

How to kill the pawn



By Marek Konka



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Introduction

I never had ambitions to be someone special, to stand out from others, or to be on the spotlight. Whatever I did, I tried to do the best I could without doing too much publicity around myself. This applied equally to my opposition activity and in the ranks of NSZZ “Solidarność”. Meanwhile, after the introduction of martial law, I was recognized by the Security Service as a person who should be isolated, together with the most dangerous opponents of the communist authorities, who separated the pieces from the pawns on the chessboard developed by them. Among this elite, numbering about 5,000 people, they made another division into those who can be controlled without major problems due to their popularity both in Poland and abroad, and the rest of the pawns whose control, due to their number and dispersion was a task beyond the capabilities of the communist authorities. These pawns should, according to them, be disposed of, by any means possible. One of these ways was to make the „pawns” an offer they couldn’t refuse.

11/8/2006

(1) AN OFFER YOU CANNOT REFUSE

Daily interrogations by the SB¹ became a routine in Białoleka.² The initial fear when walking under machine guns disappeared, and as the realization grew that the authorities had no idea how to get rid of us, it slowly turned into a tactic of how to get a few cigarettes. Those who were supposed to sign the declaration of loyalty signed it, mostly they were criminals detained on the occasion of street rallies, although there were cases of signing the „loyalty” also by „Solidarity” activists, including high-level activists, such as: Janek Kułaj - chairman of „Solidarity of Individual Farmers”. 20 years later, it turned out that there were more collaborators, but that’s another matter. Since the situation seemed to be a stalemate, General Kiszczak issued a radio statement that those who wanted to can leave the country without any obstacles. However, there was no mention of the consequences of such a decision. At the same time, the style of interrogation by the UB became completely different. can happen accidentally. In Białoleka, I had the opportunity to observe the officers interrogating me several times, but this one was an exceptional type.

¹ SB – Sluzba Bezpieczenstwa, meaning Security Service. A secret Service issued to fight and oppress any kind of opposition. An equivalent of KGB in Soviet Union.

² Bialoleka – The prison near Warsaw, converted to an internment camp for a Solidarity activist, during martial law.

First, it was constant, that is, always the same. As I remember now his half-bald head with the grizzled remnants of his hair neatly combed on the sides, his fat face with little glowing eyes, a freshly pressed shirt, and a perfectly tailored suit with elegant cufflinks poking out of the sleeves. When I entered, he always sat and greeted me with his hand outstretched, saying „well, how did you think about my offer, Marek?” It never occurred to me to leave Poland. I had a very good company, a well-paid job, a car, an apartment, the West did not offer me a better life than the one I led in Warsaw. The escalation of the interrogations, however, increased with planning. Subsequent meetings with this type, made me think more often about the safety of my loved ones and myself. I tried to confuse the situation with problems with the sale of a villa that I never had, that my wife did not agree, etc., but over time I realized that I was getting closer to making a decision. I tried to argue with my cell-mates. Some were in favor of leaving, some were against. Those who supported left, those who did not support, like Michnik³ in a few years, exchanged kisses with Kwaśniewski⁴ and drank at the round table with the executioner Kiszczak,⁵ others like my guru Frasyniuk, or Lityński or Celiński⁶ or, or, did they get along with post-communism, others will play their cards together with thugs, embezzlers and other products of early democracy. At that time, I wrote a poem to my late mother

³ Adam Michnik – Solidarity activist, negotiator in behalf of the opposition during Round Table

⁴ Aleksander Kwasniewski – Member of the Communist Party Politbiuro, one of the negotiators during so called Round Table in 1989. He later became a President of Poland for two terms.

⁵ Czesław Kiszczak – Minister of Internal Affairs, responsible for numerous crimes against humanity during martial law. He continued his position after the Round Table.

⁶ Władysław Frasyniuk, Jan Lityński, Andrzej Celinski – Solidarity members, negotiators in behalf of the opposition during Round Table

that „you have to start everything from the beginning”. In the vision I asked her what would you do if we had to leave? I will be where you will answer. My father with tears in his eyes did not object. At the next meeting, I filled out the passport application with the SB. When I was released from prison, I was convinced that the Polish and international red cross had finally worked. But I was naive.

When I was free, there was a one-way passport waiting for me with a date of issue earlier than the date of my release from internment.

