

POINT BLANK 'FRIENDS & FREEDOM'

Al Cornette

Once I had a friend--"friend" being a loose term, as people seem to bend with the wind and you look up one day and they're gone. Don't know why that is, not my fault 'cause I liked Klaus and appreciated and sympathized with how he had suffered in East Germany shortly after Russia had converted the area to communist rule after World War 11.

Klaus and his mother, like most Germans in the east side of Berlin, lived in an apartment complex. They both yearned for the freedom of movement and speech enjoyed by the West Germans. Trains still ran into West Berlin so Klaus and his mother made plans to escape such a suppressive society. He indicated to me that the only person he could trust, and with whom he could express his thoughts openly, was his mother. Every apartment harbored communistic informers. Anyone who could expose someone speaking out against the tyrannical rule of the party was rewarded. Those speaking out disappeared, never to be heard from again, and so he had no friends as betrayal was normal among friendships.

Their plan to escape: for weeks that ran into months, they kept telling their fellow apartment dwellers they were planing a move to a small village outside Berlin. After many weeks of publicizing their intentions of moving, and making sure that the authenticity of their

many. Klaus told me that all he had was a small briefcase containing some school books and homework. All his mother had taken were the clothes she wore and her purse. They separated, he on one end and she on the other end of the train. Guards patrolled the train and obviously Klaus and his mother triggered no suspicious investigation or questioning. They stepped into West Germany, free to walk about and free to talk to other people, free to express their thoughts and discuss personal topics as all humans should have the right to do without persecution.



I had the opportunity to be cubicle mates with Klaus in a large corporation for a few years and even in those times--the 1960s and 1970s--we existed in a somewhat similarly suppressive, managerial/competitive/career-oriented group of people where freedom of opinion and criticism were dealt with severely if that criticism was negatively directed toward top management. I too "stepped off the train," so to speak, at Slade, Kentucky in 1975, to escape that corporate tyranny of suppressed freedom

of speech. In fact, I was literally "drummed out of the corp" for openly criticising management. I gave up retirement benefits, feeling a bit as Klaus's mother must have when she sacrificed her precious heirlooms.

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intentions were sincere to the many informers living around them--almost all were informers--they nonchalantly loaded up a moving van with all their belongings, including the family heirlooms Klaus's mother loved so dearly, and watched it drive off to the pre-planned destination.

Klaus and his mother then boarded a train going into West Ger-

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This, my friends, is what freedom of speech is all about. Anyone, whether you are talking on your phone or complaining about government issues on Facebook or email, should realize that you are living now, just as Klause and his mother, in an environment that may monitor every thought, intention, or philosophy you may have. It is wise to believe this and please know that the time is coming when the only person you will trust will be your mother.

Later, I learned that Klause and his wife, Helga, transferred to New York, and there I lost track of him. He came to visit once and appeared to be a little puzzled that I had given up such a good job, but, I suppose it's all relative. His definition of freedom was somewhat different from mine. Lots of Klause Winkler's on the net and he may be gone by now. One of the unfortunate aspects of living longer than most is that you must endure the departure of all good friends.

AL CORNETTE is an artist, author, craftsman, philosopher and keen observer of the 'human scene.' He lives in Slade, Kentucky, in the home/studio he built himself more than 30 years ago.

Next issue, The Zephyr hopes to feature more of Al's words and work...JS



Al Cornette's web site:
<http://www.mayanalendarand2012.com/>



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