

In Memory of Ulrich Becher

By Lorraine Schwartz

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I am Lorraine Schwartz, here to represent my Dad, Bill Toth and his family. Bill recently passed away from Dementia. I would like to share with you some thoughts of his about Ulrich, which I found in a diary, written at CERN, June, 1982. This was just the beginning of a very dear relationship between Ulrich and Gerta with my parents, Bill and Alberta. The following excerpts show Ulrich's concern for others, his sense of humor and his wisdom.

"We arrived at Geneva AirportUlrich Becker was waiting with John Tarrh....Ulrich suggested we catch a few hours of sleep before dinner. (And the next morning): We arranged to meet Ulrich at our hotel for a trip to Chamereaux. Ulrich suggested we take our warm coats and sweaters."

And that day in the mountains:

“The view was breathtaking. I began to take pictures at several intermediate levels....I decided that since I only had a few pictures left (I read # 20) I would waste a few and change to a new film. The film knob turned so easy I knew that I had lost the end of the film in the camera. Well---risk it all and just open the camera. Voila! No film in the camera!

“My dear Alberta: we have taken an entire roll of pictures with no film in the camera. Phil (Bowditch) and Ulrich had a good laugh: one thing about good friends: they know when to laugh....”

“While at one level lower than the top, I was surprised to see large black birds soaring around below. They reminded me of crows, but smaller. I surprised Ulrich with MY FAMOUS FARMERS CROW CALL. I explained to Ulrich that I am able to communicate with crows—being capable of calling them nearer or give the warning signal of danger. He smiled slightly with his usual understanding expression, and continued to observe the mountainous scene.

“Well, would you know it, the birds DID recognize my call; they did a complex aerobatic maneuver and flew up to our level to investigate. Ulrich almost fell over his own feet! He grabbed my camera and demanded that I call again! I did, and one bird must have hovered to my right about 10 feet away. Ulrich, by this time, was sure the bird would land right on my head! (of course he didn’t.”

“I wish I could somehow describe Ulrich Becher. Maybe it is difficult because of his many sides: I consider him very normal, by my standards of comparison, in that he readily exhibits characteristics of a fun-loving kid, a serious university professor, a very proper German, a practical mechanical person, a bull in the china closet, a rugged individualist, an extremely dedicated worker, and, I think, a good friend. I guess one has to meet him to see these things. It is because of Ulrich and Sam Ting and their people that I don't want to let them down when they have shown such consistent confidence in me and Phil at this point!”

“On the way down, we got off at a statue slightly above the snow line and walked through the snow for about 10 minutes to the Blue Lake. This small pond of cold water, which for some reason, looks blue. The area looked like the coast of Maine on a mountainside. One thing I was aware of-----NOT A SOUND ANYWHERE except a small trickle of water from beneath some nearby snow. I can only remember this kind of silence from times on the farm in Connecticut when I was a boy. To me, this was absolutely beautiful and Ulrich let me enjoy the moment without a sound.”