11/9/2006

(2) HOW DID I CROSS THE RIVERS ODER AND NYSA ŁUŻYCKA (LUSATIAN NEISSE)

A few days after leaving prison, I received a registered letter from the Capital Headquarters of the Citizens' Militia,⁷ where I received a passport for all countries of the world with the right to cross the border once. At the same time, I was obliged to leave the country as soon as possible. So I started closing the first stage of my life. The most important was the operation of a malignant melanoma nodule I contracted in prison. Mice and dirt were everyday ailments, so it was easy to get sick. At this point, I would like to thank the doctors. During internment, medical commissions, and after being released during my stay at the Oncology Institute, secret psychological sessions - everywhere I met with great understanding and a professional and quick approach to the matter. The operation was successful and very cheerful. I was asked to clench my hand on the handle and hold on during the operation. I asked the doctor to inform me when he would cut off my hand, because I would be holding on unnecessarily. The whole team started

⁷ Milicja Obywatelska – Name of Police in communist countries.

laughing and, in this atmosphere, we made it to the end. Today, when I look at the scar on my forearm, I remember beautiful, huge, hazel eyes looking out from above the mask. That's all I have left of malignant melanoma. I also associated the Institute with another fact. Well, a few weeks earlier I was brought here for a check-up during which I was supposed to go out the back door and simply disappear. Unfortunately, the key escorting me took the papers under a different name and didn't even manage to uncuff me. Yes, sometimes five minutes can decide the whole future life. After a few days, I left the hospital and started wandering around the embassies. The situation was complicated because I didn't know where I wanted to go. I decided to apply for political asylum in several embassies and go where the first ones would want me. At that time, thousands of people applied for a trip, so I stood in kilometer long queues hoping that Canada, maybe the USA, maybe South Africa, Sweden, France or any other country where I could start living from scratch. I don't know why, but Germany was out of the question. Well, maybe because my grandmother and grandfather on my mother's side were shot and my wife's father and mother were escaping from transports to concentration camps. Unfortunately, I couldn't forget it.

Canada was the first to respond, but it took a long time because the documents were sent via the UK. I even started the whole procedure and my wife, who was initially pregnant, was conducting the appropriate tests, but at the same time we received a letter from the US embassy - we inform you that you have been granted political asylum in the US and therefore please come... ...Things have accelerated. The car went first, then the piano, which always had 10 packs of extra strong in case

they locked me up, then a few small items. We packed in two suitcases, knocked down a cage for the dog (a beautiful boxer-female), which was a gift for my wife for the first wedding anniversary. It seemed that we had not gained much in communism after 15 years of work, but faith in the future and counting on each other allowed us to wait optimistically for new challenges. Last evening, I was visited by my former director of the RSW Prasa Branch. Throughout my activity in NSZZ ‘Solidarity’, I felt that I could count on him. Few directors went with the wind of that time. Thank you.

We were greeted by our closest friends and family at the airport. There was no end to the tears.

Just an airport announcement and we went to customs. We had all our money taken, leaving us \$10 each, food confiscated for our early days, told us we were a nuisance, and shooed into the duty-free zone. From then on, every cent was important. So, I licked the BALTONA⁸ windows and promised the dog that soon he would be watching communism in color in his own chair with a cigar in his mouth. After several minutes the IL-18 was climbing up somewhere to Frankfurt. And so, I crossed the Oder and the Lusatian Neisse. The champagne we drank on the occasion reduced our fortune to \$10. In the future, I was supposed to multiply this money, but I didn’t care. Our daughter KASIA was flying in Hanka’s womb.

⁸ Baltona – name of the oldest Duty Free Shop in Poland

(3) IN THE PAWS OF THE “ROTTEN WEST”⁹

Farther and farther remained the country of hairdressers and cuts, I was closer and closer to the land of stylists and bodyguards. We flew into the unknown, there was no thought, There was still a lot of life ahead of me in which so much was supposed to happen. The most important part of this trip was the envelope. A large yellow sealed envelope that I got in Warsaw at the Embassy and in which there was a secret. I was not allowed to open or lose it. Upon arrival, I was to hand it over to the immigration officer. I spent my last minutes getting ready to meet me at the airport. Poland was on the media waves, interned on the lips of the whole world. In my mind, I saw crowds welcoming me, maybe interviews, short speeches, flowers, well, like for you. game. The plane landed, taxied, I was cleared by the customs and ... SHIT.

