

**GLOBAL FEMINISMS
COMPARATIVE CASE STUDIES OF
WOMEN'S ACTIVISM AND SCHOLARSHIP**

SITE: GERMANY

**Transcript of
Manu Giese
Interviewers: Sławomira Walczewska**

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Manu Giese, born 1960, trade union employee at HBV (Union of Retail, Bank & Insurance, later ver.di). She came into contact with the women's movement when she was a teenager and had been active in the women's occupied house at Potsdamer Straße 139 in Berlin-Schöneberg since 1981. She belonged to the responsible group of women who, with the help of state subsidies and a great deal of self-help and work, renovated the house from the ground up. In 1986 the BEGiNE -Meeting Place & Culture for Women was opened in those premises. She lived in the house until 1998 and was active in self-administration (e.g. as a board member of the house association). She is also active in the BEGiNE as owner of the women's pub (1986 -1998 and again since 2004).

Sławomira Walczewska, born 1960, feminist activist and philosopher (PhD). In 1999, Walczewska published *Ladies, Knights and Feminists: Feminist Discourse in Poland*, the first Polish book about the history of women's emancipation in Poland from a cultural perspective. That book was nominated, as one of 20 books, for the most prestigious book award in Poland at that time, NIKE, in 2000. She is author of ca. 50 articles about feminism and history of the women's movement. She was teaching history of philosophy at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow (1985-1990), history of feminist ideas at the Warsaw University (1997), at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow (2000) and the feminist critics of history at the Viadrina University in Frankfurt a/O (2019).

In 1991 she co-founded the eFKa- Women's Foundation, one of the first feminist organizations in post-socialist Poland. She edited the feminist magazine "Pełnym Głosem" (*In Full Voice*, 1993-1997) and was member of the editorial board of *Zadra*, the feminist quarterly (1999 - 2018). She is director of the Feminist Institute for Research and Education (www.efka.org.pl/fibe).

Sławomira Walczewska: That feminism had somehow manifested itself in your life, that you had met with such an odd idea. When did it happen? In what way? You can tell as you like. You can also tell about the earliest childhood.

Manu Giese : Well, it starts in my earliest childhood. In 1974, at the age of 14, I was the first time in the first women's pub in Berlin,¹ in the Blocksberg.² It opened in 1974 and was the first women's pub after the '20ies, there were many women's pubs here in Berlin. A women's pub of the movement, so to speak, the women's movement. When I was 16 I ran away from home and had my own apartment and had to do an apprenticeship that I didn't want, as an office assistant, that's what it was called at that time. Today I think this is called, I don't know what it is called today. And I had to earn extra money because that wasn't enough.

The 300 D-Mark³ that I received at that time as an apprenticeship grant was not enough. So in '77 I started to work in the Zwei ("Two"), the women's discotheque.⁴ The Zwei was

¹ Berlin is the capital of and largest city in Germany, near the north-east of the country. After World War II, from 1945-1989, the city was split into Allied Powers-controlled West and Soviet-controlled East sectors. ("Berlin". Wikipedia. Accessed May 23, 2020. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin>)

² Blocksberg was a lesbian bar in Berlin, and has transitioned to a punk bar called Risiko. ("West Berlin in the 1980s". Goethe. Accessed May 24, 2020. <https://www.goethe.de/en/kul/mol/20376480.html>)

³ D-Marks, or Deutsche marks (DM) were the official currency of West Germany from 1948-1990, when it became the official currency of the whole unified Germany until 2002. As of 1999, the exchange rate with euros is set at DM 1.956=€1. ("Deutsche Mark". Wikipedia. Accessed May 24, 2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deutsche_Mark) \$167.25 USD today. ("Currency Converter". CoinMill. Accessed May 24, 2020. https://coinmill.com/DEM_USD.html#DEM=300)

⁴ A discotheque is a nightclub where people dance. ("disocheque". Wiktionary. Accessed May 24, 2020. <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/discotheque>)

in Martin-Luther-Straße⁵ at the corner of Motzstraße⁶ and was a place run by Crystal Rieselberg, who had always had women's pubs in her life. Club 10 in the Vorbergstraße,⁷ then she also had a pet shop in the meantime.

She ran a women's discotheque there and it was still in its baby shoes. There was a dance floor and the records were behind the counter, so there were single record players, for singles, where the records dropped down, a record changer for ten records⁸ it was called. Until I discovered that above the dance floor there were loudspeakers in the suspended ceiling.

Then there was also a small corner where Crystal had an aquarium. We took that away and underneath were two turntables, all connected to the speakers in the ceiling. So we made a proper little discotheque out of it. I learned from scratch at the beginning. First I was allowed to handle the wardrobe, like taking the coats from the women and giving them the chips.

Then I stepped up and was allowed to clean away the ashtrays and empty glasses. With every step further I was allowed to take orders and the last one was to tend the bar and serve the tables. Until I discovered that thing with the turntables and then we built in this tiny locker, because it was a really small locker room with the two turntables in it, a shelf in the back where we put all the singles and then I played music.

That was until about '79 because I didn't pass my apprenticeship because I refused to learn stenography.⁹ Because in my company they didn't use any stenography at all, everything was already being dictated. So there was no steno and I somehow rejected it. I've always been like that, if I didn't like something, I just didn't do it.

