



Memories about the First CIP in Reverse Program, in Hamburg 1958

By Lollie Bailey- Nilsson

The Honorable Senator Wersich, other honored guests, and my fellow 50th Anniversary Symposium participants.

For those of you who do not know me, my name is Lollie Bailey-Nilsson. I am an American and grew up in Cleveland, Ohio. I have spent the last 30 years of my life living in Stockholm, Sweden married to a most wonderful Swede whom I met as a result of my association with CIF. My husband Stig whom many of you got to know, passed away 7 years ago.

It is indeed an honor to be able to stand here today as one of the founding member of the Council of International Fellowship and also as a representative of the first CIP program in Reverse which took place 52 years ago, in this country, Germany, and in cooperation with this city, Hamburg. I am going to focus my remarks on this first pioneer program which has now lead to the establishment of 19 such inter country exchange programs under the aegis of the Council of International Fellowship.

The first reverse program occurred just two years after the first CIP program took place in the US. Looking back, I can say that the seven of us selected by Henry Ollendorff, to accept the invitation of the German Ministry for Family and Youth, were given the opportunity to take the first step of a life defining journey. As an aside, I can imagine Henry, at the time, wishing that he had a less challenging task than selecting this group for where in the world, 52 years ago, would one start to look for candidates who were not only a social workers or youth leader, but who spoke German. An almost impossible task, in America, at that time. But Henry did it.

Let me very briefly take you back to the fall of 1957, where the Federal Republic of Germany's Ministry of Family and Youth issued an official invitation, through the US State Department, to send a small group of American social workers and youth leaders to Germany, as guests of the German government. The invitation was for a 5 week program which would take place during the summer of 1958.

On the face of it, such an invitation may have seemed nothing extraordinary. But for the 7 of us selected to accept it, it turned out to be just that--extraordinary. The invitation had been issued as a result of the hard work, careful planning and persistent lobbying of German Ministry officials by Germans who had participants in the CIP program in the US. The effort to have a CIP in reverse was spearheaded, not only by Giesela Senssfelder, as mentioned earlier by my friend Anita Gerdes, but also by the late Dieter Buchholz, a member of the first CIP German group of 1956. Dieter was from Hamburg. The idea was to make CIP a truly inter country exchange program. One where Americans could experience in Germany, what German youth leaders and social workers had experienced in America. In 1958, not in my wildest dreams could I have foreseen how those five weeks would influence the rest of my life.

The Hamburg program opened our eyes, expanded our imagination and made it forever impossible to go back to a parochial view of the world. With the exception of one member

of our group, this was the first time any of us had ever been outside the US. This first visit to a foreign country exposed us to a people, a culture, a way of life and particularly the momentous social problems Germany was facing just 13 years after the end of WWII. We listened, we questioned and we learned. And there was reciprocity—for the curiosity on both sides was almost insatiable. Sharing was an exciting two way street. Among the many, many recollections I have, were the long and soul searching discussions with practically everyone we met of all ages but especially those with German youth; the enriching experience of host family living; our field placements in social agencies in and around Hamburg, which for me, and a fellow group member, meant working with as camp counselors in a summer camp run by the German labor union (the DGB) for youth being trained in the skilled trades. Another very special recollection was associated with the evening we attended a performance at the Hamburg Opera. That evening left me with an emotionally, unforgettable memory for it was the first time in my life, I was able to see and hear a Black American baritone, sing a leading role on a world opera stage. That Evening, Lawrence Winters, sang the role of Radames, in a performance of Aida.

I want to digress here for a moment and touch on something which I was often asked about after returning to the States: Racism. Did I encounter it, or sense it in any way. The answer is no. At no time did I encounter overt racism directed at me as a Black American even though I had expected it, given the occupation situation at the time. However, what did become clear, almost immediately after arrival in Hamburg, were two things: one, that Black females had rarely, if ever, been seen by Germans and second there was a genuine curiosity about my skin color. Did it rub off? Children in their innocence asked me about this and then of course wanted a hand on test. This curiosity existed among many adult Germans too. However, they were not so forward as to ask but I think I got a lot of long, massage like handshakes throughout the program.

The Hamburg Program was the beginning of my life long association with the Council of International Programs. I have been a member of CIF for 50 years and I am presently a member of its Executive Committee after having also served on it many years earlier. Participation in the German Reverse program set me on a unique and rich life's journey. I have had the opportunity to assist in training German youth leaders as a part of the educational program for the Berlin Senate for Youth and Sport and I have been a member of the faculty of one of Berlin College. Before focusing my professional career on higher education and social planning I was privileged to serve on the staff of Cleveland International Program in charge of participant selection in Central and South America. Travels and participation in CIF conferences around the world, has left me with so many friends for life. Most likely, none of this would have happened without that program in the summer of 1958. That summer laid the first building block in what was to become an ongoing effort to spread knowledge and place building blocks in the Council of International Program's efforts to build a bridge of understanding and hope between peoples and cultures regardless of race, creed, color or religion. On behalf all of the 1958 group, and I am still in contact with the remaining members, and on behalf of all those who have participated in subsequent German Programs in Reverse, I thank the German Government, the city of Hamburg and the German CIP'ers for taking the bold step of starting this program 52 years ago.

And now I would like to mention the founding members of the Council International Programs who have passed away: Dr. Henry B. Ollendorff (USA); Frau Hilde Zamorsky, (Austria); Herr Manfred Zalinski,(Germany).