

‘Flying Home’ - Dialogue List

Timecode is approximative!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

00:00:21:14

There. This is Walter’s suitcase.

Uncle Walter had died, shortly after his 90th birthday.

In November 2001, his possessions arrived in Switzerland, from Hawaii.

At my brother’s, in the family archives. A whole container. A whole life.

That is a very good photo. That was him. Walter Otto Wyss, known as WOW.

00:01:29:04

Honolulu, 31 May 1970 Dear Mami, in a way, I would like to fly home to you, and stay until your 100th birthday. But what could I do, if I were to stay longer with you? Prayers to you. Your son, Walter

00:02:18:12

Casa San Carlo in Comano, slightly above Lugano, the house of Walter’s mother, my grandmother. Our family home.

In 1939, Uncle Walter left this place as a young man. Shortly afterwards, I was born.

For 60 years, Walter lived in my head. I don’t know why. My uncle in America.

Hero of my childhood.

In Comano, nothing has changed. The same furniture, the same smells, and the feeling that time has stood still. As a child, I never really knew

if I was supposed to like it here, or if I wanted to be far away. Far away, like Uncle Walter.

00:04:14:00

In his picturebook-life, everything had begun perfectly. Loved and pampered by all - like me. His parents - Dr. med. Hans Oskar Ernst Wyss, and Ida Wyss, born Diener - his most beloved mother.

Ours was a family of few words. “Not in front of the children!” was often said at the table. Everyone seemed to know how to behave and what was a tabu. Uncle Walter, too, could not escape these rules.

On family photos, he is usually at the side, as if he did not belong properly. He was the youngest, like me - the most spoilt, like me, and the best-looking - which was not be said of me - and, as a young engineer, he would soon be able to afford all he wanted.

scene Tobias and aunt Rosmarie

What was he like? He was always a bit different, a bit a loner. He always went his own way... a strange way.

00:05:42:17

August 1929 Dear Papa, I have set up my garage in your double garage in Zurich, and am building my first car, the W1. I’m just using parts of disused cars. It’s great fun. Perhaps my enthusiasm has to do with your Electromobile of 1905.

00:06:07:17

*April 1930 Dear Mami, I'm sending you the photograph of the two of us in the W1.
I'm so grateful for your financial support, and that you believe in me!*

00:06:20:15

Did he take you for a drive? Were you able to drive with him?

Yes...people did not really like going, because he drove like mad.

Like mad?

Yes

I wasn't really so keen on going for a drive with him.

00:06:45:08

*August 1931 Dear Papa, My W2 is finally finished. How do you like it?
My friends are quite thrilled. I hope to be successful with this car. Perhaps it
will also help me to become known abroad, and to make contacts.*

00:07:15:16

In Comano, I came across a document that really shocked me:

A character reference, which stated that Uncle Walter had been sentenced to six weeks in prison. As a 24-year old student, he had hit a cyclist with his car.

The cyclist died.

What bothered me most, was that for my family, it was as if this tragic accident had not taken place.

00:07:51:07

You didn't know that he'd had an accident, killing a cyclist?

No! Really? How terrible!

You also didn't know that he had been to prison?

No, I don't know anything about it.

scene Tobias and cousin Vreni

But 10 years later, for example, one might be able to talk about it?

But why?

Well...that something like that...

I don't think...

Don't you?

Well, I think...you don't necessarily need to talk about it.

scene Tobias and cousin Walti

Since you ask, about the accident - it was probably hushed up, but also, in this family, things like that were not spoken about to others.

00:08:45:00

The only person who told me about the accident was Elia Moghini, Uncle Walter's childhood friend in Comano.

scene Tobias and Elia Moghini

There are a few stories around.

The story of this accident.

I had an accident myself once, with my car. I drove down from Biasca to Bellinzona.

Thank goodness there was a driver from Zurich behind me. A little child ran after his ball, jumped from his garden and suddenly ran into the street, right in front of me.

I hit him with the car, and killed him.

You? A child?

Yes, a child. I was lucky, that the driver from Zurich, who was behind me, had witnessed the incident. He testified that I could not have done anything, as the child suddenly appeared out of a hedge and on the street. It hit his head on the sidelight.

