



A LOW-RISK IDYLL IN BERLIN MARTIN DALY

A professor of Psychology and Biology at McMaster University in Canada, I completed my Ph.D. in 1971 in my hometown of Toronto, and then pursued postdoctoral research in the Algerian Sahara, studying the behavior and ecology of desert rodents. This has remained one of my main interests, but for the last 25 years, I have also been working with my spouse Margo Wilson on human behavior and psychology, with special interests in family relations and in violence. Margo and I are co-authors of a textbook (*Sex, Evolution and Behavior*, 2nd edition, 1983) and two monographs (*Homicide*, 1988, and *The Truth About Cinderella*, 1998), and we are members of the MacArthur Foundation Economics Network on “norms and preferences”, whence ideas and methods from economics have infused our work on homicide and risk-taking. We therefore find ourselves trying to keep up on developments in a strange domain that includes work in biology, criminology, economics, and psychology, but the one annual meeting we never miss is that of the interdisciplinary *Human Behavior & Evolution Society*, whose journal *Evolution & Human Behavior* we edit. – Address: Department of Psychology, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario L8S 4K1, Canada.

When Alex Kacelnik explained his proposal for an interdisciplinary “Risk” group at Wiko to Margo Wilson and me, we were immediately enthusiastic. We knew some of the invitees personally, others only from their writings, and we were sure that our own approach to the study of risk evaluation and risky behavior would profit from an opportunity for extended interactions. Unfortunately, ours could only be a relatively short stay of three months

duration, but that was time enough to realize some of the anticipated benefits – and some that were unanticipated, too.

To spare our cats the traumas of airplane transfers and successive flights, we flew to Frankfurt and hired a car to drive to Berlin. It was a pleasant trip through attractive countryside, except for the environs of Erfurt, a town which would soon be in the news for tragic reasons. However, we were surprised when, with still no signs of an approaching city, our directions led us off the Autobahn into a forest dotted with lakes, and soon to the Wissenschaftskolleg itself. How curious: we had understood that Wiko was located in the city, but here we were on a late April afternoon in a glorious sylvan setting instead! The feeling that we might be at a forest resort was enhanced when Ines Doleschal, the only person in sight, greeted us warmly and showed us to temporary quarters, with a well-stocked refrigerator, on the top floor of the Weiße Villa. There, the four of us (two people and two cats) ate, drank, and sank contentedly into an overdue 12-hour sleep, still unaware that we *were* in fact in Berlin, just a short walk from the Ku'damm.

And I never did get over that initial astonishment. The wondrous thing about our few months in the Grunewald was the incongruous juxtaposition: a world of massive trees and bicycle trails and lakes where great crested grebes nested, cheek by jowl with a world of major museums and great restaurants and KaDeWe. The urban scene delivered pleasures throughout our stay, but I think I derived even more from the woods. I especially remember tracking down the nightingale who seemed to be singing in our Villa Walther flat, but who was really 60 m away across the Koenigsallee, and a couple of hours spent watching nuthatches and blue tits simultaneously provisioning their chicks in nest boxes just a few meters apart at the foot of the Wiko garden. Unfortunately, the woods made me miserable, too, for I was desperately allergic to the local mix of tree pollens for the entire month of May.

Since the current cohort of Fellows had already been together through a Berlin winter when we arrived, they had established a culture that we and our friend Catherine Eckel, another latecomer, had to suss out and the Risk group had its own subculture, as well. But it wasn't difficult to start to feel at home, since there were so many people with whom we shared professional interests and an enthusiasm for conversation over good meals. Catherine, Alex, Rob Boyd, Joan Silk, Joe Henrich, Elke Weber, and Ernst Fehr were old acquaintances whose work we admired, and it was soon apparent that John McNamara, Raghavendra Gadagkar, Eric Johnson, Michael Kosfeld and Cristina Bicchieri were going to be expert and generous professional colleagues, too. They and Nicky Underhill, Helga

Fehr, and Natalie Smith soon felt like old friends. In fact, the socializing was a bit grueling!

I had last been in Berlin 30 years ago, and I confess that I returned with certain prejudices about dull Northern European cuisine. So what pleasant surprises in that domain! I expected the bread to be good, but no one had prepared me for the intensity with which asparagus season is celebrated, nor for the pfiifferling season that followed. And I had no idea how good the Wiko kitchen would turn out to be; I'm not sure that the lunches helped me work productively, but they certainly kept me happy.

When the Fellows told me about the winter they had been through (and when I considered the hibernal implications of the 20-hour days in late June), I wasn't altogether sorry to be a spring migrant. But three months was clearly too short a stay. We knew from past residences at other interdisciplinary centers that some of the best things about an institution like Wiko can be the interactions with people whose areas of expertise are very far from one's own. Historian John Breuilly's Wednesday colloquium was one of my favorites, and I was fascinated by the little that I learned about the activities of the locomotion group, but what with museums to visit, a marvellously stimulating Dahlem Conference and events that couldn't be missed at Humboldt University, the Max Planck Institute and Leibniz Kolleg Potsdam, I felt like I underexploited my opportunity for real interdisciplinary dialogue at Wiko itself.