



West of the Wall

Marcia Preston

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An act of desperation divides a mother and her child. Only an act of faith can reunite them. Trudy Hulst has no idea if her husband survived his attempted escape past the newly constructed Berlin Wall, but she knows too well the consequences of his actions. Now branded the wife of a defector, she faces a life in prison. With no real choice, she is forced to follow, praying she can find a way to claim their child once she's in West Berlin. Surviving her harrowing break for freedom, Trudy learns the truth about her husband. Left to wander the wall like a ghost, she lives for brief glimpses of her son, stranded behind barbed wire and surrounded by armed soldiers. And Trudy knows she will do anything to get him back.

West of the Wall Details

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Evangeline says

The Berlin wall is not something I have read an awful lot about, so this was an interesting read for me. Unfortunately, the plot took a turn toward the ridiculous near the middle when Garret Thompson entered the action, but I was still kept enthralled throughout. Some of the characterisation was really good, particularly 'the baddy'. The whole obsession he had with cuckoo-clocks was both ironic and fitting with his crazy character!

Worth a read, but ultimately a bit of a letdown compared with the other Marcia Preston novel I have read, 'The Butterfly House', which has become a personal favourite.

Katrina says

Loved, Loved, Loved this book! I picked this up in the Heathrow airport because I needed something to read on my long journey home. I could not put it down. I was emotionally involved in the story from the first page. How can you not be sympathetic to a quest to reunite a family torn apart by the Berlin Wall?

Robyn Gibson says

Definitely on my Top Ten List. Trudy and family live in West Berlin. Her husband has no choice but to cross the Wall and she finds she must follow or go to prison. So Trudy takes the risk and is in East Berlin while her baby son is with his grandmother is on the other side of the Wall. Wonderful writing, wonderful story.

Camille says

[I could have done without Trudy going to the United States. What did it achieve? She got nothing out of it. I feel it was not necessary for the novel. I was also annoyed by the constant reminder about Schweinheudt's love of clocks. I didn't see the point of this either. (hide spoiler)]

Liesbeth says

Starting in East Berlin, not long after the construction of the hated wall, the story has a solid beginning. Foundations are laid for good character developments, and the scene is vivid. This part drew me in instantly. I felt I was there, it was very good. So far so good. But then there is a long, rather pointless, stretch in America, which really doesn't bring anything to the book apart from filling up pages, and drawing on the authors knowledge of the USA. Thankfully, back to Berlin we go, and back to a good book. It becomes an enjoyable read again. It's as if the author had a beginning and end in mind, but had not got much idea of how to fill in the middle part of the book.

Frances says

An uncomplicated read, this book can be neatly split into parts - the German part, which was interesting and moved the plot on, and the American part, which seemed a bit superfluous and more than a bit far-fetched. It did make me interested in going to Berlin, though, so it must have had an effect ;)

Bran says

this has become one of my favorites. I had to put it down and spend a couple hours on/off crying. usually reading about the Nazi occupation, this turned the tables in my mind. my deepest sympathies for every German who lived through the wall and its separation of families and friends. I cannot fathom. yet, let this be a lesson to Israel (but I doubt it.)

Georgina Hynd says

In the middle of the story of a young mother separated from her baby by the atrocity that was the Berlin Wall, the author moves the story to America. Whether she was trying to make some attempt at proving evil is not only unique to a communist nation but can be found in a power hungry capitalist country too, or just padding the story, I don't know; I do know though that it didn't work. It's an easy read, and does send your memory back to what you know of the wall, but wasn't particularly engaging. The characters just didn't feel German enough.

Suzy says

An enjoyable read following at first, a man fleeing to the west, then we pick up the story from his wife's perspective as she is left behind in the east. The story faltered a little for me in the middle when I felt Trudy acted out of character and I didn't enjoy it when the storyline took us outside of Berlin. However when we got back to the core story of trying to reunite family, it was a fast paced sprint to the end.

Dawn says

I really enjoyed this book as it combines an emotional story of a mothers' love for her child and the lengths she will go to to protect him with the real life trauma that the people of Berlin went through in the years of the Berlin wall. There is a section that is quite far fetched but it does give the novel a more modern edge.

Janet says

Closer to a 4 than a 3. An enjoyable read. Not heavy and kept moving.

Alisa says

Hmm. I'm in two minds as to what to think of this book. It is unique for me in that, while I didn't find it particularly good, it did tug at my heartstrings and I had tears in my eyes at the end. Unusual, considering that up until the last chapter I was all set on giving this just two stars.

So here's what I didn't like about the book:

1. First off, if you are very familiar with Germany and its history, then you will be disappointed. I'm not sure how much time the author herself actually spent in Germany or how thorough her research was, but apart from the story taking place in Berlin and the significant role of the Wall, the characters could have been anywhere. It just didn't feel German.
2. The German words and phrases thrown in here and there didn't help either, in fact they irritated me, particularly as they weren't always accurate.
3. I have lived in Germany for over 20 years now - also in the former GDR - and have listened to people's first-hand accounts on what it was like to live in the GDR back then and about people's experiences of the Stasi, etc. I don't think the author did a very good job in portraying this authentically in my opinion.
4. The one thing I really hated was the "America" part of the story. This is where I was strongly tempted to give up on the book. I don't want to add too many spoilers but I just skimmed through this part as it was absolutely ridiculous. The whole situation would never have happened in real life. I know it's "only" a novel but this part was just too far-fetched for words.
5. The writing isn't brilliant.

So what was there to like?

Basically, the mother-son story worked well. I think anybody with children would be hard put not to feel anything for Trudy or Stefan. I did get somewhat emotional here and there was a good build-up of tension each time Trudy tried to become reunited with her son.

To sum up, the author had a good idea for a story but it was poorly executed. I do believe she can write novels about relationships very well. I'm sure this is a great story for people who know little about Germany or its history and aren't sitting there like I did finding flaws. It was a great storyline that simply needed so much more substance. Instead of concentrating on the America part midway, the author should have devoted more of the book to life in Berlin, found some kind of sub-plot there. Goodness knows there was enough going on there at the time.

I'm giving this 3 stars because I finished it and it did touch me emotionally. I recommend it if you're looking for a story that pulls at your heartstrings but if you want something with more substance about East/West Berlin, then leave well alone.

Helen says

Promised a lot but didn't deliver. Any historical and cultural aspects of Germany from this time were drowned out by the very loud American voice of the author. I tried to lose myself in the period but was slapped in the face every 2 minutes by Americanisms which ruined the book for me. Even when translating German into English there is such a thing as European English. Sidewalks, blocks and slacks have no place in Berlin in the early 1960s!

Nova says

I read any book about the Berlin Wall that I come across and this one did not disappoint. While the writing itself is not brilliant the story is gripping and gives insight into the lives of people caught on the wrong side of the wall, and families separated by the wall. I admired Trudy, the main character, as she refused to compromise on her principles just to be with her son.

Lucy Dodsworth says

I came across West of the Wall while I was planning my trip to Berlin. It tells the story of a family in the 1960s divided by the Berlin Wall. East German Trudy's husband helps people escape to the West, but when he's identified by the Stasi, he has to escape himself. She is left behind with her baby son, but has to cross the wall too as she risks being sent to prison as the wife of a defector. The story then follows her heartbreaking attempts to try and get back her son, who she had to leave behind in the East with her mother-in-law. The book gets a bit far-fetched in the middle when Trudy heads off to America to get help, but the details of life in the divided city and how former friends and neighbours became enemies on different sides are fascinating, especially if you've been to Berlin and seen the locations in real life.