It was dead immediately. A three-year-old child. I can tell you: you never forget that.

I am sure Walter was deeply affected by his accident. Definitely.

He was an attractive man, Walter.

Did you know each other well?

We were more than friends. We were like brothers, Walter and I.

That is why I became a mechanic. Because Walter was a mechanic.

Oh?

We learned of Walter's accident from his father, Dr Wyss. He came to our house and told us what had happened. But Walter never spoke of it. Not even with me, even though I was his closest confidant. I even did not know until now

that he had spent time in prison.

00:11:18:17

After Walter had done his time, and finished his engineering studies, he decided to change his life: he emigrated to America.

00:11:33:07

Zurich, 20 February 1939 My dears, our farewell left a deep and wonderful impression. I gratefully felt that you were sad to bid me farewell, and that you still harbour a true love for me. It is only now that I am beginning to realize the great sacrifice you have made for me, making it possible for me to leave for the New World.

00:12:06:13

His new life began in New York - far from his parents, and yet, astonishingly close.

Over 30 years, Walter wrote his beloved mother more than 500 letters, which I found among her possessions.

In Comano I also came across an item which I had dearly loved as a child:

Grandpa's huge magnifying glass from 1890.

My looking glass through time.

Tobias reading a letter concerning the photography

My dear Mamy, a liftboy can stand next to the President – it does not mean a thing.

But I am happy I have this photo. When I remember like a dream that I stood next to the man I admire more than anybody else I must think it was not real but it was, and the photo proves it forever.

When Grandma showed me this photograph from America in 1949, I was seven years old. My very first encounter with Uncle Walter. He looked me straight in the eyes - and stood right next to the legendary Henry Ford, his great idol. I was hugely proud! Who, after all, had an uncle standing next to Henry Ford?

All I knew was that Uncle Walter had worked at the New York World's Fair - the big world exhibition of 1939. There, they held the "Ford Day", on which a commemorative automobile, having completed a long journey across America, was received by Henry Ford and the country's most successful Ford salesmen. Perhaps Walter had simply snuck into the photograph next to Henry Ford.

00:14:55:05

I went to Dearborn, near Detroit, to the centre of the world of Ford. Perhaps there would be more pictures of Uncle Walter in the company archives.

In the Ford News I found an article about this big day. And the photograph with Henry Ford. But where was Uncle Walter? To my own surprise, I was really disappointed, and felt betrayed. I paid a second visit to the Ford archives, this time, to the photo department.

scene Tobias in the reading room (Dearborn)

Oh that's... And usually I make the registration here or also on the table?

Where you would like, where you feel comfortable. Any photograph that you film is 10 Dollars to film it. Then there is the use: It is 360 Dollars, if you use it in your film, per image.

I pay for 10?

Oh, you are asking for a discount?

We will give you a 50% for what you use in your film. If you use ten....

... it would be 3'600 Dollars. But you pay for what you film today.

OK. We have the deal. Fine.

Thank you.

OK.

But that's a surprise! The picture, the foto. That's a big surprise, because last time when I came I saw the foto without the uncle.

Robert Kreipke

It was not that my uncle was on the wrong place?

No! Not at all. Your uncle was in the right place at the right time, and we were probably very proud he was there. It's just that the photographer did not get his name. And thusly, when he came back here to Dearborn, when it went to get published, they said: „Don't you know who that person is? Oh we can't afford leave him in the picture, because we don't have the rights to do that.“ So the common practice back then would be to airbrush out anybody that they didn't know who they were.

00:18:04:05

My Uncle Walter had simply been airbrushed, like all the other extras. But, that very year, he was hired by the Ford Motor Company as an automotive engineer - a dream job.

00:18:19:20

15 December 1940 The Dearborn Inn is wonderful! I've lived here for almost a year, and love sitting in the lobby. First-class service! You have given me so much goodness, with the power of your loving thoughts, that it is hardly possible for me to be bad.

00:19:27:13 00:19:30:01

3 August 1941 Dear Mami, have you any idea how shy I am? Too shy to approach someone to speak to them, or to visit them. I thought there would be so much going on, and now I just live for myself. Thankfully I am far away, and you need not worry.

