

Frank Mazer

Dog poo do Berlin

I am bent over. In my hand I have a small plastic sandwich bag. It's filled with dog poo. It's 2:00 a.m. on a quiet Berlin residential street. There is no dog in sight. There are parked cars. No cars moving. There is the muted sound of autos on a busy street several blocks away in the distance. I am caught in the act. Moments before, as I was bending over trying to add some form of "grace" to picking up the dog doings and avoid a back injury at the same time; my back still thinking I am in bed; as if on cue, a taxi appears out of the still night. I can only imagine that it was lurking around the corner for just this moment. It drives rapidly and lunges to a stop precisely in front of me and the poo bag. It stands at the gap between parked cars which reveals me in action. My mind attempts to come to grips with this event happening. Out of the taxi climbs a neighbor from the apartment building where I reside. I don't know him. I do recognize him. And his scowl. The taxi driver climbs out to grab one small piece of luggage. It all happens in an instant. I am so sleepy and surprised that I am frozen in space and time. I have not moved from my position. I simply look up. They are standing there looking at me. Leaning over, my dog poo bag in hand. Their eyes seem to dart to check for a dog. Maybe it is one of those really tiny ones and they have not noted it in the shadows? No, no dog in sight.

I am not a spy. Really. I know this is Berlin. I saw "The Lives of Others". But, truly, I am not handing you a load of poo. Then again, how shall I explain to him? Or why try?

My mind races through what they may be thinking. Perhaps they are “awe struck” by this good deed of sidewalk cleaning being performed so eagerly in the night? They may be wondering if I am sleep walking? Perhaps their thoughts proceed to more sinister ideas? After all this is Berlin. Memories of Cold War histories I have read come surging to the forefront of my dreamy mind. Perhaps my neighbor is thinking I am pretending to remove poo while I spy on the neighbor? I am not laughing. He is old enough he may not be laughing within himself either as he may remember the Stasi and “Lives of Others” in East Germany during those times. Will one of them ask me what’s up?

I ponder my options. Do I try to explain? My grasp of the German language is not so strong, and I can picture turning an awkward situation into a disaster. I may apply the word “Scheisse” wrongly and instead of explaining that I was picking up the poo from the dog I had just walked because I had forgotten to bring the little bag with me when I brought the dog out in the first place, I might end up telling this fellow he is a stupid Scheisse. Shall I make up an amusing story to win their sympathy? Perhaps something about an angry wife and a broom and a frying pan? Or a science experiment for my child? Maybe, inspired by a sad ad on tv about starving African children I am doing my penance? Time passes and I remain dumbstruck.

I make myself laugh at the situation. My mind calculates the odds. What must be the odds that in all of the metropolis of Berlin, at 2:00 a.m., on this night, our life paths would cross at the precise moment his taxi would stop at this spot next to

the dog doings? This kind of meeting amidst the universe would seem to imply that it was meant to be. It has the “smell” of significance. What reason the universe intended I have no clue. How it impacts present and future timeline I do not know. What I should do about seizing this moment I have no idea. All I can calculate is that if I could turn the odds of this happening into a positive direction in life I’d be cashing in a million euro lotto ticket soon.

I straighten up, bag in hand, and then begin the 5 steps back to the apartment building door. The fellow tenant/ agent walks past me with his small travel bag in hand as I hold the door open for him. He says nothing. He nods. This makes me cringe. It’s like a message to say “how quaint”. Then it occurs to me that I may have interrupted him during an even more embarrassing situation than I face. Perhaps his wife would not be pleased with this late night arrival?

All in a simple night’s wander at the mercy of a dog, so to speak. It’s Berlin, Charlottenburg. Dog lovers abound. Well behaved dogs trotting along off their leashes are a common sight on the sidewalks. Most owners feel civically (and by law) obligated to clean up after their furry friend’s litter on the sidewalk. Or they wander the parks. The many sweet Berlin parks. A few blocks from my abode is such a park. Charlottenburg Palace Park. A place for tourists to visit. A place for locals to run, walk, sit. There are always many persons tickling the trails if weather permits. Summer. Winter. The many paths beckon amid the woods, river, ponds and sculptures. Fall calls most of all.

So it is that in this city of Cold War history, of history through the ages, of architecture to savor, of an excellent Jewish Museum, of bikes and more bikes amid bike paths galore, music venues of all sorts, woodsie neighborhoods, large parks like Tiergarten or the palace park or Humboldt Park or the vast Grunewald Woods beckon. Subways and trams and bike paths make all things accessible.

The door closes behind me upon this odd odds episode as the neighbor climbs the staircase and looks over his shoulder for a moment. I tell myself he has a guilty look on his face. So it is that the bag and I turned the tables, wondered what he carried in his bag, and returned through the door to our home headquarters.