



Chris Agee's father Philip (1935-2008): Courtesy of Solidaire.Org

# MAN ON A MISSION

On October 2, 1968 thousands of students rallied in Mexico City to protest its army's occupation of the National Autonomous University of Mexico. The protest was preceded by months of political unrest in the capital and worldwide demonstrations. Attempting to draw attention from the Summer Olympics in Mexico City, students rallied in mass.

Police and military fired into the crowd, killing hundreds while some say the numbers climbed well into the thousands. The massacre began at sunset and lasted through the night claiming the lives of students, workers, and innocent bystanders.

A curious child of four, Chris Agee witnessed the protests from the window of his family's beautiful Spanish-styled home as it was not unlikely for a CIA family to be well-off. However, just outside that beautiful house and into the streets life was anything but affluent.

"Many were killed and injured," Chris said as he remembers the Tlatelolco Massacre in Mexico City. His family's time in Mexico was short-lived, but far from ordinary.

It is shortly before one in the afternoon. Students rush to get a seat in the front. Chris walks in and welcomes the bright-eyed BMCC students.

He begins every semester by recounting his life. He feels it provides a relevant introduction for American

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Government. One by one, enthralled students soak up each detail. As he finishes his tale, each and every student begins to understand Professor Agee's passion for teaching. They realize it's not just about the textbooks, but is driven by the importance of demonstrating their country's government and how its decisions deeply impact them.

"Where they go from here is up to them, but giving them the tools to get them there is up to me," he says.

To truly understand this man's mission, and what inspired him to take it on, a look into his life is required; a life that has been anything but stagnant.

The son of former CIA agent Philip Agee (1935-2008) known for his public criticism of United States foreign policy and authored books like *Dirty Work: The CIA in Western Europe* and *Dirty Work: The CIA in Africa*, Chris spent much of his life globe trotting alongside his father. The massacre in Mexico City in the late 1960's prompted Chris's father to begin questioning his involvement with the CIA. Philip realized the information he gathered was used to set up dictatorships and right-wing militias in communist-leaning countries.

"As soon as he graduated from Notre Dame, the CIA recruited him under the pretense of expanding democracy to those who desperately needed it." Philip came to understand later that this would be in exchange for killing innocent civilians and initiating guerilla wars.

"At the heart of it all was America's economic and power interests."

Typical of those who leave their post as an operative Philip knew the CIA would continue following him even after departing, assuring delicate information wouldn't be leaked. Additionally, Philip's plans to write books recalling the details of his work didn't do much help in thwarting off the government.

Assuming false names and living underground in order to steer clear of the agency, Chris's family suffered and his parents eventually went their separate ways.

Back in the United States with his mother and brother Chris lived in a perfect, white-picket-fence neighborhood in

Virginia, a far cry from the days of living like a refugee.

While his family lived the perfect suburban dream, Chris's father continued to live underground in many different countries writing about his experiences in the CIA. The sharp contrast between the life of his mother and that of his father was not lost on Chris.

Yearning to be back with his father, Chris left Virginia to live with his father. In England, he entered the British educational system; a system he says "is much more structured than here."

The three years Chris spent in the Truro Elementary School in England prompted him to advance his education. "I started becoming more interested in history and with some good, solid guidance from my father I began learning more and more," Chris said.

As Chris adapted to life in England, the CIA increasingly pursued his father. The United States would influence countries Philip was staying in and try to persuade those countries to deport him; however, they weren't leaving without a fight.

Before being deported from England, a huge campaign spanning over a year was held in Philip's honor to stop the deportation. "It was crazy to see hundreds and hundreds of people crowding the streets for miles and I would ask myself 'Is this really all for my dad?' and it was, and it helped to shine light on the whole situation."

These demonstrations were the first of many.

"After having been deported from a number of European countries such as England and Holland, my father said to my brother and I: 'I can't keep the family going like this. Why don't you go back to your mother for a little while?' But you take me out of England...to the United States and I did what any other kid my age was doing- getting into trouble."

Upon returning to the States, Chris was introduced to drugs. Frustrated with Chris, his mother sent him packing back to his father, which proved to be a blessing. Due to his youthful rebellion, Chris flew back to his father and became "politicized."

Back in the European educational system, Chris managed to reclaim his fervor for education. After completing high school, it was time for Chris to move out on his own.

Realizing it was high time to separate his own story from that of his father's, Chris decided New York would be the location for his own declaration of independence.

It was June 12, 1982 and Chris was bound for New York City with a suitcase, a guitar, and \$20. He remembers

this day well because it was the UN Disarmament Conference in support of the Nuclear Freeze Movement.

"What a perfect occasion to be a part of on my first day. I knew I was at home," Chris said smiling. However, it was at Hunter College that Chris began to develop his voice.

"I immediately became involved in a Central American Solidarity Group and organized many events. We were the busiest and most active group on campus," he said.

The political fervor of his fellow students inspired Chris and it became an environment of action.

At 18, Chris found himself picking coffee in Nicaragua. The solidarity group had gone to Nicaragua to stop America's control there.

"The United States would support right-wing militias and guerillas to overthrow the current government in order to set up a dictatorship. So what we would do was put our American bodies in between the people of Nicaragua and the militias who were terrorizing them," Chris recalls.

They did manage to succeed in getting the United States to stop funding illegal civil wars by providing arms. However, it would prove years later that the government would always find an alternative.

Motivated by his father as well as his own political experiences, Chris has truly devoted himself to

learning the science of politics. While his childhood may have influenced him, his adulthood has truly shaped him.

His earlier years were directly impacted by his father's decisions, playing out like scenes from a movie, but what Chris feels really "politicized" him were his own experiences, not his father's.

When asked about his father's influence, he states, "I'd like to take some ownership for myself. The most important thing here is to differentiate a man's life and that of his father's." Then goes on to proudly detail his life, a life he has dedicated to the advancement of those who have been silenced.

"The key is to give voice to the working class, to educate them and in that way their living conditions improve. And maybe then we can communally obtain our goals of a better world."

He tells this to every class. Whether or not his students agree is irrelevant. The point is to simply raise consciousness.

In this way, he has succeeded in his mission. No longer is he that little boy gazing out the window, but he is now one of the protesters, educating others along his way.



1968 Tlatelolco Massacre Courtesy of LatinAmericanStudies.Org