My wife and I became the loneliest people in the world. We were sitting in the waiting room of the airport - she with her boots open from swollen legs and I looking around for the welcoming committee. Between us a dog and two suitcases and 10 dollars in the pocket, which you were not allowed to spend because otherwise there would be no money.

⁹ Rotten West – The way of the all Western Countries were called by a communists propaganda

I don't know what happened, you mustn't move from this place, or we'll never see each other again, I said to my wife and walked through the huge glass door to the ticket office somewhere. From then on, the story began, which was the reason that these stories should never have been made. Friends who know her for a long time urged me to write a book, but things were so unpredictable that, firstly, it was hard to believe, and secondly, I did not understand the situation myself. The next 3 months were undoubtedly the most shocking and perhaps the most dangerous of my life.

When I managed to reach the ticket office in some mixed German, Polish and English, I explained to the cashier that I was probably wanted by someone, that I had landed from Poland, someone was supposed to greet me, but we passed, that I did not know where to go. For this, I supported my function in NSZZ Solidarność. I quickly understood that Solidarność was yesterday and today I have no place to sleep and nothing to eat. After several unsuccessful communications from western radio evil, my confidence began to plummet. It had been going on for about an hour and I felt like I was in some kind of trap.

Don't you need help? I heard a voice with a strong German accent. I turned around and saw a short, thin man in a coat with a hat on his head. He was about 60. He looked as if he had found himself by accident, without any luggage. I told him at a sprint pace what had happened, that my wife was also somewhere, but I don't know where, that I didn't know how to get back to her, and then I completely surrendered to his suggestions. I treated the stranger like some kind spirit that had fallen straight from heaven. First, we found my wife. She could cry, but

she never cried in difficult situations. She knew we were together so nothing could happen. Later we went to the airport chaplain who, when he found out about our adventures, topped up our budget with 20 marks, and later at the cafe table I told „my” German more precisely what happened to us. After a short thought, he informed us that he was very busy, that he would be back but not he knows when and we have to wait here for him and not worry about a thing. What just happened. Since our coffee bar was on the platform of the cable car, time was running fast for us and after about two hours I spotted my guardian among the people getting off the cable car. He was literally lugging plastic bags in both hands. He asked the barmaid if he could use the phone and I guessed he was asking about different hotels. When he finished, he said that everything was arranged, he ordered a taxi in which Saba (our dog) was sitting in a harness in the front seat, and the three of us in the back seat. At the hotel, the staff asked what the dog likes to eat and then took the female for a pedicure and a bath. Because it was clear to everyone that we were in a hotel for dogs, but not for me and my Hanka, we tried to keep a serious face and not to compromise ourselves in such a hospitable place. While Saba was relaxing, Richard (that was the name of my casual acquaintance) presented the plan for the next few days. It was an October Saturday. The American embassy was not working so we had to wait until Monday. At the meal he took out of the bags, I learned the plan for Monday. Richard provided me with a map of Frankfurt, explained where they go and what trams, where the American Embassy is. Marek - he said as if ordering - on Monday you are to be at the embassy no later than 8 am. And at 8:05 sharp, I'll be calling there. Then

you must be there. I'm sure someone will call you. He gave us personal gifts, gave us 100 marks each which he stated that he was in a hurry to Munich where he lived, that the hotel was paid until Tuesday and to be of good cheer. After which he left. The only conclusion that came to me and Hania was that we had out of this world luck and that's it. There are still people in this world.

I didn't think that fate would bring me in contact with this man, and not just once.

Sunday was a sunny day, so I decided to walk to the embassy. It wasn't far, so I timed it on the way back. I spent the rest of the day walking around Frankfurt, and on Monday I was ready to go. Punctually at 8.00 am I sat modestly on a chair and waited for the development of events. Exactly 8.05 in the corridors I observed a clerk who was running calling: is Mr. Konka?, where is Mr. Konka? It's me, I'll say. We are very sorry, but there was a mistake through no fault of ours. We will try to fix everything, we will provide you with a car soon, we know that you are with your wife and dog. Please sit back and don't get nervous, everything will be fine. I watched this movement and couldn't believe my eyes. The last such mess I made during negotiations with RSW Prasa, still in Poland, but teeth at the American embassy? I felt again that I was a SOMEBODY, but it wasn't me. That SOMEBODY had to be HE - my mysterious stranger Richard Kluge.

