

Marcia and Gary Welsh
Jan. 20 2019 Forum

This is a story about lessons learned, journeys traveled, circles of connections and coincidences, and love.

The story starts in Webster, NY (near Rochester) In 1988, when our older daughter, Jennifer, then 15, won a government scholarship to live with a German family for a year. There were no strings attached, and no obligations for us to ever host. Jen had a fabulous experience and even after two years back (her Jr and Sr HS years) we knew she missed her German family immensely. As a graduation gift, we sent her and her sister, Kristie, to Germany, Jen for 4 weeks, Kristie for the first two. They left July 4 1991. A few days later, I was gone when Gary got a phone call. When I got home, he said "Phoebe from Youth For Understanding (YFU) called and asked if we would host a French boy for 6 weeks this summer. I told her no to someone from France, no to a boy, and no to 6 weeks, but that we were probably interested in hosting a German girl for a year and to check with my wife tomorrow."

Phoebe called the next morning asking me to tell her about our family. I told her Gary was extremely interested in personal computers, Jen would be off to college, probably to study history, and Kristie, our French Horn player, was heavily involved in musical activities, including the Rochester Philharmonic Youth Orchestra. Phoebe said, "I think I have a boy who would be great for your family. ". I said, "Oh no, we don't do boys. We have two daughters. The bedrooms are pink. No boys!" Phoebe said, "Well, I have to see the house where a student might live anyway, so let's set up a time." When Phoebe visited, she had a thick notebook full of information on students who were expecting to come to the U.S. around Aug. 1 and who were not yet placed. This included the letters students had written to their possible host family. We three sat at the kitchen table, and Phoebe said, "Just read this letter first." She handed me the notebook. I read the letter. I did not say anything, I just handed the notebook to Gary, but I was pretty sure we were about to have a son. Here's what we read ...

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Dear host family

Dear parents, dear (perhaps) Brother and Sister

It's not easy for me to begin to write to a family I don't know. That's why first of all I want to thank you and say how happy I am to have the chance to spend a whole year with you. I imagine you as a very hearty and nice family because I really believe you are this way, when you give a stranger a home for such a long time. Once more I want to say that I am really indescribably happy to get such a unique chance.

Why? – perhaps you still ask. America is only part of the earth, too but it isn't quite right. As you know still and years ago we lived "behind the wall", and so to go to America, only for travelling, was an unimaginable plan. Now the time has changed, but it's not so easy to change the feelings and minds of the people.

But now enough of all these feelings – I want to introduce myself. I was born in Pawlodar, a town in the USSR, in 1973. It's not easy to explain why there. Our family is a German one. In the last century our forefathers emigrated to Russia, because the living conditions in Germany were very bad. But in the USSR were, especially after World War II, no chances to cultivate the German culture and languages and my parents decided to move to the former GDR in 1979 to live in Germany among Germans.

Now we live in Chemnitz. My hometown isn't a town worthy to be seen because of its sights, it is an industrial city. But around Chemnitz you will find a wonderful landscape and often my family and I make sight-seeing tours or we hike through the woods. Sometimes we visit museums, exhibitions or we go to the theatre. Especially at the week-ends as we do a lot of things together.

But I do not only spend my holidays together with the family – I have a lot of friends too. Often we meet at home, work and play with the computer. To program computers is my second important hobby. Furthermore I play in the Youth Symphonic Orchestra and in a string quartet the first violin and have many friends there too.

To play the violin is my favorite hobby and I would like to continue this in the USA. I think that music is the best way to bring people of different nations together – music is understood by everybody.

I got in contact with music very early – my Mum is a piano teacher. My father works as a constructing engineer and constructs cars. Helena, my sister, is 14 years old and attends Secondary School. She plays piano and is interested in arts.

I am interested in arts too, but I like sciences a bit more. After my year in America, in your family, I want to become a physician or a surgeon.

I am interested in languages very much. Not only because I speak Russian and German, but also because of my interest in foreign people, culture and countries.

I am not a fan of this kind of sports we had in the GDR – sports only for competition. I like to go in for sports just to relax and to do something for my body. So I go swimming twice a week and cycling in summer, just for fun, health and relaxation.

I think you want to know something about my "normal day", too, so I will describe it. I get up at 6:30 am, have a little breakfast and go to school. This takes me half an hour. School begins at 7:30 am and on average we have seven lessons. At about 3:00 or 4:00 pm I am at home again and have time to help my mother, when she needs it – I have to do works at home, like everybody else. And at 10:00 or 11:00 pm I go to bed. That's really a normal day for me. Now I want to end my short letter to you.

