

The Mistake That Brought Down the Berlin Wall, and the Fragility of Tyranny

Today I was fascinated by one woman's biography of 40 years of a German family's life under East German rule. *Forty Autumns* is mostly about the small (heartwarming as well as heartbreaking) stories of family members trying to stay connected and build a "family wall" against socialism.

One of the most fascinating geopolitical details is one that's perhaps well known – it was new to me. In a 1989 press conference intended to announce simple *liberalization* of travel restraints, East German official Günter Schabowski **accidentally** announced that effective immediately, East Germans would be able to pass into West Germany.

That's right – it was an accident. Guy must have gotten confused or flustered.

But as a result, millions of people who before might have been too timid to even whisper about escaping gained the courage to go toward the border.

This is an encouraging thought: that it only took a flubbed statement at a press conference to initiate the final downfall of East Germany. People want to be free **that much**. It's strange what they chose as their trigger for action. In this case, all it took was permission

Lesson: never underestimate the longing for freedom, never overestimate the popularity of tyranny, and look for unexpected "cracks in the system in which both become clear. For East Germany, the Schabowski and the fall of the Berlin Wall was one of those moments.

Originally published at JamesWalpole.com.