So I didn't complete my apprenticeship, basically I don't have any qualifications. Then in 1979 I got a replacement job, also in the office, at Arbeit und Leben ("Work and Life").¹⁰ At that time, Arbeit und Leben was an educational community between the Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund ("German Federation of Trade Unions")¹¹ and the Volkshochschulen

⁵ Martin-Luther-Strasse is a major north-south street in Berlin in Schoeneberg, Berlin's traditionally LGBT district. ("Martin-Luther-Strasse (Berlin)". Wikipedia. Accessed May 23, 2020. [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin-Luther-Stra%C3%9Fe_\(Berlin\)](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin-Luther-Stra%C3%9Fe_(Berlin)))

⁶ Motzstrasse is a street in Berlin in Schoeneberg district, known for its LGBT+ friendly atmosphere. ("Motzstrasse". Wikipedia. Accessed May 23, 2020. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Motzstra%C3%9Fe>)

⁷ Vorbergstrasse is a street in the Schoneberg district in Berlin, near the south east of the city. (Google Maps. Accessed May 24, 2020.)

⁸ A record changer is a device that plays multiple records in sequence without intervention, in this case playing 10 records in a row. ("Record changer." Wikipedia. Accessed May 24, 2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Record_changer)

⁹ Stenography is the practice of writing in shorthand, with a particular code to be mutually understood by notetakers and note readers. ("Shorthand". Wikipedia. Accessed May 23, 2020. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shorthand>)

¹⁰ Arbeit und Leben ("Work and Life") is a German federal training facility for political and social educational work. ("Arbeit und Leben". Accessed May 23, 2020. <https://www.arbeitundleben.de/>)

¹¹ Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund ("German Federation of Trade Unions") is an umbrella organization for eight German trade unions, coordinating joint demands and activities among unions. ("German Trade Union Confederation". Wikipedia. Accessed May 23, 2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Trade_Union_Confederation)

("Adult Education Schools").¹² We went on educational trips to France and Greece, where you could take educational vacation.

We also had a so-called East-West Office, where groups from West Germany were guided to East Berlin. The Berlin Wall¹³ was standing and that was not so easy. You always needed visas and permits and stuff like that. But I had little to do with the East-West Office, I rather did the educational trips to France and Greece and was also a tour guide in Greece.

I was the youngest tour guide in history, but in cooperation with Greek colleagues. And politics, those were always political educational trips, where we met with this parties, in Greece with the PASOK Party.¹⁴ Or in France with the CGT,¹⁵ that was a big trade union. All this time I kept working in the Zwei on weekends. I was in the Blocksberg area, went to the LAZ, the Lesbian Action Center West Berlin.¹⁶

I didn't always understand totally what they discussed there, because they always had a tone I don't have, because I only went to secondary school. With a high school diploma though, but this lofty language I never really understood. In the LAZ I was less often, but instead in Blocksberg and then in Zwei ("Two"). Then the squatting started, which started at the end of the '70ies. So I came to work here in this house. Everything besides my 40-hours job by the way.

So this house was once squatted and in the beginning we were five women. The house was not habitable, but we did-- There was a program of the Berlin Senate¹⁷ at that time, I must admit, at that time it was still a SPD ("Social Democratic Party")¹⁸ Senate. They had set up a project and supported 10 houses that were occupied with funds so that the houses could be renovated.

For this purpose a so-called inventory had to be made and as a result of this inventory we got the highest funding, namely 2 million D-Marks,¹⁹ because we had the dry rot up to the

¹² Volkshochschulen ("Adult Educational Schools") are non-profit centers for adult and further education available to everyone age 16 and older. They are not universities, but are seen more as community training centers.

("Volkshochschule". Wikipedia. Accessed May 23, 2020. <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Volkshochschule>)

¹³ The Berlin Wall stood from 1961-1989 as a guarded physical barrier between East Berlin and West Berlin, with the purpose of preventing travel between the two sectors, especially from West to East. ("Berlin Wall". Wikipedia.

Accessed May 23, 2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin_Wall)

¹⁴ The PASOK Party, or the Panhellenic Socialist Movement, is a social-democratic political party in Greece, and was one of the biggest left-wing parties. ("PASOK". Wikipedia. Accessed May 23, 2020.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PASOK>)

¹⁵ The CGT, or General Confederation of Labor, is a national trade union center in France. ("General Confederation of Labour (France)". Wikipedia. Accessed May 23, 2020.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_Confederation_of_Labour_\(France\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_Confederation_of_Labour_(France)))

¹⁶ The LAZ, or Lesbian Action Center West Berlin, was one of the first lesbian organizations in Germany, with the purpose of serving as a means of connecting lesbian women and facilitating women's rights organizing. ("About the Group." LAZ Reloaded. Accessed May 23, 2020. <https://www.laz-reloaded.de/%C3%BCber-den-verein/>)

¹⁷ The Berlin Senate is the executive governing body of Berlin, and consists of the Governing Mayor of Berlin and up to eight appointed senators. ("Senate of Berlin". Wikipedia. Accessed May 23, 2020.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Senate_of_Berlin)

¹⁸ The SPD ("Social Democratic Party") is a social-democratic, pro-European political party in Germany. ("Social Democratic Party of Germany." Wikipedia. Accessed May 23, 2020.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_Democratic_Party_of_Germany)

¹⁹ \$1,115,026.03 USD today. ("Currency Converter". CoinMill. Accessed May 24, 2020.

https://coinmill.com/DEM_USD.html#DEM=300)

roof, the house dry rot. This was due to the fact that there used to be a public swimming pool in the basement because there were no bathrooms or showers in Berlin.