00:19:49:16

4 May 1943 Just think: a few weeks ago, I became an American citizen. Am investing all my money in war bonds.

00:20:04:08

November 1944 It is difficult to write to you after so many years of war, not knowing whether you have received my letters. I go dancing. Take Spanish lessons. Am often alone. I've hung up a picture of Comano, with the view from the portico.

00:20:29:14

I could gather from Walter's reports of his life abroad that his mother answered every letter with at least three of her own - for 30 years.
Hundreds of letters, all gone missing in Honolulu.
But my search for Walter's traces in the New World had only just begun.

Here we are. In this manoeuvre the plains of the squadron shoot down the targets.

00:21:15:21

My research led me to Wichita, Kansas, then a center of the American aviation industry.

film aircraft industry

One thousand plains for the Army.

The Stermann Aircraft Company of Wichita Kansas is the first to reach the 1'000 mark in the number of War planes delivered to the military forces. The defense program calls for busy construction.

00:21:31:00

The huge companies, which had lost their Air Force contracts after the second World War, were on the search for new markets and ideas with a future. For Walter, the chance of a lifetime. I set off for Wichita.

00:22:06:19

November 1945 Dear Mami, just think: I now work for the airplane company Beechcraft, in the state of Kansas. I'm designing a car for them. Maybe this will be my breakthrough.

00:22:21:18

January 1946 Do you remember Papa's Electromobile? I will design a very special car, which can drive on electricity as well as on gas.

00:22:36:08

15 April 1946 Before my departure from Detroit, I attended a jazz concert by Lionel Hampton and heard my favorite piece, "Flying Home". I arrived in Wichita last Saturday evening, with my Ford and all my things, after a nice 1000-mile trip. The roads were good, and I mostly drove 70-80 miles per hour, overtaking everyone on the way. Here, everything seems better than I could have dreamt for. In the Broadview Hotel, I'll probably be able to pay a monthly rent.

scene Tobias Wichita

Good morning. My name is Tobias Wyss. I'm making researches on my uncle who was working at Beechcraft in the 40's. Thank you.

Hello. My name is Tobias Wyss from Switzerland. Wyss: W-Y-S-S...

...and I have several documents...

...because it was a very interesting hybrid car the developed...

... I saw this picture...

...there is anything left...

It was made on August 5th 1947.

Yes, it's a very beautiful picture!

Aha...

That's another document I have.

Thank you! So I call you back. Thank you very much. Bye.

00:24:25:05

Wichita, 17 July 1946 Work at Beechcraft is still wonderful. I have never been happier in the USA.

I've bought a bed, to be able to spend the night in the office. Seven people now work for me on the Plainsman car.

Dana Johnson

One day, they asked me if I would like to see a car that they had been working on it. So they took me over to a plant, well the Beech plant, and showed me a mock-up, full scale mock-up of this car, called the Plainsman. And it was there, it was real.

Did you know at that moment that it was a hybrid car?

No, I didn't. In those days I don't think that they were even using that term „hybrid“. And... Well, I take it back, I did know that it was gasoline-electric.

Craig Minor

Remember that gasoline in the United States at that period was about 15 to 18 cents a gallon, and nobody even knew what the gas-mileage of the car was.

I had a car in the late 50's and I knew exactly how fast it would go and all that, but I had no idea what the gas-mileage was, because gas was nothing.

Styling was such a huge thing. I mean it didn't matter what the engineering of the car was or what the efficiency or how much space it had. And this car would have looked strange.

00:26:34:18

End of November, 1946 It is certain that we will finish the test cars, as a few hundred thousand dollars have already been spent on them. But there is a big question mark over whether the car will ever be manufactured.

00:26:56:00

After days of fruitless searching, I began to fear that I would find nobody who could tell me about Uncle Walter's private life here in Wichita. But then I came across the name Walt Burnham, Uncle Walter's then boss at Beechcraft. His daughter Pat had married a certain Dale Rummer, whom I finally found in Lawrence, Kansas.

Dale was also an engineer.

On the phone, he had told me about a wonderful wedding present, which Walter had given him and his wife Pat.

Dale und Pat

There it is!

Well!

How much would it cost now, such a...?

About 8'000 Dollars.

8'000 Dollars?

That's what the insurance company said.

