

Peter Klinge '55 - Remembering FA as a boy and as an exchange student to France



Peter Klinge '55 and Jean Claude Aubourg '55 at the Friday evening reception for alumni over Fall Fair and Homecoming Weekend. Jean Claude was a French exchange student at Friends in 1954.

After graduating from Friends, Peter Klinge '55 went to Dartmouth College and then to the NYU film school where he received a MFA in directing and a Ph.D. thesis in aesthetics. He worked in media and direct advertising and wrote for the *LA Times* and most recently taught at Ithaca College Film School. Peter has published four textbooks on mass media and film aesthetics.

Two years ago he related the following, story for the 1955 Class Notes: "A young man, Matt Oesch, a sixth grader from Huntington, likes to scuba dive for treasure off the Huntington pier. On one of his adventures...he found my class ring in 14 feet of water. He contacted Friends who contacted me...The ring has been missing supposedly under water for 46 years."

Peter wrote a book, *Diary of a Boy*, about his days at Friends and as the first Friends exchange student to France. He has kept in close touch with the French exchange student to Friends in 1954, Jean Claude Aubourg.

Peter sent the following from *A Diary of a Boy* for the 125th Anniversary celebration of Friends Academy in 2002.

The American Friends Service Committee has long had exchange programs for young people where you live with a foreign family for a year. In this instance, Jean Claude has spent a year in America at Locust Valley Friends on Long Island, New York, and now Pete is returning with Jean to France for the summer. Pete is the school's first exchange student after World War II.

April 30th

Meeting was great today. I think if I don't find something better, I'll become a Quaker. (Never tell Pop.) To sit in an 18th century meeting house with its drab grays and rough-hewn beams and old potbelly stove gives you a feeling that you're close to God. Not drab at all. I mean there's a simplicity about it that's beautiful. Like Jesus.

For some reason it's very easy to just sit and think in a room like that. And that is the Quaker way. There's no sermon. Anyone can stand up whenever he wants to and say whatever he wants. I've actually done it a couple of times. Afterwards I realized what I said was a little dumb but nobody laughed then or ever. Your feelings about God come out of yourself. They're not injected like propaganda.

The following are excerpts and comments Peter recently sent the Alumni Office.

Entre Nous

Friends had a lasting effect on my relationship with my father, reflected as a major theme in *Diary of a Boy*.

My father did not want me to go to Friends. He thought it a school for snobs. At the interview with the Headmaster, he demanded to know if they would indoctrinate me as a pacifist. I guess in a way they did, but it wasn't indoctrination. It was friendly persuasion.

Wednesday meeting 1954. My thoughts. I remember Christmas 1945. The card table was filled with half-wrapped presents, brightly colored paper, and TB stamps. Grandma wanted me in bed because my father would be coming.

Then I heard the front doorbell And Pop's voice echoed through the hall.

I started down the front staircase with not even a thought of sliding the rail. I wanted to be really good this time. But I was shooed back upstairs again with only a glimpse of Pop... They didn't understand I wanted to

see him, not steal looks at any old presents. I didn't see a bike or puppy anyway.

He never smiled this visit and always seemed so jumpy. And it wasn't just the cast that went from his fingers to his shoulder. He never would seem the same as I vaguely remembered him.

I was glad when he had to leave but that made me even sadder. I thought when he was out of the hospital things would start to change; but they never really did. It was a terrible Christmas.

Approached Le Havre. It's 1954 and I'm a Friends exchange student to France. There are still half-sunken ships in the harbor. Dawned on me, probably for the first time, that the war wasn't something you just read about. It really was here. The twisted steel is the monument. Maybe some sculptor should salvage one of these ships, paint it, and the call the work "war." Probably make the guy world famous. Then I thought of Pop. The Battle of the Bulge. Captain Klinge lost all but five of his men. A bullet bounced off his helmet and shattered his shoulder, and not his head. He turned over the command. But the man ran off into the fog and snow yelling his refusal. An enlisted man carried Pop out before he froze to death.

I should not joke about the twisted ships.

Pop retired very early to expand his amber paradise I guess. But echoing voices from far away kept his mind in constant turmoil. Was he hearing voices of his company lost in that famous battle? Maybe he thinks he failed his men in some extraordinary way? And he was always being called away from us. Called away from us to them? Waking once again in an ice-cold sweat.

His war years never did end. This is the man who did not want me to become a pacifist? To this day I do not understand, but now I appreciate the pain that led him to an early death. I just wish I had told him I loved him before he left.