Anyway, there was no ventilation down there and so the dry rot had reached the roof. The house also stood empty for decades, it once did belong to the Neue Heimat ("New Homeland").²⁰ I can't say exactly, but for 10 or 15 years it stood empty and the windows were broken and of course more humidity came in. Then we renovated it for three and a half years on every evening and weekend.

In the end, the crazy thing was that we also had many contractors, of course, but the dirty work we had to do by ourselves. So bringing the whole rubble from the attic down. All the garbage, all the rubble. I don't know how many cubic meters of containers we brought from the yard to the street into the container so that they would be picked up.

That's it. That was all the preparatory work so that the contractors could continue to work. The special thing in the end was that we had to find contractors that waited three to four months for their money because we had a so-called construction approval every three months. There was a list, where every door handle, every window handle, every socket was listed and after three months there was construction approval and then we checked off what is done. Only for what we had done we got the money so that we could only then pay the contractors.

The roofing and the riser pipes²¹ were larger sums. That was a better thing. But these small painting jobs, varnishing doors, varnishing windows, these are all lint jobs, there wasn't much money either. For example, we had to redo all the slots here. We had to install new power lines all over the place. We had to make the slots. There was a machine that weighed 25 kilos²² on its own and this machine had such a gear wheel in it and you had to press it with 25 kilos on the ceiling under the wall, switch it on, that you get the slots then.

Of course we couldn't do that, we didn't manage it. So of course we needed three times as much time. It was so crazy. All that with 40 or 45 hours of work besides, then spending every evening here and then getting home dirty. It took three and a half years and then we were done and then there was also this room down here. It used to be a pub, too. Then we actually wanted to make an association pub, because this is a society here. We founded this association, the Verein zur Entwicklung neuer Lebensqualitäten für Frauen e.V. ("Association for the Development of New Qualities of Life for Women").²³ Then we also found a woman, a Dutch woman, who was willing to run this café here.

²⁰Neue Heimat (New Homeland) was a German non-profit construction and housing company from 1926-1990. ("Neue Heimat". Wikipedia. Accessed May 23, 2020. https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neue_Heimat)

²¹A riser pipe is a vertical pipe made of metal or plastic used to carry water, oil, gas, etc. in a building. ("riser pipe". Vocabulary. Accessed May 23, 2020. <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/riser%20pipe>)

²² 55.12 pounds. (convertunits.com. Accessed May 23, 2020.)

²³ Verein zur Entwicklung neuer Lebensqualitäten für Frauen e.V. ("Association for the Development of New Qualities of Life for Women") was founded in 1981 to improve quality of life for women by providing housing and connecting women through meeting spaces to share culture. ("Potsdamer Strasse". GSE gGmbH. Accessed May 23, 2020. <http://www.gsegmbh.de/index.php/handlungsfelder/treuhandauftrag/83-handlungsfelder/treuhandauftrag/92-potsdam>)

Since she was a foreigner, however, she did not obtain any concessions at the time. The concession to serve drinks. Then Ulrike Röhr,²⁴ who also worked a lot in the house, took over the concessions, so that the pub could open. We had opened up and didn't have any concessions yet. Of course someone came right away. Then we opened the BEGiNE²⁵ on October 3rd or 5th, 1986. You have to imagine, this area of Potsdamer Strasse²⁶ was a red-light district²⁷ and the houses weren't actually residential houses here, but all hotels by the hour.

We had a great relationship with the prostitutes. They were really glad that we opened up here, because here they could get in without the pimp or a client following them and strangely enough we never got into serious problems with men, or that they wanted to enter or something. There were maybe two or three situations though. But after 33 years two three situations is just very little. So I was always connected with pubs and with the Women's Movement so to speak and finally kept the concessions. The BEGiNE was once leased out for four or five years.

There was a restaurant at this place, but after the changeover from DM to Euro they adopted it one to one and then they didn't last much longer, because it was just too expensive. Before a soup was 5 Marks, now they wanted 5 Euro for it. That is 10 D-Marks.²⁸ Impossible. In the meantime I moved out here. I also lived 14 years in this house. Because I was transferred professionally to the Black Forest I moved to the Black Forest²⁹ and in the time the BEGiNE was leased out, they made a restaurant out of it and I didn't own the concessions in these five years.

Then the operators of the restaurant had the concessions and then I came back in 2001 or 2002, I don't know exactly when. Then Verdi³⁰ was founded, I worked for the Trade Union, the Union of Trade, Banking and Insurance.³¹ And then Verdi was founded, where five individual trade unions were practically merged into one trade union. The trade union HWV - Handel, Banken und Versicherungen ("Trade, Banking and Insurance"), the

²⁴ Ulrike Röhr is a gender and climate activist from Berlin. ("Ulrike Röhr". Speakerinnen. Accessed May 24, 2020. <https://speakerinnen.org/en/profiles/ulrike-rohr>)

²⁵ BEGiNE is a cultural center on Potsdamer Strasse in Berlin designed as a meeting space for German women to discuss culture, literature, music, etc. It hosts events and parties, and is a pro-LGBT+ organization. ("Begine". Visit Berlin. Accessed May 23, 2020. <https://www.visitberlin.de/en/begine>)