That's the appraisal on it.

Yes.

No, when he bought it, it was 22 Dollars a place setting.

He lived down at the Broadway Hotel...

...Broadview!

...Broadview Hotel in Wichita. And I had come home from school for Thanksgiving break I think it was. He just acted like he was an old friend who had known you forever. And he really took an interest in you as well as telling you a little bit about himself two or three times. Interesting conversation was...

And he also had a personality that went with disappearance. He was outgoing, he was interested in people. He could have been a movie-director, he would have been a diplomate...

A diplomate! I had the impression that he was a lonely person and being single is lonely sometimes.

My mother, she kind of adopted him like her son. She had a real rapport with his mother. The postcards kind of indicated that. "We're taking care over here for you,"

that type of thing. And he had the personality to allow her to do that. A lot of people wouldn't. They would reset it.

Walter had built, you know, his dream cars earlier. You can understand why he was able to put together this neat project.

00:29:49:05

15 January 1948 Unfortunately, the aviation industry is not doing well. People are losing their jobs. I surprised I'm even still here. I can probably still finish the test car. Working Saturdays now too. But who knows, with the Cold War against Russia, and rearmament, the aviation industry might soon have plenty to do again. It is so terrible, that there will be war again in the foreseeable future.

00:30:22:20

Handicapped down here...

Following my visit to the Rummers, after travelling alone for such a long time, I suddenly had substantial back-up.

Linda Hall Library

His name was Walter Otto Wyss...

Aha.

... and we think there may be some patents signed to Beechcraft back in 1946. How about looking at „Plainsman“, just for fun?

00:30:54:10

The two elderly engineers took me to the Linda Hall Library in Kansas City. There was no stopping Dale and Bob on their trip down memory lane.

Linda Hall Library

Here is a Beech Aircraft Corporation. This is not the one we look for. Let's see how it works.

OK. Here is another Beech Aircraft. Erhard Kantas Paleon 10.

In this case he is not there.

Now I guess what that says, signed by the Beech Aircraft Corporation, it is a clutch.

Will you write this number down?

This is ah.... "Sinority", Beech Aircraft Corporation dynamic breaking control system.

That could be the drive system.

Yeah, that could be part of it.

That's a little success!

Yes, I think so.

Yes, yes. You read that together with that description you got, that tails perfectly.

00:32:08:24

And the result of my research in Kansas? A hybrid car that was never completed, and two small inventions, in which Walter Wyss was apparently involved. Not exactly much.

00:32:28:24

5 August 1948 It seems to be cursed. Nobody is interested in the project any longer. Mami, I don't know what it is, but I think that if you had not kept writing to me, I would probably never have written again.

00:32:48:10

24 January 1949 Dear Mami, there is something inside me which prevents me from coming home. I wish I knew exactly what. It is all the more so, when I think of seeing you again. Still, you are the only reason for my visit to Switzerland.

00:33:12:11

In the spring of 1949, Uncle Walter bought a plane ticket to Switzerland. He had hoped to come with news of his breakthrough at Beechcraft. He was 38 years old -and he came home alone.

00:33:28:24

7 May 1949 After ten years as an American, I flew back to Switzerland, in 20 hours, from New York to Zurich. The pleasure at seeing my dear parents again was great.

00:34:00:08

I had always wished for Walter's hopes of success with the Plainsman to come true, his revolutionary hybrid car, which was invented half a century too early. But in August 1949, the Beechcraft company dropped the Plainsman project. One month later, Uncle Walter lost his job. He stopped enjoying his work as an engineer, sold his war bonds, and invested his money in securities.

Walter began to live off playing the stock market, and turned to his hobbies: photography, languages, and travel.

00:34:57:07

Los Angeles, August 1950 Dear Mami, I do not think that I can continue to live alone for long. But finding a woman with whom I will fall in love and wanting to marry her, is a huge problem. If I send you letters of former girlfriends...I invited a girl to dinner, another to a show. The one I liked best is getting married in a month. I played tennis with Catherine...The more I think about it, the worse it gets.

00:35:36:09

Dear Mami, my last interesting girlfriend is a black woman, whom I met on the plane from Mexico to L.A. She will give birth in two months, and is called Martinique. What an experience for a bachelor like myself.