I hope that our year together will bring us and our countries a little bit more together and that we will be full of impressions and experiences after this time.

I am looking forward to hear from you very soon.

Sincerely yours, Paul Lingor

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We agreed that we were quite sure we would host Paul, but told Phoebe that we needed to check with our daughters. We checked the girl's itinerary and called the Youth Hostel where they were staying that night. (no internet and no cell phones in those years). We asked them how they would feel about having a German brother, and they said that sounded great. We then asked Jen to please send a letter to Paul telling him about our family. We knew from experience that sending a letter from the U.S. might take up to 4 weeks to get there, and we did not have that kind of time. Besides, of course, Jen could and did write the letter in German. Kristie flew back from Germany on July 24th (Jennifer stayed a bit longer for an extended visit with her German family). Paul arrived late in the evening on Aug. 5th. We waited anxiously at the airport with our Welcome sign, then looked down at the tarmac and saw Paul, violin and backpack in hand, looking up and waving excitedly. We knew from Jen's experience that the Germans are more formal people—translate no hugs—so we waited, ready to shake hands. To our surprise, Paul immediately gave us big hugs. As we left the airport, Paul looked at all airport lights and highway lights and remarked, "The lights! How beautiful!" and we remembered Jen telling us of the stark difference of being at night in well lighted West Berlin and looking over into a very dark East Berlin. Then, as we stopped at a traffic light Paul said, "Oh, a Walk do not Walk sign! I have read of those but never seen one." We began to have the feeling that this year would be a different experience from having an exchange student from Western Europe. The next morning, knowing that Paul's family had no phone, I asked him if there was someone he could call to let his folks know that he had arrived safely. "Oh yes! Do we go to the Post Office for this?" We had multiple phones and two different phone lines in our home. I felt so humbled.

Jen arrived home from Germany Aug. 7th and the next two weeks were busy ones as we squeezed in three days at Marcia's family's cottage in the Adirondacks, got Jennifer all set to go to college, and Marcia unexpectedly was hired as a third-grade teacher. Paul went with us as we drove Jennifer to the University of Richmond; during a day of the parent orientation our Virginia brother in law, a pilot for Smithfield Co, took Paul with him on a day long business trip. By the time we got back to Webster, Paul had visited 4 or 5 more states.

Over Labor Day we went to the NYS Fair and, among all the other exhibits and activities there was a U.S. Military exhibit with equipment, vehicles, a helicopter and even a jet fighter. Paul was concerned that he'd be in trouble if they found out he was German. In his experience these things would be secrets and kept from view. I had to explain that we had an all-volunteer military and they were simply doing marketing and promotion to interest people in joining. In

both East and West Germany, two years of service to your country was mandatory. Today, in unified Germany, it is still required. For most, the two years of service means military service. Paul planned to work in a hospital.

School started right after Labor Day. Gary became chief dishwasher, taxi service for the kids if it was late, and the one to generally hold us all together when needed.

Paul and I went to a nearby farm market in September. The young cashier warmly greeted him by name. When we got back into the car, I asked Paul about it. He said, "She is in one of my classes. She smiles too much."

Early in the fall, Paul wanted to go to the downtown Rochester library. He asked if he could take his camera in, and of course, I said yes. This library was large enough so that as you exited you went through a sensor to make sure you had checked out the books. As we exited, the guard asked Paul for his camera, and Paul gave me a look indicating great apprehension that he had just been betrayed and would have to give up his camera. We assured him that the guard just didn't want the camera to go through the sensor and perhaps have something be ruined, and that he would get his camera back. How I wish we had known enough to warn him in advance of this!

As the year progressed, we learned about Paul's family and their lives. Marcia mentioned the hugs at the airport and we learned that was the Russian influence. And, as Paul indicated in his letter – he was born in Russia but is 100% German. All those Germans ended up in Russia when Catherine the Great, a German, was the Empress of Russia. She offered free land to Germans who emigrated and many took advantage of that program. In fact. They formed their own communities and married only each other for generations.