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(4) VITAGENA BAD-SODEN NEAR FRANKFURT

We picked up “SABA” from the hotel, loaded our belongings and set off in the direction of Bad Soden, a town of about 60 km from Frankfurt. Time was running very fast. We drove a beautiful highway, from time to time we were overtaken by speeding cars Mercedes. After an hour we drove down to the town, the destination of our trip. He greeted us owner of four hotels, one of which was to become our new home for a short time.

„Welcome very warmly,” said a very elegant gentleman.

Will the dog pee in the front or back of the building? He asked. I’m confused probably since we landed, so it was hard to control, so probably the interpreter quickly explained that they are asking me how the dog is used to getting settled because there is grass at the back and a street in front, We said grass and we got a room with access to the back of the building. After unpacking, we were shown the hotel, i.e. the swimming pool with which we could use at will, the canteen and other rooms such as toilets, telephone booths, etc. The main points of the program were to be discussed the next day at breakfast and for now we were given time to get acquainted with the area. Bad Soden was a pretty town nestled between wooded hills. In one of valleys was the center of the city. From Vitagena (that was the name of the hotel complex) to the city you walked along a wide sidewalk, you passed a complex of swimming

pools with hot water, and then you walked to the downtown, a few shops, 3-story residential houses, fire brigade station railway, just like everywhere in small towns. One thing immediately caught my eye: terrifying cleanliness. I had the opportunity to observe the morning washing of houses Cisterns the water was going very slowly and the man operated the water hose and washed the houses of dust. People gave away plastic egg containers to the stores, dog owners they were cleaning up dog poop in plastic bags, it was weird and funny. Weird and funny when I threw my cigarette butt on the sidewalk. Passing German so sharply he gave me a look that I still remember his indignation. Willingly not wanting this lesson came in handy because from then on we took an active part in keeping the city in good condition proper cleanliness, and more than that. The stay at Vitagena was one great onerest. Meals were served on the canteen, at breakfast they were read current messages, some very expected, e.g. who will fly out next week and where to.

Everything was paid for by the US. We had complete medical care and dental, and once a week we received the so-called pocket money we should have spend on pleasures or, for example, on cigarettes, and for which one could buy at least. for two weeks of family food in Poland. I was so impressed with all those goods, that I sent photos of a set table with lunch meat I purchased, so that in Poland they would not worry that we're are having a bad time here. To tell the truth, probably never, not even in the greatest times of the People's Republic of Poland I've never seen a store as stocked as in this little town, let alone.

Not to mention about queues to the counter that did not exceed five people here. Under such conditions we found ourselves finding the

peace we needed. New ones sprang up acquaintances sometimes brutally interrupted by departures to the States United States. I was not allowed to enjoy this peace for too long. One evening the staff notified me that there was a call for me:. Hello?....

Good evening, Mark. It's me Richard. I wanted to know if you found it in the right place, because there is also a refugee camp nearby. Everything is in I answered okay. I'm definitely in Vitagena. Could you give me yours Shirt size, and Hanka's measurements, and what number of shoes does she wear, and how about yours? I wanted to interrupt this conversation, but I was starting to get uncomfortable. It dawned on me that I was starting to be dependent or inactive while I am in contact with this guy. After a conversation I told Hanna everything. Our thoughts on Richard went the same direction. We were sure that he wanted to make us dependent on him. I had a phone call to Vitagena besides, he called a good place to make sure if I was there.

There were so many question marks that I slowly switched back to the old style. of the type, everyone wants to harm me, report to the SB and that this someone may even be good friend. There was no doubt that we would see Richard soon. It happened next day. He brought us coats, shirts, shoes, and we already knew when we were leaving.to Boston we prayed that this nightmare would end. And he lasted. Richard invited us to dinner in his room in the hotel behind ours. We promised, we will come. You know what, Hania, I'll go to this dinner alone and refuse, and if not, I'll come back fifteen minutes tell the landlord where I went. Going uphill in the evening to I was wondering what might happen to me. I knocked, Richard opened.