²⁶ Potsdamer Strasse is a major east-west street in Berlin that crosses Potsdam Square, lined with many shops. ("Potsdamer Platz". Wikipedia. Accessed May 23, 2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Potsdamer_Platz)

²⁷ Red light districts are areas associated with the sex industry, including prostitution, sex shops, and strip clubs. ("List of red-light districts". Wikipedia. Accessed May 23, 2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_red-light_districts)

²⁸ \$5.58 USD today. ("Currency Converter". CoinMill. Accessed May 24, 2020. https://coinmill.com/DEM_USD.html#DEM=300)

²⁹ Black Forest is a large mountain range in southwest Germany. ("Black Forest". Wikipedia. Accessed May 23, 2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Forest)

³⁰ Verdi is a German trade union established in 2001 in Germany, and is currently the second largest trade union. ("ver.di". Wikipedia. Accessed May 23, 2020. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ver.di>)

³¹ HWV - Handel, Banken und Versicherungen The Union of Trade, Banking and Insurance was a trade union representing commerce and finance workers in Germany. In 2001 it merged with other trade unions to form Verdi. ("Trade, Banking and Insurance Union". Wikipedia. Accessed May 23, 2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trade,_Banking_and_Insurance_Union)

Postal Union,³² the DAG ("German Employees Union"),³³ ÖTV ("Union for Public Services, Transport & Traffic")³⁴ and IG Medien ("IG Media").³⁵

Then Verdi was founded and then it was clear Verdi, so it was previously unclear whether Verdi's headquarters would be in Berlin, and then it happened and then I was transferred back to Berlin. Which was fine with me, of course, although I wouldn't want to miss the five years or four and a half years of the Black Forest. Anyway, I continued to work for Verdi and here was the pub. In the end I always took the fall for something. But nothing ever happened, I had full confidence in the women who did this, that they weren't doing anything irregular or something.

Now since 2008 I am seriously sick, I am on disability pension. I've been in the hospital for three and a half months and it wasn't easy. But because Barbara Hoyer worked in culture, she always had an overview of what was going on here.³⁶ And since I've been feeling better, I'm here again regularly and take care of technical matters and office stuff. I don't stand behind the bar anymore. Only in emergencies or on Christmas Eve, because we are always open on Christmas Eve. It is always relatively well visited. Then once a year I still stand behind the bar.

We had on the first floor, and I think, in the second, at the very beginning, the project Wildwasser ("Wild Water")³⁷ and Hydra.³⁸ Hydra is a project that took care of prostitutes and Wildwasser took care of raped girls and abused girls. They had to get out also because when we started to renovate properly, the apartments were no longer usable, so to speak, and the house. When we were finished, we had one floor or half a floor.

These are all about 180-square meter apartments, which go from front to back. Then we had an apartment as an aftercare apartment from the women's shelter. Women from the women's shelter lived there with their children, in a shared apartment, so to speak. Because they could stay in the women's shelter only for a limited time and then they needed apartments. And we provided a complete apartment here, where of course they also paid rent. And we had a whole floor in the house, a supervised girls' residential community for girls who came from difficult backgrounds.

³² The Postal Union was a trade union representing postal workers in Germany. In 2001 it merged with other trade unions to form Verdi. ("German Postal Union". Wikipedia. Accessed May 23, 2020.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Postal_Union)

³³ DAG ("German Employee's Union") was an independent trade union based in Hamburg, Germany representing career-oriented workers. In 2001 it merged with other trade unions to form Verdi. ("German Salaried Employee's Union". Wikipedia. Accessed May 23, 2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Salaried_Employees%27_Union)

³⁴ ÖTV ("Union for Public Services, Transportation and Traffic") was a trade union representing transport and public service workers in Germany. In 2001 it merged with other trade unions to form Verdi. ("Public Services, Transport and Traffic Union". Wikipedia. Accessed May 23, 2020.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_Services_Transport_and_Traffic_Union)

³⁵ IG Medien ("IG Media") was a trade union representing printing, paper, journalism, and arts workers in Germany. In 2001 it merged with other trade unions to form Verdi. ("Media Union". Wikipedia. Accessed May 23, 2020.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Media_Union)

³⁶ The Global Feminisms Project has an interview with Barbara Hoyer on the German Interview site.

³⁷ Wildwasser, founded in 1983, is a non-profit that works to fight sexual violence against girls and women in Germany. Its primary work is providing advice and information to women and girls experiencing sexual violence. ("Wildwasser (Verein)". Wikipedia. Accessed May 23, 2020. [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wildwasser_\(Verein\)](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wildwasser_(Verein)))

³⁸ Hydra, founded in 1980, is a self-help and advocacy group for prostitutes in Germany. Its primary work is providing counseling services, education and information, and lobbying for political change for the protection of prostitutes. ("Hydra (association)". Wikipedia. Accessed May 23, 2020. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hydra_\(association\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hydra_(association)))

Not necessarily that they were abused, but from difficult backgrounds, and that still exists today, this supervised girls' shared apartment. There usually live the girls from 16 to 18 years. I remember that there was also Pelze-Multimedia ("Fur-Multimedia")³⁹ next door. The shop was called Pelze because the old neon sign was still on the outside. In former times there was a fur shop in it. Pelze-Multimedia was a project that tried out, where women could also throw paint on the wall, with paint bags, and I know what, like, do art, or, uh, I don't know. Anyway, it was completely different. We were the lower BEGiNE and Pelze-Multimedia were the fancy ones, with their fancy ideas.

