

DOLT by Don Lauria

Over six years a friendship had developed between Dolt and me. A friendship whose depth became apparent through tragedy and perhaps was never apparent to Dolt, Dolt may never have believed that he was loved by anyone.

I first met William Andrew Feuerer in Yosemite's Camp 4 the day in 1966 that he began touting his latest innovation, the nylon hammer holster. He accosted me after determining that I owned part of a mountain shop and I might be interested in selling his holster. In the months that followed, Dolt began to frequent our shop, always bringing in his latest ideas for discussion. He became a fixture. He made daily phone calls and nightly visits. He was always anxious to determine the needs of the contemporary climber. Did we think nuts were going to catch on in the United States? Should he make some? Was Chouinard's cliff hanger practical? Should he make a better one? He was constantly questioning, questioning.

From 1967 through 1969, Bill created an industrial dynasty on paper - Doltco, The Dolt Companies, Bill Dolt, and TDH (The Dolt Hut) Manufacturing company. He did it with long hours, 500 square feet of metal shop, a post office box, and a penchant for advertising. He employed a workforce of one, Bill "Dolt" Feuerer and work he did.

Bill once came stumbling into our store on an unusual early morning visit. His blue eyes were beaming despite his obvious exhaustion. He had been working on his ultra light chocks into the late hours of the night and had fallen asleep in the magnesium shavings under his drill press. In he staggered, a walking incendiary, magnesium shavings still clinging to his hair and eye brows. He was attired in his usual Dolt "uniform" black air force dress shoes, burnt through with swage splash, gray Sears Roebuck work clothes; a red kerchief tied about his neck; and perched atop his head, the locomotive engineer's cap. His enthusiasm was unquenchable he just had to show us his latest handiwork.

Dolt's enthusiasm was exceeded only by his generosity. He lined the walls of our shop with Dolt photos. He gave us all his prototypes to test. Hennek and I used his original Dolt Cobras (sky hooks), and his only two Twinkle Dolts (head lamps) on our El Cap climbs. He gold plated a couple of Dolt Pegs that Boche and I used on the Nose and presented them to us. He gave the shop the original Dolt Winch from the first attempts on El Capitan. Dolt actually gave me three titanium alloy Dolt Pegs to test and keep for my own. One day he came in with a box under his arm. The box was nicely finished wood. Inside, nestled in red velvet, was his "complete" selection of highly finished Lost Arrow style pins all neatly seated in the velvet. I don't remember the exact number, but there were more than ten. He was offering me this collection in appreciation of West Ridge's help through the years. I paid him around \$120 for the box and its contents and put the box on a shelf in my office.

Dolt's vicarious interest in our climbing adventures rekindled the climbing spark in Dolt's soul, and he became a familiar sight bouldering at Stony Point in the year 1969. Bob Kamps once related a story to me attesting to Dolt's incredible strength as a climber. At Stony Point one Sunday afternoon, the beer drinking competitors were happily solving a relatively easy boulder problem. Dolt was among the first to master the route, and when everyone had finally succeeded at it, Dolt picked up a rather large, heavy rock and repeated the route, using only his free hand. Kamps remarked that it was all he could do to lift the rock. No one else could repeat the feat.

On Christmas Eve 1969, Dolt was invited to my home for dinner. He presented us with an old Argosy magazine containing Harding's, and Merry's account the first ascent of El Capitan and an old Dolt Hut catalog, circa 1957. That night he told us tales of early Yosemite and of his childhood. He was an orphan, raised by foster parents. He mentioned his attempts at matrimony that had repeatedly failed. Although Bill exhibited sincerity and generosity, he still managed to remain somewhat aloof, possibly a little paranoid.

Through the year 1970, Dolt was not seen nor heard from at the shop. I suspected that he may have been inadvertently slighted. I tried writing him with no response. Finally in the spring of 1971, Dolt and began making his regular visits to the store.

Bill had been having difficulties all through the year 1970 in deciding whether to remain an employee of McDonnell Douglas or to quit and give The Dolt Company his complete attention. Later that year, he told me he wanted to buy back his pin collection to use for advertising photos. I told that he could use them as long as he wished for that purpose, but that a deal is a deal, I would not sell them. He was comfortable with that and took them.

On December 6, 1971, while delivering some Dolt Rope, Bill mentioned that he was definitely leaving McDonnell Douglas after 10 years to go into Doltco on a full time basis. He was asking my opinion. A great idea I was sure he could do it. He was elated by the encouragement.

One week later, Bill telephoned, his voice quavering, "I'm thinking of selling most of my interests in Doltco, are you interested?"

"But Bill, I thought..."

"I changed my mind, Douglas has offered me such a good deal I can't let them down." He sounded unconvinced and subdued.

"Okay, Dolt, I'll buy whatever you're selling." I really didn't believe he would do it.

"I'll call you later to arrange a meeting," he replied weakly.

On Christmas Eve 1971, the telephone rang at the shop in the midst of a Christmas party.

"Hello, Don?", Dolt asked in a hushed tone.

"Yeah, Bill, what's up?"

"I just called to wish you a Merry Christmas", Dolt answered, his voice almost a whisper.

"Merry Christmas to you too, Bill."

He didn't answer.

"Bill, what's with the deal we were talking about a couple of weeks ago?" I was searching for a subject that might break his silence.

"Oh, I'm not sure what I'm going to do", he replied slowly. I had never heard him sound so depressed. He continued, "I just called to wish you and yours a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year."

"Well, thanks, Bill. Same to you", I replied awkwardly.

"Thank you, Don. Goodbye."

As far as I know those were the, last words William Andrew Feuerer ever uttered.

One week later, the police were summoned to Dolt's apartment by Ken McNutt who had noticed the week's accumulation of newspapers on Dolt's porch and found his door chained from the inside. Dolt was found hanging from a water pipe on his back porch. He left no note, no will ... nothing. His funeral, paid for by his veteran's insurance, was attended by fourteen people, only six of whom were from his climbing world. The priest in attendance knew only two things about Bill Feuerer his name, and how he died.