00:35:53:09

I had already met Walter's former girlfriend in Los Angeles in 2003. Six years later, I visited Martinique Landois a second time. The former dancer was now over 80, and lived with her son, Raoul.

scene Raoul and Tobias

That is a pleasure to see you.

It is a pleasure to see you, Tobias. I have heard so much about you, and for the first time I have been able to talk with you face to face to tell you to see how you are and how I am, and I know we will going together splendid!

It's great! Because I read in a letter that you were in the belly of your mother, of Martinique, when my uncle met her. That's fifty-seven years ago.

Yes, right!

00:37:25:08

When I asked Martinique during my first visit, how her love story with Walter had actually begun, she first said: "Maybe I shouldn't tell you..."

Martinique First Visit

Walter, don't you have any girlfriend or anything?

And he said: I'm fine like I am, I'm fine like I am.

And I said: Well, you should have a girlfriend, I said.

So I fixed him good and said: Come on, let's go to your house, I want to see everything, all the pictures you have there.

So he has this little tiny place.

And I said: What do you eat, where do you eat, where do you do things?

He showed me the plate where he heated things an all that.

So I looked at him and I said: Come here, Walter!

And I grabbed him, I kissed him and I pushed him on that little bed he had.

And he was shocked! Yes he was.

Oh, I can't... Oh don't... I don't know... You shouldn't...

I said: I know what I want. And that's where we had... we had the relationship.

And he was still... oh my God!

He cried, he actually cried, Walter cried.

And he said: You are so sweet.

And he was kissing my hands..... Oh, he hugged me!

And then I knew that Walter did not... He did not know really women.

Martinique Second Visit

Dearest Walter, well, today you are in New York and I feel you are very close to me.

I have come to love, respect and need you more than you think.

I certainly don't like to quarrel with you, but you must remember: You have lived alone for most of your life.

Give my love to all your family, especially to your sweet mother.

Were you in love with Walter?

I don't know.

I don't know.

I never was really in love with nobody, comes to think of it.

You know sometimes, some people touch you in a strange way.

And Walter was completely different from everybody, I mean everybody.

Because, let's see, I knew all sorts, believe me.

But Walter touched something that was something like maybe a challenge, maybe.

He wanted to take pictures all the time just being with him.
And then he wanted me to.... And then I said I'm dressed for you, and everything for you! Let's go! Let other people see me too!

00:41:11:00

Los Angeles, 8 February 1954 It is wonderful, that you write about Martinique so kindly. Mami, you have a strange son, that he is more able to be friend with a woman of a different race, and that it is more mutual, than with someone of the same race.

Martinique Second Visit

Walter was the only one that I came any close to.
To really doing for somebody. And I seduced him, I never had to seduce anybody.

00:41:42:24

Mami, Martinique is not the way with men, that you think. Don't write so nastily about her, that makes me sad. Martinique is very Catholic, not like you and I, and never misses Mass on a Sunday. When she was in Rome, she even danced for the Pope.

Martinique Second Visit

There was a deep deep sadness.
And I wish he would have said something.
Maybe sooner or later he might have... Then of course, me, with my moving all around...
He would want to say something, and he just would stop.
And you see, I didn't have enough to understand that something was deep inside of him, you see, I didn't understand.

00:43:04:01

June 1955 Dear Mami, what a pity that I cannot introduce you to Martinique in Comano. I would have been so happy to see the two of you meet. I am sure she would have called you "Mother", and that you would have loved the little black baby.

00:43:26:17

I do not know what happened between Walter and Martinique in the following months. The fact is that from spring 1956, he no longer mentions her in his letters. Martinique told me she had returned to Mexico, and had always hoped that he would follow. But Walter never came.

00:44:08:16

He gave up the small apartment, put his belongings in storage in Los Angeles, and set off on a round-the-world trip. On his big trip, Walter visited his 80-year-old mother for the second and last time in Comano. He stayed for two weeks, then continued to Istanbul.

00:44:42:16

7 July 1956 Dear Mami, I miss so much, not being able to accompany you to your bedroom, to sit by your bed and chat with you, and, in the morning, to have breakfast with you again.