One of the tourist activities we did with Paul was to visit Niagara Falls. Since the best view is from the Canadian side, that involved going across the bridge to Canada. Paul was nervous about crossing the border and when we approached the American side, they just waved us through, which surprised him. Then on the Canadian entry, when the agent asked where each of us was born, Paul expected something bad was going to happen when he said he was born in the Soviet Union. To his surprise the agent just said have a nice day and waved us on. Then Paul asked where he could get his passport stamped and the agent essentially said they didn't really bother with those formalities. This didn't solve Paul's problem. He wanted his passport stamped so he could show folks in Germany he had been to Canada. So he said please can I have my passport stamped. The agent pointed out a building and said if we would just stop there someone inside could stamp his passport. So he ended with proof he'd been to Canada. We were always amazed at how fluent Paul was in English. We would never have guessed it was a subject taught to students behind the iron curtain. But there were some things about English that did give him difficulty. For example, why is author Michael Crichton not Michael Kritchton?

The schools in East Germany had many old buildings that were not modernized and not in good repair. Those built after the war, because of a shortage of concrete and building materials, had low ceiling heights. If the walls are only 8 feet high instead of 10 or 15, you save on materials. But a large space with low ceiling feels oppressive.

The schools were politically oppressive as well. All the students and teachers knew there were spies in the schools but were never sure who was a spy. Neither the teachers nor the student said anything that might be taken as questioning the State. As Paul said, the teachers knew the questions they were allowed to ask and the students knew the answers they were allowed to give. No one dared wander from the allowed subjects and opinions. Everyone was suspicious of everyone else. If a someone came to school with new clothes, everyone wondered how the family could afford it – did they supplement their income with spying? This fear carried over into homes. Families didn't talk about the government for fear one of the younger children would mention something in school.

Even so, Paul got a good education in the basics. What he didn't have was the extracurricular activities common in our schools.

Here in the US he took a course in photography. It would never have been taught in East Germany. In fact, you wouldn't want to carry a camera around in East Germany. He participated in music, a musical, public speaking and the speech team.

Driver's License

Under the terms of the YFU contract, an exchange student is not allowed to drive while in the US. except as a student driver with a professional instructor. Paul took driving lessons and passed the exams, receiving a New York State Driver's License. He saved a lot of money doing it this way. A German driver's license costs over \$2000 and requires a minimum of 25-45 hours of professional instruction plus 12 hours of theory. Paul was able to take his New York license to AAA and get an International Driver's License. When he got back to Germany, he was issued a German License based on already having an International License.

Because Kristie was in the Rochester Philharmonic Youth Orchestra, we knew about the auditioning process and suggested it to Paul. He was very interested and auditioned shortly after arriving. He was selected to play first chair second violin. The orchestra's year started with a weekend retreat and he came home beaming. He explained that he was right – music is the universal language. For the first time since leaving home, he felt like he was just as deeply part of the group as everyone else there – not an outsider

Religion

There was freedom of religion in East Germany – Guaranteed by their Constitution. There was no law or regulation against attending church. But Paul's family never attended church. If they had, his father would have been expelled from the Communist Party and then lost his job because he couldn't have the job unless he was a communist.

Paul didn't routinely attend church with us, but music got him there several times, as during the year he played solo, duet or accompaniment during Sunday service.

Music was also important for him at school. He played in the school orchestra and, in what had to be a unique experience for him, played in the pit orchestra for a musical.

German schools, except for music schools, don't have music programs like we're used to. His only opportunity there was to play in a community group. They were amateurs brought together by their love of music, but nothing like what happens in our schools.

Paul's mother, Erika, is a musician and music teacher – both her parents were surgeons.

Paul's father, Anton, was a "constructing engineer" in a factory that built trucks. I think our title would be "mechanical engineer". We didn't learn much about the factory or what his father did there but apparently the vehicles were not very good – outdated in design and not made very well. That's not because the employees were incompetent. It's that they had a huge handicap. After the war the Soviets stole all the good machinery and tooling and took it back to Russia. All that was left was equipment that was not worth stealing. The only advantage they had was their customers had no choice but to buy what they made. When the wall came down, and East German companies had choices, the factory immediately closed for lack of any customers. One of Paul's memories about Russia is that his people – the Germans – were looked down on as a minority and they were the victims of prejudice. They later found that in Germany they were looked down upon as Russians and again on the receiving end of prejudice.

