

ESCAPINGS

A synopsis of the feature-length screenplay

Written by Ulli Kampelmann

Edited by Steve Van Stone

1975 in Communist East Germany. Where listening to the Rolling Stones and Led Zeppelin is illegal, where you must wait years to get a car, where buildings fall to ruin because there are no repairmen, where the secret police have a boot on the neck of anyone suspected of non-conformity. Escape is the dream of many but the reality of extremely few. This is the remarkable true story of Ulli Kampelmann, a young woman who successfully escaped to freedom. Three times.

Our story begins at a rock 'n' roll party where Ulli meets Klaus, a boy visiting from West Berlin. They instantly fall for each other. In subsequent visits Klaus learns about life in East Germany and is awed by the Kampelmann's resilience and optimism under the circumstances; no car, punitive income tax (90%), phone tapped, etc. Little do they know that the secret police more commonly known as the Stasi, orchestrates many of their difficulties. One particular Stasi official, Sigmar, is ceaselessly plotting against them. Sigmar's antipathy stems from the family's attempted escape in 1959. Mama, Ulli, Lutz and Heiner escaped into West Berlin successfully but Ulli's Papa and older sister Christa were captured. Broken-hearted, Mama took the kids back home to Halle while Papa went to prison.

Ulli's desire to be in the arms of her lover, coupled with threats from her boss at the school and hidden pressure from Sigmar drive Ulli to flee to meet Klaus in East Berlin. There, Klaus proposes that she come live with him. Unbelieving yet hopeful, she cries, Yes! Three months later, by secreting herself in the trunk of Klaus' car, Ulli risks everything in a thrilling escape to a new life in the wondrous culture of West Berlin.

Romance and enjoyment fill their days and nights. Ulli settles in with her new life and finds a teaching job but she deeply longs for personal contact with her family and wishes that somehow, someday, she could see them again. Ulli imagines that if she could only find someone who looks like her, then she would borrow the passport in order to visit her family.

Not one month later, during a field trip to a theater, one student points out that Annette, the actress in the play, could be Ulli's double. Stunned that her dream came true, Ulli hastily contacts Annette. She explains her plight and asks Annette for the temporary use of her passport. Without a qualm, Annette instantly agrees. Klaus, initially incredulous, relents to Ulli's audacious scheme.

Without exposing the true plan, Klaus arranges for a family Christmas at Heiner's house in East Berlin. Early Christmas morning, Ulli's cover is nearly blown but the couple succeeds in deceiving the border guards and they pass into the bleak streets of decaying East Berlin. At the gathering, Ulli's family is overwhelmed with surprise and delight. Shortly afterwards they leave for the day; knowing that the house is monitored by the Stasi.

Meanwhile, Sigmar hears of the family gathering at Heiner's as well as the news that Klaus entered East Berlin with someone named Annette. He orders Stasi agents from Halle to Berlin to investigate the family's activities but one quirk after another prevents them from discovering what's really happening. Throughout the day the Stasi tentacles are close on their heels but do not catch up until that night when the couple arrives at the border to re-enter West Berlin.

Sigmar directs the guards to inspect the couple and their car thoroughly as he believes that the family gathering was merely a ruse to allow Lutz to escape with Klaus. Ulli, sensing her imminent exposure and arrest, sits frozen with terror, unable to move, unable to think. The border guards, searching for Lutz, and overlooking the true escapee in the process, fail to find Ulli's brother (because he isn't there) and have no choice but to allow this "West Berlin" couple back into the glittering liveliness of the city where Ulli is finally free to make her dreams come true.