He didn't invite me in alone. I said that Hanka felt bad, so I came alone. We'll postpone it, he said, for another time. I will come down to us and We started to wonder what it was all about. He's already helped us Frankfurt. Why did he continue this, and so generously? Why wasn't everything true what he said? Is this what stupid philanthropists look like, I was most comfortable with that?

He puts me together with his wife in a situation that he tries to arrange. None of us separately was important to him, but we both create for him at the same time some tasks, or maybe a goal? I came to the most far-reaching conclusions, conclusions I didn't want to share with Hanka because of her pregnancy. But I'm completely transforming myself. I started being very careful. I tried to skillfully avoid it. After two days, he decided to leave. At his insistent request I took him to the train station. On the platform he asked me to buy him cigarettes despite never smoked. God, what did I feel walking backwards to him, and then what I feel like going ahead. The arriving train hastened our farewell. he handed me prepared \$600. I will never give it to you back, I said. No problem, he said; help someone like I did help you. But I didn't feel that this help came from the heart, that's why when he got in, although I knew that this money would come in handy, I was more glad that it did disappears from my life. We had a plane to New York in two days.

Goodbye stranger.

We'll never see each other again. THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT SO

11/15/2006

(5) FOR PENALTY TO THE USA

We spent the last two days preparing for our departure to the USA. My wife had to pass a final medical examination. Everything was fine, the doctor cleared Hanka's flight during her pregnancy. Just a new dog cage bought at TWA for given us \$600 and we were pretty much ready. Last night was restless.

I was thinking what would be far away, how we would manage and if we would make it at all. November 10, 1982, a scheduled TWA B747 flew from Frankfurt airport to New York Kennedy. On board, among other things there were a few rebellious families again with top-secret, sealed envelopes. They were. last hours spent together. Everyone flew from New York on their own. designated sites California, Texas, Massachusetts, Florida. Sometimes a few years later it took a long time to find one of my friends. The plane circled over the Statue of Liberty approaching landing. The country of immigrants, the capital of the world. How many people would give anything a lot to live and work here? My arrival was considered as a penalty. Clear November skies allowed us watching millions of lights from houses, office buildings, streets, highways that have started.

Slowly set in a row, as if setting the direction for the landing. The runway accepted our plane very gently. With one stamp it was established who I am here, the envelope was taken from us and for we flew

to Boston in thirty minutes. Welcome to Boston allowed us to regain self-confidence. First of all, representatives of the organizations appeared.

Polonia working for the opposition in the country, people supporting the fight for independence. Above all, I was reassured by the fact that he was among those welcoming me. fellow prisoner Zbyszek Padzik. He flew in early to Boston and that why I found myself here. I would suggest Zbyszek for a few days, moved in with him because my apartment was still painted and needed change additionally, as foundation, phone installing or filling a canister with oil for heating. I gladly agreed. We got into the mighty cruiser and off we went.

Zbyszek, even though he was in the States for only a month, gave the impression of being very self-confident, even as a slightly Americanized man. Skillfully - as everyone threw. cigarette butts, soda cans and papers everywhere. On second the day we went out for a walk, I was horrified to find myself on the world's greatest scoundrel. I didn't know there were different neighborhoods and villages.

Depending on where you live, you have neighbors like that. I'll make sure of it soon. My own apartment, which I moved into somewhere after a week. Same neighborhood but completely different neighborhood. We joked that in my neighborhood shooting is not so common. Zbyszek had two great advantages. He wanted to learn English as soon as possible, so from morning to evening he walked with headphones on his ears, he loved his own children immensely, so when he could, he devoted all his free time to them. He didn't have much of it though work, he would collapse on the sofa as if dead and with his legs up, waiting

for the next day. He worked in a meat processing plant, like most of the visiting Poles at this time. To what others could not stand being everyday life, for Poles, only half a liter a day was enough and it was possible to work. Thanks to the knowledge of the language, he quickly changed his job to truck's driver, later drove a taxi, bought a house and moved out. I don't have today contact with him, but the first months in which he helped me were very helpful in making important life decisions. A few days before moving into.