He was 4 yrs. old when his parents decided it would be better if they relocated from Russia to East Germany. The day his father applied for permission he was discharged from his job and for 18 months they simply waited for the moment when a truck would show up (unannounced) and give them 20 minutes to get on board and leave. Paul said "we sat on our suitcases for a year and a half". When the day came, they wanted to include their piano in the things they could take and the truckers said no – the regulations clearly stated that it was not allowed to take either a black piano or a brown piano. But, as Paul's mother pointed out, their piano was not black, and not brown - it was orange. They agreed the piano was orange and, since the regulations did not say anything about orange pianos, they loaded it on the truck and it went with the family to East Germany. They moved to Karl-Marx-Stadt (Karl Marx City). The city had been named Chemnitz before the Communist came along and changed it to Karl-Marx-Stadt. With the fall of the Communists, the citizens changed the name back to Chemnitz.

When they first got to East Germany, they lived with the family that had sponsored their move and waited for the State to come up with a housing assignment. Some of Paul's comments implied that relationships were pretty strained by the time that happened. It had to have been with great relief they finally moved out to the assigned housing.

An elderly lady, living in a three-room apartment, was notified by the State that she didn't need all three rooms. She was told she could continue to have one of the rooms and that a family

was being given the other two. Those two rooms were for Paul and his family. As he explained, to get to the “old lady’s” room, people had to walk through the other two. So, they could never lock their door and never knew when someone might come in. It was like living in a hallway. Paul said, we never sat around in our underwear!

Eventually, they were able to use the same government system to improve their situation. Paul’s mother had a piano student whose father had dual citizenship – East Germany and (I think) Hungary. For some reason they were moving to Hungary. When they left and their apartment became available, there would be no chance Paul’s family could get it. However, the rules allowed families to voluntarily switch with each other. So, before letting the state know they were leaving the country, this other family switched with Paul’s. It was a financial transaction. Paul said, “they got our life savings and we got the apartment”. Even then, they didn’t actually switch places with Paul’s family. It was only done on paper. But, when they left, Paul’s family quickly moved into the apartment. As far as the State knew, at least officially, a family who had been occupying the two rooms with the old lady left the country and those rooms were available.

The new apartment was on the fourth floor of a brick building that had survived WWII bombing. It consisted of a kitchen, living room, bedroom and bathroom. No hot water and no heating. For heating, they burned coal in a stove. The coal was supplied by the government ... they dumped a pile of coal on an empty lot for people to help themselves and everyone in Paul’s family took turns carrying coal to their apartment by the bucketful.

The lot next door was rubble from a building destroyed in the war and never cleaned up. Telephone? They could use the pay phone at the Post Office. They were told the wires and switches in the city could not handle any more phones. The government, of course, didn’t want people to be able to communicate. You could sign up on a waiting list, but the wait was “indefinite”.

This was 1989.

The Wall

Paul was in High School when they heard the border restriction had been lifted and East Germans could go to West Germany and return with no restrictions. Some of his classmates invited him to go to the border with them that weekend just to go over and back for the joy of being able to do so. Paul declined because he thought it was a cruel fraud and didn’t want to go through the disappointment of finding nothing had changed – or be arrested for showing up with the intent of crossing over.

That Monday, his friends brought a banana to school. That had to have been an incredibly emotional experience for Paul because a banana was absolute proof they had been to West Germany and back.

Paul also mentioned that the best Christmas they ever had was the one year his mother got an orange. Think how he must have felt walking into our neighborhood supermarket. Incidentally, Paul told us the story he heard about the opening of the border was that the State-run TV station erroneously reported that the Government had decided to open the border and based on that the guards let people cross over and back. Then the Government weighed the consequences and concluded that closing the border again was not an option. After the wall came down and Communist Party Leaders fled and ordinary people got into the building where they had lived, everyone learned that the Party leaders had big apartments with TVs, dishwashers, washing machines, stoves, hot water, heat ... even telephones. It had been a carefully guarded secret.

One of Paul's U.S. high school activities was Speech Team, where he competed in a category called Oral Interpretation—where you “read” a selection of up to 9 minutes long and are judged on it. Paul did very well in this, and competed in a national competition. Starting in a field of 192 highly ranked competitors, through successive readings and cuts, Paul placed twentieth in the nation in Oral Interpretation---- in his third language!

Paul flew back home to Germany July 6th, 1992, but the story did not stop then. Despite there still being no internet or cell phones, we managed to stay in touch. Paul did a two-year Civil Service requirement by working in a hospital. In 1993, his parents moved to Karlsruhe, near the French border, which would help Paul get into the university he wanted. In 1994, he entered Heidelberg University, pursuing his dream of becoming a doctor.