There was also a dark room over there in the Pelze, in the basement downstairs. I was never down there. But I think where women could have sex. Pelze was also promoted, just like the BEGiNE culture, which is still promoted today by the Berlin Senate. We received subsidies for rent and electricity, and there were still remunerations⁴⁰ at that time. Then there was such a huge cut in the Berlin Senate. All these funds were totally cut back. The BEGiNE had before one and a half positions and then only a half. Remunerations were cut. That was really terrible. Tamara Multhaupt⁴¹ had this full position. She then quit because she didn't want half a job.

She couldn't afford it and Barbara took over half the job. Pelze fell victim to the cutbacks. Pelze then had to give up. They couldn't hold on any longer. Also great was for example Rita Eichelkraut,⁴² who also played in various women's bands, who founded a girls' band with girls from the girls' shared apartment, who then also performed in Pelze. With a drummer and guitarist, and I don't know what else was there. Anyway, those were really exciting times. The girls got totally out of themselves, so to speak, and that was great. That was really fun.

When we were done, we could start renting out the apartments. Everything was rented quite quickly because the rents were also very cheap. Because we did so much ourselves, because we did work for half a million D-Marks⁴³ without actually getting the money, so to speak. In other words, two and a half million D-Marks⁴⁴ went into this house without it being possible to live in it again. The house was finished. We were finished in '86. '87 the Berlin Senate offered us this house for sale. Because it belongs to the Senate. Not to the women who live in it.

At that time, Ulrike Röhr and I were the only ones who were having a steady job. The house was supposed to cost 120,000 D-Mark.⁴⁵ We wanted to buy it. But then we were badly insulted by the other housemates that we are capitalist pigs. And then we let it go and I could still bite my ass today that we didn't do that. Because we could have taken

³⁹ Pelze-Multimedia ("Fur Multimedia") is a art and filmmaking space for feminist artists in a former fur shop in Postdamer Strasse. ("Pelze Multimedia." gleisreick-blog. Accessed May 24, 2020. <https://gleisdreieck-blog.de/events/pelze-multimedia/>)

⁴⁰ Remuneration is pay or financial compensation for a service performed. ("Remuneration". Wikipedia. Accessed May 23, 2020. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Remuneration>)

⁴¹ The Global Feminisms Project has an interview with Tamara Multhaupt on the German Interview site.

⁴² Rita Eichelkraut was a guitarist in the German women's band Lysistrara. ("Women's bands". Feminist Berlin. Accessed May 24, 2020. <https://feministberlin.de/kultur/frauenbands/>)

⁴³ \$278,756.51 USD today. ("Currency Converter". CoinMill. Accessed May 24, 2020. https://coinmill.com/DEM_USD.html#DEM=300)

⁴⁴ \$1,393,782.53 USD today. ("Currency Converter". CoinMill. Accessed May 24, 2020. https://coinmill.com/DEM_USD.html#DEM=300)

⁴⁵ \$66,901.56 USD today. ("Currency Converter". CoinMill. Accessed May 24, 2020. https://coinmill.com/DEM_USD.html#DEM=300)

out a mortgage on the house, and then we would have had this house. Because now it still belongs to the Senate. We would have had a lot of capital, close to Potsdamer Platz.⁴⁶

The thing is, we were very young. When I started here I was 21. Last year we didn't do it. But we try to do it once a year. I digitized all the slides, a presentation of the house as it once looked, and also a bit of history. During the construction phase we went to the archives to learn something about this house. That was quite interesting, because Lina Morgenstern also lived here. There is also a commemorative plaque here at the house. She was the co-founder of the people's kitchens and she was very politically engaged.⁴⁷ To add it to the history of the house.

In the back there is still a garden of more than 2,000 square meters and in this garden there was always a clinic for female diseases. This was the nurses' home. But the clinic was torn down. I also don't know exactly when this house was built, because we couldn't find out exactly. We also did not find anything who lived in this house during the National Socialism.⁴⁸ It was interesting that this house always had something to do with women.

Clinic for women's diseases, nurses' home. That's really fascinating. Outside on the street there is also a plaque. "A place of the women's movement" is now written on it. I think that's really great. We will celebrate our 33th birthday this year. 33 years the BEGiNE, and that is unfortunately now the only women's pub in Berlin. Because all the others unfortunately closed. Let's take a short break. I got to know the silence in the Black Forest, because I lived 35 years of my life actually only on main roads and we had no soundproof windows here at that time yet.

I had always requested them in the house meetings, but it was rejected. I hardly moved out when they installed the soundproof windows here. No, but I lived in the Black Forest in a village with 260 inhabitants and had real problems to fall asleep at first, because it was so quiet. So, no street noise, no car traffic, nothing at all. But after I got used to it, I also got upset when the tractor drove by early on Saturdays or Sundays.

