



Learning the Hard Way

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I replied, No thanks, been there, done that and got the T-shirt

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Looking back over my life of all the accomplishments and the failures, I wonder what I could have done, if anything, to better my life. Most likely not, as I feel life is what it is, so don't worry about things you can't change. Of course, my greatest accomplishments were my two sons and my marriage of almost 54 years to my husband Mike. I must say along the way there have been many failures. I knew they were learning experiences, growth of my character and some of them seem hilarious now. Something that sticks out in my mind, the time that I was in Germany and our wives club was going to visit Berlin and the Berlin Wall. I thought this would be a wonderful experience, as there was already talk of bringing the Berlin Wall down. I asked my husband if it would be all right for me to go on the tour. "No," he stated without hesitation, "You can't go on a trip that will take you into East Germany." He didn't even get this out of his mouth when I jumped in with both feet wanting to know why. "It's simple, Cheryl Ann," he retorted. "My security clearance will not let me or any of my family go to East Berlin. You and I both know that when the rest of the tour goes to the Wall, you won't be able to stay

on the other side.” “That won't be a problem as there are plenty of things for me to do while they are gone,” I stated. My husband stared at me with a look that said, do you think I'm that stupid. He said in a calm voice, “Honey I know you well enough to know all the tea in China wouldn't keep you off that bus if everyone else was going.” With the most sincere look that I could muster up, I answered, “You know, I do not lie to you and I swear to you, I will not go to the east side.” His expression told me that he wanted to believe me, but just knew me too well. “Cheryl, I know you mean that right now, but when you get there, hon, I can read you like a book. You won't be able to stand being the only one not going.” “I will, I swear to you on all that is holy,” I pleaded. “Believe me, you have my solemn promise, I will not step foot on the bus for that trip.” “You do realize, if you decide to go you could ruin me. If something goes wrong and the Army finds out that you went into a communist country, I most likely will get kicked out of the Army. My career would be over, are you willing to take that chance?” I replied sincerely, “Michael, you know me better than anyone in the world. I would never do anything to mess up your career. You have worked too hard to get where you're at and I would never take a chance of that happening to you, to us.” “All right, as long as you realize what's at stake, I'll just have to trust you,” he said with not a whole lot of conviction. “This will be harder than you think to not go but by far the most important promise you will ever make to me.” All the wives were having a wonderful time on the tour. We saw lots of Germany that we had never seen before. It's a beautiful place when it comes to the countryside and all their churches. Upon our arrival in Berlin, our excitement grew. It seemed to be a typical German town. Much larger than seen around Army bases. Our first day was exciting. We enjoyed exploring all the little shops, restaurants, doing the usual tourist things. That night as we were sitting around waiting on our dinner, everyone was talking about our trip so far. Of course everyone was buzzing about seeing the famous Berlin Wall. I thought it was time to let the group know that I wouldn't be traveling with them the next day and why. This started a barrage of questions why I was not going to go on the trip. I told them I had promised my husband that I would not go because of his secret clearance dealing with his job. A couple of wives related that their husbands also had the same problem with them going. They assured me the tour guide said there was nothing to worry about. Nothing had ever happened. They would check our passports on the American side. Then we would drive through to the other side and the German soldiers would collect them all. They would keep them during our tour and as we prepared to cross back over the border, we would receive our passports back. Listening to the others, I convinced myself that there was nothing that would go wrong. I forgot those sincere promises that I had made. Making a command decision of my own I decided there was no reason for me to stay behind. The next morning as we boarded the bus, I have to say, there was a momentary panic that came over me. It has been a rule of thumb throughout my life, if something is going to go wrong, it always happens to me. It's like a red flag and I can't stop, I say bring it on. Unfortunately, I let those bad feelings of doom and worry slide away thinking about the excitement. I knew deep down I was wrong but just buried it. I'd like to think it was because I was young, (almost 24) that wasn't it though. Nothing scared me, after the childhood I had, no one or anything would cause me pain I thought at that time. When we got there, everything went as planned. The Americans on the west side looked at all our passports and counted