He had consistently volunteered with Youth for Understanding offices in Germany, and in Aug. 1995 accompanied a group of incoming German exchange students to Atlanta, bringing his sister with him. We had just moved to Birmingham, AL, so we were able to pick up Paul and Lena and bring them to our home, then play tourist together for a week. Then they went on an Amtrak tour of some eastern cities. Lena flew back to Germany Sept. 6th, Paul went on to Rochester to visit Gary's parents, then up to Harvard U to speak with some medical professors, and then back to Alabama for a few more days with us.

Jennifer spent the 1995-96 school year at the University of Munich and was able to connect with Paul several times, including going to visit his family, where she was warmly welcomed. Paul continued on his studies to become a medical doctor, which we gather in Germany meant you needed to first get your PhD. He also spent a year in Montpellier, France, where he worked at a hospital and did four medical rotations. We heard some mention of girlfriend Kathleen. By 1999, Paul was back in Heidelberg, studying for his second licensing exam, and then going into a practical clinical year. We, on the other hand, were in Florence, AL in 2000 when Paul next came to visit for a week before going to Mt. Sinai Hospital in NYC for eight weeks. I picked him up at the Atlanta airport, and as we drove away, he pulled a cell phone out of his pocket and sheepishly said, ‘My parents gave it to me when I completed Med school.’ I kept remembering just 9 years before, when a young boy asked “Do we go to the Post Office to make a phone call?”

In 2001 Paul officially became Dr. Paul Lingor and an intern at the University of Gottingen in a program that also gave him time to do research. We were immensely touched that he called us on Sept. 11. Paul continued at the University of Gottingen, by 2004 was a resident and presenting a paper at a conference in California. We were overjoyed that he ended his trip by taking a short detour to Raleigh, where we had moved in late 2001.

Jen was off to Germany for another 15 months of doctoral research, and so, of course, she could get together with Paul now and then. She emailed us telling of her first visit to his apartment. She said that Paul introduced her to a friend, Peter, and told us that she noticed several affectionate notes back and forth between the two of them on Paul's bulletin board. She didn't know quite how to acknowledge this, so just kept saying, "Peter seems really nice." When she got back to the city where she was living, Jen emailed Kristie, the family advisor and confidant. "Is Paul gay?", she wrote. Kristie emailed back saying yes, he had mentioned it to her when they had met up in NYC at some point, but she didn't remember if she had said she would not say anything, as there was some quantity of wine involved in the meeting. So, now, Jen debated how to acknowledge to Paul that she knew he and Peter were a couple and that that was fine. So, she sent an email, and this is how she started "Have I told you about the church that Mom and Dad are involved in?..." That, of course, was this church!

In March of 2005, Gary, Marcia, and Kristie flew to Germany for two wonderful weeks. Jen was still there, and she and Paul had done a wonderful job of planning all the details of our visit. Paul took time off from his research and hospital clinic work to be with us for much of this time. It was the first time we all had been together since June, 1992, and Marcia wrote in her journal "A week has gone by already, and our favorite thing is just the chance to be together." We finally had the chance to meet Paul's parents and grandparents and were overwhelmed by their warm welcome and hospitality. Whether we had one, two, or no translators, we found that communication with laughter, smiles, and hugs is all that is really needed. Peter was off in California for a year, so we did not get a chance to meet him. When he did return to Germany, it was to teach at the University of Munich.

There were times when we benefited from Paul's medical experience. The first was in the fall of 2007, when Gary was diagnosed with Prostate cancer. We emailed Paul, telling him we had gone to a clinic at Duke, Gary was going to have surgery, but first he had signed up to be part of a clinical trial. Paul emailed back right away, telling us that there are different kinds of clinical trials, and, that if it were him, he would opt for surgery at once. We promptly moved up the surgery! A month later, Paul attended a conference in San Diego, and stopped in Durham on his return. He and Jen drove up to Virginia, where we were now living, and Kristie flew down for a wonderful two-and-a-half-day reunion. The three younger ones voted that Gary should keep the beard he had started after surgery!

In Sept. of 2011, Gary's dad suffered a stroke which meant some difficult life decisions had to be made. We so appreciated a call from Paul, who assured us that the decisions made were the correct ones. We were reassured, knowing that he spoke not just as a doctor, but as someone who had known and loved Grandpa.