In any case, I didn't want to live in the city anymore, because I actually learned to appreciate living in the countryside. And then at the beginning I lived in such a furnished one-room apartment here in the Bülowstraße,⁴⁹ because I first had to look for something and this apartment was then also paid by Verdi. And then I--, at that time I was with Barbara, we moved to Erkner.⁵⁰ There we found a small house with a view into the

⁴⁶ Potsdamer Platz ("Postdam Square") is an important public square in the center of Berlin, as it marks the point where the road from the city of Potsdam passed through the Berlin Wall. ("Potsdamer Platz". Wikipedia. Accessed May 23, 2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Potsdamer_Platz)

⁴⁷ The Berlin Association of People's Kitchens was established in 1866 by women's rights activist Lina Morgenstern to promote women functioning outside the home by employing them to equip and maintain the kitchen. ("Lina Morgenstern". Jewish Women's Archive. Accessed May 24, 2020. <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/morgenstern-lina>)

⁴⁸ The National Socialism refers to Nazism. ("Nazism". Wikipedia. Accessed May 24, 2020. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazism>)

⁴⁹ Bulowstrasse is a street in Berlin and a train station (U-station) in the Schoenberg district. ("Bulowstrasse (Berline U-Bahn)". Wikipedia. Accessed May 23, 2020. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/B%C3%BClowstra%C3%9Fe_\(Berlin_U-Bahn\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/B%C3%BClowstra%C3%9Fe_(Berlin_U-Bahn)))

⁵⁰ Erkner is a smaller town on the south-eastern edge of Berlin in the Brandenburg district. ("Erkner". Wikipedia. Accessed May 23, 2020. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erkner>)

landscape protection area, so that it was clear, here must not be built on and there we lived together until we separated.

Then I always commuted from Erkner to work. And Barbara started while the foundation Verdi--, of course, because many were from Hamburg,⁵¹ they had to move to Berlin. From Stuttgart,⁵² from Düsseldorf,⁵³ because there were the individual main administrations of the individual unions. And then we, I was in the workers' council of Verdi at that time, and then we concluded an agreement that the married couple, spouse or partner would be employed primarily for a limited period at Verdi and then Barbara also had a job at Verdi for two years and we could have made it permanent, but she didn't want it. She preferred to do the BEGiNE here again and so she quit, and then took over the cultural work here again, I think from Marion.

And that's why I had to leave Berlin and spent four and a half years or three and a half years, two and a half years in the Black Forest, one year in Solingen,⁵⁴ near Düsseldorf, and then back here in Berlin. When did I come back? 2001, 2002? I don't even remember that anymore. No, we left in '98. Then 2000. 2002 we came back, exactly, 2002. Yes, and then I lived in Erkner and then I moved back to Berlin after the break-up, and actually had a pretty nice apartment here on the Red Island, Schöneberg.⁵⁵

In the back building, also totally quiet, quiet side street but then I gave up the idea because then I got so seriously ill. Since 2008 I have been receiving an invalidity pension, which of course is not so high.

My dream has always been to have a motorhome. Travelling around in a motorhome. Then I gave up the apartment and put my furniture in a storage and bought a motorhome. But it all didn't turn out so well, because it's quite expensive. Also this travel is expensive. So the gas and so on, the campsites are not so expensive, but it sums up. That's why I didn't drive as much as I thought I could. Because I always have so much to do in the Begine, I couldn't even be away for three months, that's not possible.

So the longest I've been away, I guess, was six weeks. Everybody envied me and during the six weeks I was also--, so I drove with the motorhome over Holland, Belgium, France, up to Brittany, and then I drove up the whole coast to Denmark.⁵⁶ After four weeks, when I came back from Brittany, I was in Holland and somehow realized that I had to talk to someone. Because if you drive alone and you can't speak French, Belgian or Dutch, then it will be difficult to communicate. And a former colleague lived in Mönchengladbach,⁵⁷ so I made a detour there for three days.

⁵¹ Hamburg is the second largest city in Berlin, in the northern part of Germany. ("Hamburg". Wikipedia. Accessed May 23, 2020. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamburg>)

⁵² Stuttgart is the capital city of the Baden-Württemberg state in Germany in the south-west part of the country. ("Stuttgart". Wikipedia. Accessed May 23, 2020. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stuttgart>)

⁵³ Dusseldorf is the capital city of the North Rhine-Westphalia state in Germany in the west part of the country. ("Dusseldorf". Wikipedia. Accessed May 23, 2020. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/D%C3%BCsseldorf>)

⁵⁴ Solingen is a city in the North Rhine-Westphalia state in Germany in the west part of the country. ("Solingen". Wikipedia. Accessed May 23, 2020. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solingen>)

⁵⁵ Red Island is a neighborhood in the Schoeneberg district of Berlin. ("Rote Insel". Wikipedia. Accessed May 23, 2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rote_Insel)

⁵⁶ Holland (Netherlands), Belgium, and France are countries to the west of Germany. Brittany is a region in the north east of France. Denmark is to the north of Germany. (Google Maps. Accessed may 23, 2020.)

⁵⁷ Monchengladbach is a city in the North Rhine-Westphalia state in germany in the west part of the country. (Monchengladbach". Wikipedia. Accessed May 23, 2020. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M%C3%B6nchengladbach>)

I visited her and then drove on. And that was a great experience, but sometimes driving alone is also very lonely.

Yes, what was great about these 33 years? Many things were wonderful. Prangin Jonker had founded a small house orchestra for women who lived here in the surrounding area. The oldest was, I think, 95. And then we had the stage back here, so a fixed stage, and we always played. That was great. Prangin Jonker also played the violin herself and they have--, so piano, then we had a piano, the grand piano, I don't know if we already had the grand piano. I don't know, that was a long time ago.

