

The Golden West

by Georg Aeberhard

I started to smoke when I fell for films, at the age of 17. A few days ago I came across a film script I had written in 1968 or and in practically every scene there were instructions like "he grabs a lighter to light a cigarette", "he let the steering wheel go while lighting a cigarette", "he puts the cigarette out and puts his hat on" or "she pulls a pack of KENT out of her purse, offers cigarettes to everyone there."...

Both my parents used to smoke, the cheapest brands, without filter, but each of them smoked a different brand, ten cigarettes in a pack, no cellophane wrap, straight red color print on a rough white background. We, our peer group already meeting in downtown Prague, we were after the foreign brands that were not available in the normal stores. Some of us, or rather some of our parents, were privileged to shop in the "Tuzex" outlets with Western goods where you paid by special coupons, and so the dreamed of cigarette brands came also into circulation among us. We passed around foreign magazines, went to see any film coming from the West, and thus inspired we play-acted characters out of films like "Pierrot le Fou", "Le Mépris" or "La dolce vita" - we had to smoke brands like "555", "Kent" or "Lucky Strike".

In about 1966, the socialist leaders decided to import filter cigarettes for ordinary mortals as well, not only for the privileged with the Tuzex coupons - from Egypt, Bulgaria or Yugoslavia. We could buy "BT" (for Bulgarian Tobacco), "Cleopatra", or - strangely enough - "Golden West", the two later brands from Egypt. So here we were, citizens of the Socialist Republic of Czechoslovakia whose best friend, the brotherly Soviet Union, was declared by the Czech Communist party as our friend "for eternity as well as for ever", yet we were smoking "Golden West" cigarettes. Yes, it became my brand as well. Unfortunately, later in the West I was unable to find it.

Are you curious what kind of brands a man like me smoked throughout his life since he could not stick to his "Golden West" in the West? Here is the complete list:

"Golden West"

"BT"

"Kent"

"Gaulois bleu"

"Gitanes"

"Gaulois jaune"

"Astor"

"Parisiennes"

"Philip Morris"

"Winston"

"Pall Mall"

"Camel"

"Camel Double Filter"

... Yes, I was no Marlboro man. Instead, I would walk a mile for a Camel.

And I stopped smoking on my 50th birthday. About two o'clock in the morning, while the party was still on, the "Camel"-box was gaping at me empty and that was it.



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