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Businessman helps reunite family after 57 year separation

By BRUCE STAPLEY

"It was one of those experiences you wouldn't trade for anything, but you wouldn't rush back to try again."

This is how Stouffville's Ged Stonehouse summed up a recent adventure which saw him fly to East Germany to help reunite a Parkview village resident, Walter Kempin, with his sisters after a 57 year separation.

An earlier attempt to re-meet his sister was aborted last spring when he failed to make the proper connections.

And after spending a day going from one border crossing to another, standing hours in lineups and receiving much verbal abuse from customs officials, Mr. Stonehouse now understands how someone can come so close, yet still fail to rendezvous with a person in that Communist country.

Completed pressing matters

Upon arrival in Berlin, West Germany, Mr. Stonehouse immediately completed business matters, his prime reason for being in that part of the world.

He then picked Mr. Kempin up at the airport and went off in search of his sisters.

"Holy Moses," Mr. Stonehouse recalled Mr. Kempin repeating as they watched cars pass them on the autobahn at speeds of over 100 miles per hour.

"After arriving at the border and the checkpoint, the guard asked for documents," Mr. Stonehouse said. "But I spoke no German, he spoke no English and Walter was so excited he didn't understand."

Couldn't enter

Ultimately they determined the East German officials were telling them they couldn't enter without a visa and they didn't issue them there. The guard pointed them in the direction of another border crossing 110 kilometres away.

Off they went through several small towns to the border crossing of Hirschberg.

"There it was," Mr. Stonehouse recalled. "High barbed wire fences, watch towers, check points and five rows of cars."

After a 40 minute wait, they



All set to go!

With Halloween only a few days away, students at Dixon Hill Public School got a jump on their preparations to don scary disguises and go out trick or treating by having their faces painted during lunch hour on Oct. 27 and 28. Here Maxine Bond (left) and Melanie Martin,

both of Grade 4, get into the swing of things with hearts and stars to mark the beginning of what must have been very scary costumes on Saturday night.

—Denise McDonald

were once again on their way to the check point.

"This lady took one look at our papers and started telling me off very forcefully," Mr. Stonehouse said. "When she realized I couldn't understand, she became even angrier."

Found someone

Going from building to building, they finally found someone sympathetic to their plight. However, the red tape was going to make it touch and go for Mr. Stonehouse to catch his flight home from Frankfurt within 24 hours.

With paper work now intact, they once again presented them-

selves to the excitable border guard. After additional waving of arms and another fast and furious verbal offensive, the sergeant major, as Mr. Stonehouse affectionately dubbed her, sent them to the next checkpoint. The car was searched, and they were finally sent on their way.

They now had to backtrack the 100 kilometres they had been forced to go in pursuit of the proper border crossing. Except this time, they were on the other side of the iron curtain.

Old girlfriend

Driving through the drab East German countryside Walter

found his memory had not failed him. Each town triggered a recollection from his distant past including a girlfriend he once dated.

Arriving in Sonneberg, his home town, Mr. Kempin directed them to his family home. "The yard's a mess," was his first reaction.

They were met at the gate by Mr. Kempin's great niece, who gave the old man a big hug and ran off to get the others. His sisters came running. The tearful reunion was complete. "Walter's reaction was really quite predictable," said Mr. Stonehouse. "He gave one sister a big hug, then looked at her and said: Holy

Moses, are you my sister?"

Mr. Stonehouse was welcomed as a guest. The experience, he said, was similar to staying in a late forties Ontario farmhouse except for the 26 inch color TV.

Extremely cold

The toilet was an outhouse, the bath was the kitchen sink and the house was extremely cold.

Mr. Kempin spent one day with his family who accompanied him by bus back across the border.

East Germans who are past the age of 65 are allowed to leave the country several times a year.

After several days together, it was all over. Mr. Kempin was on a train back to Frankfurt for his flight home.

But this time, he would return with his mission accomplished, thanks to the adventuresome spirit of a Stouffville neighbor who believes in storybook endings.

As for Mr. Stonehouse, the travel office operator with a flair for the unusual, he was just as happy to return to his native land.

"I came home to a fantastic country where we must really stop and think how lucky we are," he added.

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