00:45:18:14

Tokyo, 3 May 1959 Dearest Mami, I like it here in Japan, and feel better than I have in a long while. Everything is so strangely nice and different, that I keep going further and taking photographs and never want to leave.

00:45:43:17

4 August 1959 Everyone must think I am totally crazy, to be learning Japanese. But I am so obsessed with it, that I want nothing else. It drives me from within, like building cars did, back then. It is all so strange, and I am surprised myself, that my life is going in a different direction from what I had imagined.

00:46:49:20

From 1959 to 1964, Uncle Walter lived in Tokyo. 50 years later, the journalist Masayuki Ishiguro led me to the archives of the Bunka Hoso radio station. I had discovered Walter's method of learning Japanese. At home, he taped radio plays based on popular Japanese novels.

Masayuki and Tobias at the radio station
That's an old studio.
Smaller!
Smaller.

00:47:17:10

Every week, he visited the radio station, to pick up the original manuscripts. That way, he could listen to the recordings and read the text at the same time. After Walter's death, I found over 200 cassette reels among his belongings.

scene Masayuki u. Tobias
„Yukiguni – Snow Country“. This is a novel of a Japanese writer.
This is also „Michikosama“.
So it is a radio program?
Yes. Genzo Yokoyama. Original writer. Itoko Koyama.
Do you think there is a technician who could help us?
Maybe it takes some time. One day or two days.

00:48:13:24

Masayuki recorded for me the radio play "Snow Country", based on the novel of the same name by Yasunari Kawabata.

00:48:29:20

On either side of the long tunnel, is the snow country. There is a sad beauty in the constant snowfall. When it stops snowing, there is a lonely purity. This is like the heart of a woman.

00:48:59:15

The radio play tells the story of an impossible love, between the writer Shimamura and the Geisha Komako, who keep meeting in a ryokan, surrounded by snow, in the north of Tokyo.

00:49:12:21

The train that separated us, and carried me out of the snow country, brings me back to this woman. Could that not be the same train, and the same compartment, as back then?

Yes.

Perhaps it is even the same seat as then.

00:50:04:18

Tokyo, October 1961 Dear Mami, I don't have time for anything anymore, apart from, uninterruptedly, listening to radio plays without missing a single day. Instead of living my own life I have immersed myself in the life of the people in the stories. It is not what I wanted, but it just happened. And I don't have the strength to change it.

00:50:35:12

For a long time, I thought Uncle Walter had been all alone in Japan - a hermit. But then, I found Japanese letters among his possessions, which I sent to my friend Masayuki Ishiguro, for translation. Shortly afterwards, he replied that Walter had not at all been so lonely - on the contrary.

00:50:57:12 00:51:00:07

You are probably surprised about this letter, please forgive me. Should I run away from home? Should I come to you, Mr. Wyss, and live with you? I will say good night now. Please tell me if you need help. I was surprised that you are such a bad person! Japanese men are not as cowardly as you. I have never experienced a man physically. I am totally crazy about you, and am now scared. And I send you my kiss. Thank you for being so kind to me. To tell you the truth: I have met a man in Kyushu. I am going to marry him. I will forget the past, and start a new life. Do not be angry with me, I will never forget your kindness.

00:51:53:09

If he has been with many women, that would be a shock for me. Of course, I am also shocked about the women.

Mr. Walter was an admirable man.

But he was a man, after all...

Yes...

First I would like to ask you, how you got to know Mr. Walter?

When I worked at the radio, Mr. Walter was sometimes there. He asked me for textbooks, and I gave them to him. I was not actually allowed to do this, but because he said, that he was eager to learn Japanese, I gave them to him. Apart from at the radio, I had nothing to do with him. Once, when I went for a walk near my home in Kagurazaka, I ran into Mr. Walter. We chatted, and I mentioned that he was often at the radio. He told me he lived in the area, and taught English occasionally.

What kind of person do you think Mr. Walter was?

That is hard to say.

I just wanted to learn English from him. Probably I was inattentive.

Once, he mentioned the name of a woman, who lived in the same apartment block as I. So I thought they must get along very well. I was engaged, and so I had no interest in Mr. Walter's girlfriends. Only once did Mr. Walter invite

myself and Miss Tsubouchi into the apartment he was renting. It was really a very small room. You could only sleep curled up. He only had textbooks, and a little bed.