how many were on the bus. We drove through the neutral ground and stopped at the east side, German soldiers boarded the bus and collected all the passports, gave us a few rules that was translated to us and off we went. I can't say that I had a great time as I was sort of waiting for the other shoe to fall. I knew I shouldn't be there. I just couldn't shake the thought that I had lied to my husband, because I did not listen and carry through on the promise I made. Most of the day, I wished I was back at the hotel. I knew I was going to have to tell Mike what I had done. I was already dreading that look that always came on his face when he was disappointed with me. I just kept thinking, "Cheryl, why don't you ever listen." Finally, it was time for us to drive back across the border. We got back to the guard shack and the German soldiers came aboard. The protocol for going back was different. They would call out your name, you would walk forward and receive your passport. Get off the bus and walk through the neutral ground to the west German side where US troops were stationed on guard. When they called my name I stood up and walked to the front and reached for my passport. The guard looked at me, shaking his head and rambling off German that I didn't understand. The interpreter said, "You are not the person on this passport." "Of course I am, my name is Cheryl Adam." I proceeded to tell him my birth date and my social security number. He kept shaking his head saying, "Nix." Even with my limited German I knew that meant no. The interpreter asked me, "If this is your passport, how come you look so different." I informed him that I had been on a diet for the past year and a half and lost 217 pounds. In a very stern voice, he inquired, "Why did you not get a new passport?" "The Army informed me that it wasn't necessary and I had been several places outside of Germany and hadn't had any problems." "This may be very true," he stated, "but it certainly is a problem right now." I was told to sit back down and they would deal with me after everyone else was off the bus. Most of the time I am a very take charge kind of person, but I am here to tell you I was too frightened to even open my mouth. They instructed me to leave the bus and walk to the German guard shack. A US officer stepped into the neutral ground, and demanded to know what was going on. The German soldier was once again rattling off a bunch of stuff that I could not understand. I knew from the look on the American officer's face that none of it was good. As he spoke to me, I felt like a child that had been mischievous, "Mrs. Adam, were you suppose to be on this tour today." "No sir, I wasn't, I promised my husband I wouldn't, but after talking with the other wives, I just didn't see what could go wrong. I was mistaken when I came to that conclusion." By this time I was in tears. Not so much the fact that I might be in a prison pretty soon, but I knew they had to call my husband. In all the years of our marriage he had never gotten real upset with me. I knew that was going to change now. No matter how this turned out, I had lied to him. I felt he would never be able to completely trust me again. I think that was the hardest part for me, knowing I had let him down. Officer Ward, in no uncertain terms, told me that I would stay in the guard shack until they could clear this matter up. They would notify my husband to get the documented proof of the diet and recent pictures of me. He informed me to just sit still, say nothing and for God's sake, sign nothing. I should let you in on a little secret here, I am claustrophobic and sitting in small places does a real number on me. Trying my best to follow orders, even though it was a little late for that, I would not even ask if I could go to the bathroom. All I could think of was how would I ever get out of this mess. I was certain

that my life, as I knew it, would never be the same. As night fell, all my assumptions that this was going to be over soon were to no avail, no thoughts of sleep or food came to mind. I just kept praying that my husband was going to do what he had to do to get me out of this godforsaken place. In some strange sense, I was looking forward to the lecture I would receive upon my release. I knew I deserved every bit of it. I promised myself and God that I would think long and hard before I made another promise and I would always keep it. I sat there for sixteen hours. No clue what was going on. All kinds of terrible things popped in my head. What if my husband was denied help on my behalf. If they were preparing to boot him out of the Army. What were the chances that he would say, let them keep her. In my heart I knew he would never do that but after you sit there that long, you just can't think straight. Every once in a while, a German soldier would come in and say something. Knowing about ten words in German, they never spoke any that I recognize, I just kept quiet like the US officer had asked me to do. Strange time in my life to decide there was a possibility that I didn't have all the answers. As morning dawned, I was praying pretty hard at this point that my plight would soon be over. Suddenly voices outside perked me up. I heard a lot of Americans and Germans conversing, I even heard some laughter and of course this brought hope that this nightmare was coming to an end. The German soldier came in with a very stern look on his face, looked at me and said, "Stand up." After all I had just gone through, believe it or not the first thought that ran through my mind was he spoke English. I have to say, this ticked me off to no end. Smart girl that I can be sometimes, I managed to keep my mouth shut and stood up. He all but barked, "Come." Once outside the guard shack, the American officer looked me in the eyes. He ordered me to walk forward, not to look back, not to say a word, just keep walking. No matter what I heard, just walk until I crossed the blue line." He did not have to repeat himself, as it was all I could do to not start running. I'm sure the distance was no more than about 50 feet but I'm here to tell you it seem like 100 miles. Once I arrived on the West German side, they had a car there and the officer told me, "Please get in and they will drive you to your hotel." "Thank you sir, I appreciated everything that everyone did on my behave to get me home." His reply was calm but firm, "Mrs. Adam, the next time your husband tells you not to do something and he explains his reasoning, please listen to him, this could have had a different ending for us all." When I arrived back at the hotel, I had no idea what to expect. I knew the tour was over. No one said anything about what arrangements were in place for my departure back home. So I just rode in silence knowing that someone would be at the hotel to inform me of my fate. There is no way in this world to describe how I felt when that car door opened and there stood my husband. He tried hard to look mad, but as I stepped out he just threw his arms around me and said, "Thank God." He pushed his head away from me, looked me square in the eyes, "I am going to kill you when we get home." Then he started laughing. "I knew you would go but like you, I didn't think anything would happen. I never once thought about the weight you lost and how different you look now. Do not ask to go on anymore tours because the answer is definitely no." With tears in my eyes, I asked, "How in the world did you get here so fast? "My boss had me flown out, everyone wanted this over with before it turned into a international incident." There was nothing I could say to help the situation so I just kept quiet. At that moment, I never wanted to go on another tour, I only wanted to get back with my family

and forget this ever happened. Upon my arrival home, my first order of business was to apply for my new passport. My husband's commander (the Post Chaplain) thought the world of both Mike and me. After a good blessing down, Mike's boss told me that it had all stayed in-house, and no one was to ever speak of it again. I went back to Germany many years later with a girlfriend of mine and she asked if I'd like to go see where the Berlin Wall used to stand. With no hesitation at all, I replied, "No thank you. Been there, done that and got the tee shirt."