



The Iceman Cometh

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I was watching the Discovery Channel's remarkable presentation, "Ice Age," aired in 2003.

The program took the viewer through various developmental periods during the ice age and discussed the reasons for human survival and success, despite great odds and environmental challenges. Scientists on the program posited that the reason we have been so successful is our ability to adapt to climate change.

The program introduced us to a small traditional hunter-gatherer ice age clan that was faced with extinction. Hunter-gatherers strive in small groups living off the land. As the ice and oppressive cold moved south, resources quickly disappeared and the clan was decimated. With half the clan now dead, the remaining three were forced to flee and seek assistance from other groups. Since competition for resources was fierce, conflicts with other groups were inevitable. The clan of three found it hard to survive as other hunter-gatherer groups were not willing to take them in as they were seen as encroaching on already scarce resources. Near starvation, the clan continued their trek through the ice-laden European landscape and eventually stumbled on something strange indeed...

The clan found something never before seen on the face of the planet: A "village" that ensured survival through a large community of cooperation where a division of labor provided for all. As icemen learned to specialize, they became more and more effective in all their endeavors, be it farming, cooking, tool making, art, or tannery. Their increasing skills as individuals benefited the group as whole. As the realization that cooperation and larger numbers protected them from enemies, human and beast, grew, a rudimentary government developed. The community elders learned to focus on this common ground. The community continued to grow as more and more hunter-gatherer clans joined it. Pride grew and communities developed unique styles in art, culture, and language. Those that did not contribute were exiled and went extinct. It is interesting that scientists say this community evolved first in the Carpathian Basin of Central Europe!

But wars and vindictive victors soon blanketed the region in a new ice age. After centuries of struggle, Hungary once again found herself in perhaps the most devastating ice age ever: Soviet occupation and the grips of a cold war. The Hungarian icemen of 1956 turned to community, as did their ancestors 20,000 years before. 1956 brought people of all political backgrounds together. Intellectuals and workers, rural farmers and city workers, military and civilian, men, women, and children fought to crack the thick ice of Soviet communism. The common ground found in the desire for freedom and independence set aside petty differences. But the Soviet ice age was one that would leave a lasting impression on its victims. The pride that helped iceman's community could not flourish in the new Hungary. Pride was seen as a danger to Soviet imperialism. Pride, knowledge of history, and love of self were all systematically attacked in the interests of Soviet fraternity. Hungarians stopped trusting each other and corruption grew at the highest levels of government and in the population. Unfortunately, many modern Hungarians today have seemed to forget these bitter lessons and the mistrust promoted by our occupiers infects us today...

We have all seen public attacks on fellow Hungarians circulating across the Internet. The attacks, launched from various sides of the political spectrum, are often without regard for decency and show a lack of will to verify rumors and innuendo. This behavior discourages those that would be active and contribute to our growth as a people. It also sends the wrong message to other "clans." It shows weakness at a time we need to unite. The hunter-gather mentality that pervades our organizations is the reason the Hungarian-American community has accomplished little for the group as whole. We must end petty divisions come together to have a stronger voice. A common ground focus on issues that unite rather than divide is key. Hungarians, like any family, must learn that it is OK to disagree on some issues; we must work with those willing to contribute to causes arrived at by a focus on common goals.

But we must be vigilant against hypocrisy. Can we legitimately criticize Hungary and its governments and express concern for the survival of Hungarian culture in the Carpathian Basin without looking at ourselves first? How many schools have we opened in the United States? Not one. Have we reached out to the next generation to ensure our organizations and presence in the United States continues? No. Do we ourselves believe in democracy and the political process? A rhetorical question, I know, but how many of you are part of a national umbrella organization like AHF and voted for your leaders or declared candidacy for office?

The climate is changing again. Hunter-gatherers beware, the Iceman cometh! We are building a new village. Let's be careful in what we think, how we think, what we say, and how we say it. Let's all "Break the ice" before it swallows us.