



FIVE STONES
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I went to the Wissenschaftskolleg with four goals: to learn German, to finish a book in progress, to dive deeply into my next book project, and to advance my visioning for a new collaborative space that I am calling the GenderSci Lab. Instead, the year became a reflective exercise in how to find spaces for deep creative work despite my many new constraints, obligations, and passions as a parent of young children.

My year at the Wiko was a difficult one, defined by my experience of trying to combine life at Wiko and life raising babies. Some time after accepting Wiko's Fellowship, I learned that I was expecting a second baby. With Wiko's encouragement, I set myself on course to come anyway, and I arrived in late August with a three-month-old infant and a two-year-old toddler.

I am grateful to Wiko staff, particularly Andrea Bergmann and Nina Kitsos, and to my cohort of Fellows for their support and kindness as I surfed the divided attention, exhaustion, and challenges of being an intellectual by day and an up-to-my-elbows parent at all other times. I lived between Villa Walther and the Wiko, rarely leaving the Grunewald, with only a glimpse of Berlin after dark on a handful of carefully orchestrated occasions involving teams of babysitters. I did what I needed to do to get through each day, even if it meant napping in my office, or accepting that breastfeeding and colloquium-attending could not go together on a particular Tuesday. Each day was utterly exhausting and it required discipline to get any work done, despite the idyllic surroundings and quiet, spacious office provided by Wiko. With the demands of child-rearing, accompanied by enormous challenges setting up comprehensive childcare, I felt that I missed out on much of what Wiko has to offer. I quite often felt isolated, as if I were watching Wiko's activities through a slat in the blinds. However, in an intergenerational group such as ours, I benefitted from the understanding and advice of those who had been through it all before. I even came to feel a little pride at somehow making it all happen.

For my son Martin, Berlin will forever be a part of his life story and his education. He emerged with a perfect German accent and many fond memories, which we are nourishing now with weekend German school. In the end, Acadia was blessed with a bevy of babysitters – German and Brazilian – who absolutely fell in love with my daughter and with whom we built lasting bonds. We and they took her on regular perambulations of the Grunewald. Her first words: duck! swan! lecker! obrigada! Over the course of the year, both children grew like weeds and were curious, strong, and resilient in the face of our move to Germany and return home. It was an awe-inspiring thing to watch.

I did not learn German. That was the first to go. I did not finish the book in progress. Instead, I slowed way down and took time working through the most complex parts of that project on the science of maternal effects. The opportunity to slow down in this way allowed me to significantly deepen my understanding of recent developments in the field, and in this I benefitted enormously from many conversations with Mike Wade, who also generously read each of my book chapters, as well as conversations with many other Fellows.

I used my Tuesday colloquium and the incredible opportunity to present to our large cohort of biologists the most ambitious and difficult ideas at the center of my new project on sex contextualism. This vastly advanced my thinking and launched what I think will be an important paper. It also began a collaboration with Simon Elsässer, whose research on sex effects in stem cells sparks some wonderful possibilities for elaborating the stakes of the view that I call “sex contextualism”.

Throughout it all, I kept up one routine: a weekly conference call with my lab group back home, who faithfully assembled each Friday in my Harvard office to Skype with me as we continued our work. Over the course of the year, we practiced together a lively interdisciplinary and socially engaged approach to the sciences of sex and gender. As a group, we built and envisioned a dynamic collaborative training space and research engine for driving new thinking in this area. We read and wrote together, built a website and a blog, placed several pieces of writing both popular and academic, and overall, significantly advanced the reality of the lab. The ability to virtually continue this community was an anchor in the midst of so much personal change and geographic dislocation. The lab is now launched. Ideas are zinging, and the lab is every bit the joyful, energizing, and empowering space I hoped it would be. I expect that this project will be a major part of my intellectual life in the coming years.

Accompanying me to Berlin, and overlaying all of this, was a numb tension about the question of my proper orientation to my own family’s history in Berlin. My grandmother, Barbara Rodbell, was born in Berlin in 1925. She left at the age of eight when her father lost the ability to practice law due to anti-Semitic laws. Ultimately, her entire immediate family perished at Auschwitz. Now the only trace of her extensive Berlin family is an untended plot at the Jewish cemetery in Weißensee. The only survivor, my grandmother obtained false papers and went underground in Amsterdam at age 16. She eventually emigrated to the United States. When I told her I intended to go to Berlin, she was delighted, and she asked for two things. First, she wanted “the stones” placed in front of her childhood house. Second, she wanted me to find the bird figurines in the Tiergarten that she remembered playing on as a child.

I never definitively identified the bird sculptures, but the stones that she was speaking of are Stolpersteine, the vision of artist Gunter Demnig. The stones memorialize victims of National Socialism at the site of their last voluntary residence. Some adorn the Wiko’s Grunewald villas. With the help of Daniel Schönplflug and Kirsten Graupner, and the companionship of Joan Strassmann, Thomas Lewinsohn, and Gisèle Sapiro, we delved into

my family history and made connections with the Stolpersteine project. Five stones will be placed in front of Genthiner Straße 5a in the coming year. I intend to return to Berlin for the ceremony. I am ever grateful for this support.

At the same time, I learned grave things in the process of this family research that I still struggle to process. The footprint of my family in Berlin and the scale of loss within my direct family lineage are far beyond what I had previously understood. Shortly before I departed, I learned that the two already existing Stolpersteine at Genthiner Straße 5a had been vandalized. It is being investigated as a hate crime. The opportunity exists to restore my German citizenship, and I completed the application while at Wiko, but I have not yet filed to the application. I have some more thinking to do. Berlin, you and I are not finished.

It is said that to be happy, one must be able to love and to work. Wiko gave me the space to rebuild my ability to do both. Coming home has brought an enormous rush of energy as I reenter my regular activities with a clarity about how I will combine my work with my investments in my children, the conditions ideal for my best, deepest, most creative labor, and the broad future I see for building conversations and collaborations with colleagues across so many fields and around the world.