And a prostitute asked if she could celebrate her birthday here sometime and then we said: Yes, of course. And then she had told me somehow before, that she really wanted to have the song played, "Johnny, when it's your birthday". And then she sat there in front, I didn't forget that, with her friends and then the orchestra played this song for her. She broke out in tears. She just cried out of sheer happiness. It was so great. It was also so heart-warming. So, it was really wonderful.

Then we had-- oh, we had so many great events. We had another event once, Planet Women. Planet Women who were from five continents, the women. From Australia, New Zealand, England, America. I don't know where they all came from. Anyway it was a really great band and they were in Ireland or Great Britain and wanted to perform here for two days. And we had it all set up, our big mixer and the multicore, and I don't know. We had it all set up and Jives was still here back then. Jives, who did the sound engineering. And who didn't come was Planet Women, the place was packed and they didn't show up. Well, means they didn't come, they celebrated too much in Great Britain and missed their ferry. I think they arrived here two hours late. They came in here and immediately went on stage. We couldn't do a sound check, we couldn't do anything. They were totally off the hook and performed here, but that was great. It was just great.

The next day we were able to do a soundcheck before. And Jives had five heart attacks because they didn't show up and then two hours later they came. And we also had to calm down the women who were sitting out there. But it was awesome. I will never forget this event.

There are so many great events, like the Lesbian Selection, the Pub Quiz, which we have been doing for a few years now. Where women meet for this Pub Quiz, always maximum of four. And where the questions are beamed onto the screen and they had to answer on a piece of paper, and those were really tough. So, really tough, partly. But it is a lot of fun. Or what else do we have? Well, the event here from the--, I can't always pronounce the name properly. Sina Hügen, Hügen or something. They are just great women who perform here. And culture is actually there to promote young talents, so to speak.

That was after all the background. We also had Cathrin Pfeifer here once,⁵⁸ she is a great accordion player. She was so small, she's so big now. So she made it big, it's really great. Many artists who had their first performances here are really famous today, yes. And that's an effort, thanks also to BEGiNE Culture, that we give the artists this freedom to perform here, even if they're unknown. Then, of course, there is the risk that few women

⁵⁸ Cathrin Pfeifer is an accordion player from Berlin. ("cathrin pfeifer". Accessed May 23, 2020. <https://www.cathrin-pfeifer.de/index.en.html>)

will attend. But we also had an open mic once, we called it that. So, open microphone, where they could come and just go on stage and do something.

That was a lot of fun, too. These are really great events, which we do here and which of course also mean a lot of work. And where we sometimes don't know where we get the strength from, to be honest. Well, after Christmas we were somehow finished. We were smashed, so to speak, because we also had really major events. So this event company, BEGiNE, and that was just an incredible amount of work, because it's not just doing the bar here, the culture is actually all the organizing, designing this program, or developing it, arranging the dates. There is so much to do, including the changing exhibitions that take place here. Then something breaks, then it has to be fixed. The bookkeeping has to be done, there is so much to think about.

And simply for the fact that we are so few, it's really-- sometimes I ask myself how we actually manage all that. It's like with the house. After we were finished with all the construction, we were also so completely wasted. Then a year later we looked at the first pictures, what it looked like once and we said: We'll just demolish. But we don't want to modernize any more. So it would have been easier to demolish and rebuild than to modernize. But I can only say that I would do it again and again. To create a place for women where they have a place of retreat, where they can feel safe, where they can get to know women.

We have so many regulars' tables they are getting more and more. Sometimes we don't even know where to put them. And I think that we have this place, I think it's more than important and nowadays it's all the more important that we have such a place. So that there is a place where women can feel at home. When I was 12, I went to secondary school. At the age of 12, in 1972, and I had such ancient teachers in primary school. You know, you had to stand up, and I don't know, sing a violin morning song, and all that crap.

And I come to high school and there is a very young teacher who was still in her year as a trainee teacher. And she stands there, that must have been the first school day in secondary school, and says her name is Sylvia.

And it was all pretty new somehow and we were allowed to call our teachers by their first name. We didn't have to get up when they came in, she was completely insecure, because we all got up, since we didn't know anything else. And there I got to know a different kind of teaching. And with the women's movement I--, I've always been a bit political in school as well. I was a school speaker, a class speaker, always stood up for the oppressed, let's say so, because I myself was just being oppressed at home. That's why I ran away from home when I was 16. But in the end this teacher encouraged me in it.

She also supported me in this, and made sure that the school filed a complaint against my father, because I was so beaten up that I was photographed by the police. My father was not convicted because at that time child abuse was allowed within the family framework, let's say so. But it was quite violent. I left home when I was 16 and was in Blocksberg for the first time when I was 14, because I heard that there was a pub for women. There I was in '74 for the first time and then I ran away from home, had support via the Contact and Counselling Center for young homeless. They got me an apartment because I wasn't legally viable yet. I wasn't actually allowed to sign a rental contract.