I already have a telephone installed in my apartment. I was just inside when It started ringing. Hello? Are you Mr. Mark? I said: yes. Would you agree to giving an interview for Radio Free Europe? Christmas is coming so we are interested in her you spent Christmas in prison. I'd rather answer questions that I know, so I received them without any problems and we agreed on another day for a specific one hour. After some time, I received a check for \$50. Yes, it's imperialist money

I betrayed a state secret that I spent Christmas with mice. After a few days Hanka and I moved into our first apartment in the USA. Insurance we got health certificates from the state of Massachusetts. We got money every two weeks a foundation taking care of immigrants, we were paid for an English as a Second Language school, oil tank was filled for the winter. Surplus furniture from private homes was brought to us, the rest we found it in the rubbish bins, which were put out by the owners once a week property. How many things happened there. TV sets, mattresses, armchairs often not torn from the foil.

They simply did not match the interior design after purchase and the owners chose to give them away. Actually, the only thing missing

for a full happiness was a car, I bought it in very interesting circumstances. Hanka sent me for cabbage. When I went to the store, I looked modest parking lot with a couple of cars. I've been eyeing a blue VW for quite some time Hunchback. What do you want to buy? the salesman asked. I do not have that much money - I replied. How many do you have? I only have \$50. That's enough for now. And so it is without a cabbage, but I returned home in my own car. I paid for the whole thing \$400 in monthly installments of \$100. This way, I was able to move on getting to know the area. It turned out that I live in a very interesting environment. Very there was a lake near the ocean and 7 miles north of Boston. I didn't have a job yet, but not because of laziness. I decided to start working after when Kasia was born, it was mainly about insurance. Also, language was very important

I didn't want to stop school. So, I led an intermittent social life from time to time an interview for TV or a meetings with Harvard students to whom I probably explained to no avail how it happens that in a poor country almost everyone, a woman has a dozen or so pairs of shoes, that there is literally nothing in the shops and the nation cannot die out. I think they didn't understand me and I didn't understand them because it was only after 7 years I began to understand America. I say I'm on for now suburbs of America. In March, my daughter was born, who 23 years later will be graduated from the University of Massachusetts. It's time to look for work.

So far, I have had various jobs working for cash. I played the piano in the hotel I washed dishes in the restaurant, cleaned the bowling room. I used to be so tired that I couldn't feel the few steps in the hall. But

it didn't stop me from comforting my wife with that that's really what it's all about. Soon I took up a permanent job. One day it knocked us two guys. They identified themselves as FBI agents and then asked for a moment conversations. The point was that they were looking for an SB employee in the US, who for sure he was in Vitagena as they were interned, and they are sure that he entered the USA. I said what I knew, and then they gladly stayed for a private dinner. I don't expect I will be asking them for help soon. The next day was Sunday. From our kitchen you could see the front door and part of the porch. I was sitting in the next room when Hanka in a muffled voice said, Marek, he is on the porch. Who? This one ...Richard. My legs buckled under me. How could this guy find me? Why was he satisfied? this effort? Or maybe he didn't bother? The only logical one.

The solution to this puzzle was that he had a purpose and that he did not pay for all the costs. I opened the door and asked - what are you doing here? I came for two days or so could you spend the night with me? His luggage looked like hand luggage, didn't give the impression that he stayed for a long time. Come in, please. The conversation didn't stick. I give him to understand that he was an unwelcome guest, nevertheless Hanka fixed him a sofa in table room. We walked up the stairs to our bedroom. Violent jerking my wife tried to wake me from a deep sleep, What the hell happened?

Listen, he must have been taking pictures of us, because I woke up to a shooting light as if from a flash. She's gone mad already, I thought, and as quietly as I could, I approached stairs. I looked down over the railing. Downstairs on the sofa sat Richard pretending to reading

a newspaper. He had gloves on his hands and a camera next to him bed, I sat down and said. I have no doubt he wants to kill us, just no I know how. I called Bary from the top phone in Kasia's room. All the stories he met him when he was at dinner with us, so I told him the last minutes. Nothing happened dead He is under our control. Try to scare him to leave. Tell that you called us. Richard, I shouted in high spirits. I had to notify the FBI. He broke off like burnt, he grabbed his things and and he quickly left the apartment. He didn't get far; on the street ahead an unmarked car was waiting for him at home. The darkness was starting to turn gray and the day was getting up. This I don't go to work on Monday. Hanka and I decided to celebrate the loss of "FRIEND".

THE END

Marek Konka. November 2006

Translated by Bolko Skowron