00:54:09:12

Why did you come? Why did you come here?

I came here to meet you.

I don't believe you.

People in Tokyo are liars - I hate that.

I won't take you to the station anymore.

I am torn.

Oh - this time I will leave without saying anything.

Liar.

I waited the whole time.

I cannot trust what you say.

00:54:57:09

And then you invited him to your wedding. Why did you invite him? As a friend?

I thought that a Japanese wedding could be interesting for a foreigner.

That was all.

00:55:19:16

We researched a lot, and discovered many women and girlfriends.

I hope that he only had good experiences with girlfriends. That would have been nice for him.

00:55:39:14

Tokyo, March 1962 In this country, I can stand it much better as a hermit.

And at least I like being among all these strangers. The fact that everything is so peculiar, is what attracts me the most. I have decided to enjoy life, before it is too late.

00:56:05:03

In the summer of 1963, Walter sent a long letter to Comano. For the first time in his life, he spoke up against his mother. He was 52 years old, and she was 86.

00:56:21:04

Tokyo, 25 June 1963 Dear Mami, for 25 years, I have only read kind words from you. But all I have inherited from you, is a miserly austerity, and the feeling, not to have achieved anything. Mami, since, on the inside, I am still strongly attached to you, I have to try not to lose my belief in you and the way you brought me up, otherwise, my conflicts will make me ill.

00:56:56:15

After 5 years, Uncle Walter no longer renewed his visa for Japan. He returned to the US, and found his new home in Hawaii, on the other side of the globe. From there, he wrote a very last letter to his mother.

00:57:12:11

Honolulu, 31 May 1970 Dear Mami, in a way, I would like to fly home to you, and stay until your 100th birthday. But what could I do, if I were to stay longer with you? Prayers to you. Your son, Walter

00:57:45:00

Following the mother's death, the heirs met in Comano. Everyone was there, only Uncle Walter was missing. And to the whole family's annoyance, he refused to sign the division of the estate. After two of my sisters-in-law tried to get Walter to change his mind, in vain, I offered to fly to Honolulu myself.

I would see my Uncle in America for the first time! He had written to me, that we could meet on the 25th floor of the Pauahi Towers, at his broker's. For this first encounter, I had taken a small Video-8 camera.

scene Honolulu 1

I want to see my uncle. He is an old swiss man.
He always goes to the broker. I'm coming from Switzerland.

scene Honolulu 2

You are from Switzerland?
Yes...
He is my uncle.
Mr. Wyss is your uncle?
Yes.

scene Honolulu 3

You are his broker here?
You want coffee or anything?
Maybe I wait five, ten minutes, and if he doesn't appear then...
Sure. You can wait in my office or wherever.
That's fine.

Scene Walter and Tobias at the broker's

Sit here.
On the right better.
I have brought you three fotos.
Ah?! It's good!
Yeah!
This one I remember, but this one I don't. How come?
Sure it's me.
When was...
This one I know.
Oh yes this one!
We must show them to Alice.

Walter showing pictures
He brought some pictures.
He brought some pictures? Allright.
That's me.
That's you? Who is this?
A starlet.

You know Ford Motor Company?
Aha.
This is the founder.

01:00:17:02

So that was my Uncle Walter, who had lived in my head for so many years. Who got up every morning at four, to study the New York share prices, who lived at his brokerage like in a big family.

Walter showing pictures
... The founder of Ford Motor Company.
That's me.
This is..... Henry Fonda. Isn't this Henry Fonda?

You know what's the same Otto that hasn't changed?
... in 1939 ...
You know what hasn't changed with you?
Not shaved?
No no. No no. That you still look the same? Your eyes!

scene Walter, broker, Tobias
This picture, I don't know where and when it was taken, this one.
This one?
I never used tripods. I have no idea who took that picture.

01:01:07:08

In the office of his broker, Eugene Drzymala, I finally summoned the courage to ask Walter a few questions.

scene Walter, broker, Tobias
You heard Walter that the construction was very modern.
Yes, you know I was just telling him...
The steam...
No no no. This twin overhead camshaft, they only now use the twin overhead camshaft.
Of course I bought that used, the parts.
But they were not interested in that construction?
Oh no! That was way before I went to the United States.
But Walter, why did you want to go to the United States?
He was coming back from Japan.
No!