They rented vacant apartments for their teenagers. And then I had an apartment on the Kottbusser Damm.⁵⁹ It was already progressive, with an indoor toilet. Not with toilet, toilet on the home stairs. So with an outside toilet. Yes, then I did-- I don't know how long I lived there. Thus I finally joined the women's movement. Because then with 16 I was regularly in Blocksberg. Almost every evening, mostly on weekends, because always after the Blocksberg, I went to the women's discos. And that was when the Zwei had started. I worked one year in the Zwei, every night and so I got stuck in this women's movement. I think I had already fallen in love with my first class teacher in primary school when I was six. I never had anything with men. I don't have anything against men, but they don't have to get in my pants. And so I joined the women's movement A) and became a lesbian B). That's what I've always been, so to speak.

SW: And the father. We don't have to go on there...

MG: He's dead, I don't care. They are all dead.

SW: Were you the only child?

MG: No, I had one brother, but he hit me too. He is two years older than me and my mother was so weak that she could not prevent it. And at 59 he died, thank God, and my mother at 63. They died very early. I no longer had any contact with them. To this day I have no contact with my brother, who absolutely wants to have contact with me but I do not want to have contact with him. That was too much. But these are all things...

SW: You mentioned Blocksberg several times: not everyone knows what Blocksberg is. What was Blocksberg for you?

MG: Blocksberg was for me like here the BEGiNE the second home. Blocksberg was a pure women's pub, but there were no events. They were here at the Yorck Bridges,⁶⁰ where now the terminal station is located. That is such a travel information for the German railway.

SW: There were the Blocksberg?

MG: The former owners were Henriette Lürmann and Gerda Herrmann. They had a little something to eat. Usually tomato soup and corn on the cob, and otherwise just drinks. Women met there to chat and play cards, and I thought that was great. I really liked that. There I was then mainly, because I met women there, got to know them, with whom I then also did something privately. It was awesome. Some of them gave me furniture, because I had nothing. I ran away by night and fog. Then I got a bed as a present, a cupboard as a present and then it was winter and I just sat in my kitchen and turned on the gas stove, because I didn't have money for coal. At that time there was still coal heating.

SW: Then what about Blocksberg later and your contacts with Blocksberg?

⁵⁹ Kottbusser Damm is a main road that forms part of the border between the Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg and Neukölln districts in Berlin. ("Kottbusser Damm". Wikipedia. Accessed May 23, 2020. https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kottbusser_Damm)

⁶⁰ The Yorck Bridges are a row of railway bridges in Berlin near the south-west. ("Yorckbrücken". Wikipedia. Accessed May 23, 2020. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Yorckbr%C3%BCcken>)

MG: There were some arguments with the LAZ but I don't know them in detail. Two other women took over the Blocksberg and I didn't go there anymore. Those who had done it before, Henriette and Gerda, with whom I had a different, a better relationship. Then I didn't go to the Blocksberg anymore. I was then more in the Zwei or in QL, or in Pussycat⁶¹ or in Bucatio. Those were all the women's pubs. The Bucatio was in the Kleitsstraße.⁶² The QL in the Karl-Kreuz-Straße.⁶³ The Zwei in the Martin-Luther-Straße, and then it was not so long, until I was involved here in the house. Everything is only a short time span. From '76 to '82. That was then six years. I went rarely to the Blocksberg. I didn't understand at that time, which arguments they had and why now the Blocksberg was occupied and taken over basically by LAZ women. I just don't know. I was also too young to ask questions. What will happen when I quit, because I am getting closer to 60, and I don't know how long I will do this here. Actually I would do it as long as I could. It's about the concession. Someone has to have the concession and finally take the heat for the pub, because that's the difference between culture and pub. Barbara is looking for a successor who can take over her cultural work. Barbara would then still be active in a supporting capacity via Minijob,⁶⁴ but she is now also turning 64. It is difficult for this little money, because I do it on a voluntary basis. I do not get any money here. I really do it on a voluntary basis and find someone who can take over this cultural work... I am still full of hope that we will find someone. That a young woman might somehow discover that and say: Yes, I would do that. We don't know. As long as I can, I will continue to do it and make sure that it remains a place only for women. The QL did it like this: once or twice a week men were allowed in and they shot themselves in the foot with it. The women didn't come anymore when men were there. It is important and also really a matter close to my heart to preserve this place as long as possible.

SW: What would you say about your life experiences and experiences with the women's movement, the women of today and in the future? What would you like to tell, warn, recommend to women in general about your experiences?

MG: I can only recommend preserving a place like this and working for it. But it is a lot of work and little money. If I had to live off the pub, we would have been closed by now. It's impossible. The pub cannot finance a living for a woman. Those who work behind the bar are also registered and get their salary. We must always look. Now our coffee machine was broken and such a coffee machine costs money. Thank God the BEGiNE is a place that women now rediscover more and more. There are a lot of regulars' tables. The women consume well. The dance courses we have here are great. On New Year's Eve there were about 170 women here. I wasn't here, I would have got claustrophobic. But it must have been a really fantastic atmosphere. So far I have only heard great things about women who went and were here as visitors. So it must have been amazing. I can only recommend the women to do this if they bring a lot of commitment with them.

⁶¹ Pussycat is a LGBT+ bar in Schöneberg district in Berlin.

⁶² Kleitsstraße is a street in Berlin near the south-west.

⁶³ Karl-Kreuz-Strasse is a street in Wien, Austria near the east of the country.

⁶⁴ Minijob is an employment relationship in Germany characterized as part time with a low wage, first intended to legalize informal work and promote employment. ("Marginal Employment". Wikipedia. Accessed May 23, 2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marginal_employment)