Paul officially became a board certified neurologist in January, 2009. That August, our daughter Kristie was married in an outdoor ceremony outside of Boston. Paul and Peter flew over for this. This is the first time we had met Peter, and we found him to be a wonderful, personable man. It was incredibly moving to Marcia to have Paul walk her down the aisle.

Besides the wedding, Paul and Peter had another reason to want to talk with Kristie. They wanted to start a family and wanted to know what it was like to share custody of a child. Kristie and Josh were sharing custody with Josh's ex-wife. Apparently in Germany, or at least in the state where they were living, adoption by gay or lesbian couples was, if allowed, very difficult. The way around that was for compatible lesbian and gay couples to get together, produce a child (the natural way, as Kristie put it), and share custody.

On Oct. 7, 2011, Paul and Peter officially registered as a couple, and on Nov. 14th they welcomed Felix into their family. Peter continued as a professor at the U. of Munich, and Paul was appointed a professor at the U. of Gottingen, so there was a lot of commuting. There did not seem to be a way around this, as Paul was teaching, having clinical responsibilities, and in charge of two labs in Gottingen.

Life continued, Gary retired, and we moved back to Raleigh. In late August, 2014, we made a long-awaited trip back to Germany. Paul and Peter had meticulously planned a wonderful itinerary for us, and, for the most part, one or both of them was with us on this trip. We finally got to meet Felix, a charming, happy nearly three-year-old, who just wasn't sure why we could not understand his conversation! We had time for much talking during some of our car rides, and Paul mentioned that he no longer thought of himself as East German, but, rather, as German.

This was also the time for UPUCC to participate in Sarah Witt's Magnificent Mile. We had known Sarah since our earlier years at the church, but had been in Virginia for all of her Magnificent Miles. I emailed her from Germany, apologizing for not being able to walk with the group, but telling her that our German son—the doctor—had just gotten his lab workers, and himself, to participate in the Ice Bucket challenge, raising much money for the cause. Paul's labs and specialties are in the field of ALS, so someday his work may result in benefits for Sarah. We have not caught up in person since 2014, but are grateful that we do skype with Paul and Peter several times a year.

This past year, Paul has finally been able to transfer laterally to the University of Munich, where he is a consultant in neurology. He has just received another large international grant to fund a research lab in Munich; over the course of the next few years his lab in Gottingen will cease to be, and his lab in Munich will grow. Everyone is very happy that the commuting is, for the most part, done.

In conclusion --- lessons learned--- For Paul, that first year, I think the lessons learned were how different families operate, and how different cultures, countries, and customs exist. The young

boy who remarked that a classmate smiled too much now looked at his German pictures and said, "Americans smile a lot. The Germans do not." Seeing things through Paul's eyes helped us realize how blessed we are to have been born in the United States. When things happen to us that would have left us feeling sorry for our misfortune, we just need to remember what it was like for Paul and his family and the millions of people who did and still do live in bad circumstances. Our misfortune looks pretty inconsequential in comparison and now when something happens that we might have thought was a seven or eight on a scale of one to ten, we see it as a one or a two and that makes a difference.

In the 28 years that have passed since we first met Paul, our bonds have strengthened and our shared experiences grown.

Journeys [Google Paul Lingor](#)

The young teen who thought he would never be able to travel to West Germany, let alone any other place, is now a very experienced traveler, presenting papers, giving speeches, in many different parts of the world.

Circles of Connections and coincidences---- I remain amazed at our many similarities. I am moved that because of this church, Jen found a way to talk about Paul's sexuality with him. I am hopeful that one day Paul's research will benefit ALS patients and help in Sarah's particular form of that disease. Years after meeting Paul, I learned that my college roommate had married an East German and, before finally being able to get back into the U.S., lived in a town not too far from where Paul lived. Some of her stories are very similar to Paul's.

Love--- there is so much love going back and forth! But I think mostly of Felix, who is growing up knowing he is loved by his two mothers, his two fathers, his Omas, his Opas, his Panamanian abuelo, his grandpa, and his nana.

In the end, perhaps the greatest lesson we learned was the one that we here at UPUC have been learning over the past 15 months ---- that when you open your hearts, your lives, and your spaces to welcome a stranger, your own life may be immeasurably enriched, enlarged and impacted in ways you could never have dreamed.