When you came from Switzerland? Why did you want to go to the United States then?
Oh naturally because of automotive.
Oh that way: Well at that time people were not sports-car minded at all. That's only now.
But you wanted to go to the United States, live here? Didn't you want to... Why did you go away from Switzerland then?
What would I have done in automotive in Switzerland?

scene broker and Tobias

I see him now. He seems to be the poorest man of the world.
You know, I don't know why. Wait until you see where he lives.
Yes. You have been there? You have been in his room?
Not in his room, but...
I haven't neither. He didn't...
He has two apartments, one to keep all of his cameras and equipment and...
On North Kong too?
Right next door, I think, in the same building. And he has all his materials and everything in there, and in the other he lives in. But I never could understand. He has so much money. In Switzerland, I know. He showed me his bank account...
Yes.
... and I said: Otto, how can you live like this, when you...
But much, what means much? It's much?
You know... Quite a bit... But he is happy in the way he lives...
Yes, of course.
So, you know that's the main thing. I think he just doesn't like to spend money. If he doesn't need it, then he won't.

scene Walter and Tobias

Where shall I stay?
I think you have to go down.
Ah. OK. Like this?
Yes that is good, except...
Like this? It's ok?
Do you sit?
Yes. Like this?
Just be lower. Ok!
I would think, I should about expose for your shirt. Maybe hold the camera sideways.
Like this?
Yeah. It looks more interesting.
Ready?
Ready Walter!

01:05:03:03

Once, during my visit, Uncle Walter asked me:
- Why did you come?
- Because of you, I said.
Then he uttered a scream, and ran off, across the street.

Of course I was led by compassion, when I asked Uncle Walter my questions about the future of his life, but also by my interest, that his money shouldn't be lost.

Walter and Tobias in the city
Finished?
Where can we go now?
Yes. Ok.
Go down.
It's Ala Moana where is... in which direction?
We have to take the bus on the same street.
Aha. Yes. Ok.
It didn't rain.
Not in the morning, either.
Nothing.

01:06:56:19

Towards the evening, I had begun to get used to my strange, frugal, lonely Uncle, and I began to like him more and more. Just like all the other Uncle Walters I had always imagined. But he didn't let me get any closer.

01:07:21:10

Have a nice evening! Bye, Walter!

01:09:14:20

Uncle Walter had taken about 25,000 slide photographs over 50 years. Most of them in Honolulu. It took me months, just to have a quick look at them. In February 2001, I visited my Uncle again in Honolulu. I knew that Walter would soon die. Three years earlier, he had fallen from his bed, because for years, he had shoved all letters and bills under the mattress, until it collapsed under him. He was bruised and taken to an old people's home. When he got worse, he was taken to the Leali Hospital.

At the hospital's corridor
Good morning. I'm looking for Walter, Walter Wyss, my uncle.

Broker

There is this wonderful man inside of this old withered body that is trying to come out. But the skin is so thick from the inside that it can't escape this this old body with all these old habits and maybe old world values and he had seen all the different parts of the world and the different cultures and the different values. And yet I think his Swiss values continued to dominate his way of thinking and created a conflict in his mind that he was never able to solve.

Martinique

Maybe he had never found anybody that would really
So I'm hoping that at the last days he might have found peace.
That's what he was looking for: peace.

But now that he has gone, so let's just hope that the Good Lord's blessing, that he will be ok.

01:13:23:17

In November 2001, Walter's urn was sent to Switzerland. A few months later, his estate - about a million dollars - for each of us heirs, almost 100,000 Swiss Francs.

01:13:36:19

I can carry it down, if you like.

It would be possible.

It would be better, then you can see it.

Damn it!

01:15:13:02

There is still a final story: During my visit to Honolulu, Uncle Walter told me that he absolutely had to go to Los Angeles, as he had put his belongings in storage there, and never picked them up. But he never made it. After his death, I made inquiries at several storage companies, without success. If I were to receive a phone call today, that they had found his things after all, what would I say?

"Please throw it away."