, if the border had just been open.
But of course, one problem is that once that border is open, you know, when we talked about the Berlin Wall earlier, it was there for a reason and it reopened literally the same problem again that people would have migrated westwards very quickly. And they did.
Actually, this happens even in the 90s. East Germany pretty much empties out where I grew up in rural Brandenburg just outside of Berlin. People used to joke that they turned the whole thing into a nature reserve now because there were only five people left in it. You know, so that is a problem that would have continued. So, you know, it would have created an existential crisis economically for the GDR in any case. And on top of that, you've got Helmut Kohl, who now sees his own chance to get out. He was in a lot of political trouble in West Germany at the time. His government was looking like it was going to lose the next election. And so he seizes this chance and makes this his moment, comes to East Germany and basically says to people, you know, you're going to live in a free society. You're going to have all of the things that you've always wanted and we're going to create a state.

Don't worry about unemployment.
We'll sort this out.
There will be state support for this.
And I think over promised a lot as well.
This is what leads to a lot of the dissatisfaction,
I think, in the 1990s and early 2000s,
when a fifth of the East German working population is unemployed.
But basically Kohl said this wasn't going to happen.
So to many people, it looked like certainly, you know,
when you get into the spring of 1990, it looked like,
why would you hold on to this old state that was so calcified
and wouldn't change when you can join the state that we've viewed
through like television adverts and TV shows
and our Western relatives for so long as this kind of Western utopia.
And looking back at it now, you know, it's vanished.
It's gone.
Do you think it has left a long-term legacy?
Will the experiences of the fact that a portion of Germany
was a separate country for as long as it was,
do you think it will permanently mark Germany
or will the waters close over it completely?
I think it will for some time.
I mean, you know, when you think about the society that they created,
it was a completely different one from West Germany
and you still see that now in any statistic that you look at.
You know, you can look at anything from voting patterns
to vaccine acceptance, attitudes towards Russia,
how much wine people drink, how young their parents are,
old their parents, anything that you look at statistically,
you put that onto a map of Germany
and you see the old border reappearing, which I find fascinating.
It's like the sort of after image you blink
and it just doesn't go away.
I grew up with both of my parents in full-time employment.
It was perfectly normal for me to walk out of my primary school
at like midday with a key in my hand and walk home
and just cook my own dinner and get on with things.
That would never have occurred to most West German mothers
to sort of do that, you know, at the age of like seven, eight, nine,
to allow their children to do that.
It leaves a legacy.
It leaves a culture and I think like a sort of sociological legacy
to some extent as well as a wider society has changed
and people individually have changed, I think,

and they pass that on.

So East Germans once still get their children earlier than West Germans because they're used to that from their own background.

It's economically more difficult now to do that, but many still aim to have their children say in their sort of mid-20s rather than in their 30s, which is happening in what was Western Germany.

So those may all seem small points, but they're still there and they will, I think, perpetuate for a while longer.

And do you personally ever feel East German?

Yes, in those cultural senses I just talked about.

So it's things like East Germans, for instance, are more likely to shake hands with people when they meet them.

So you come into a room, you stick your hand out and everyone just looks at you like, you know, we don't do this and this is even before COVID, you know, people in West Germany would just sort of wave their hand and say hello into a room as you introduce yourself and do that or you take your shoes off.

It's an East German thing when you go into somebody's flat or house before you go in.

And again, that's not something that West Germans tend to do.

They tend to sort of just wipe them and then go in and wait to be asked whether to take them off or keep them on.

It's little things like this.

So what you're basically saying is West Germans are unfriendly and unethical.

You heard it here.

I wouldn't go quite that far, but...

Yeah, that's what you said. Listen, you can't throw back from that now.

Well, Ketchy, thanks so much.

And your book, Beyond the Wall, East Germany, 1949 to 1990 is out now fascinating.

I mean, really fascinating.

It's about something that I turned out I didn't know anything about at all, but I thought I vaguely did.

So thanks so much.

Yeah, thank you, Ketchy.

I'll feed you Zane, everybody.

Tschüss.

Tschüss.

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