

A Strangers Lesson!
By Michael M. Tickenoff

The Himalayan Mountains are no place to be when you are sick! Believe me, the Nepal wilderness is no place to be wondering around by yourself, near helpless with hepatitis and yellow jaundice from some contaminated water or just a predestined microbe with your name written on it and heaven only knows the rest. But there I was, hoping I had the strength and fortitude to climb out of this mountainous trap I had put myself into. (1969)

I was still sixty miles out from the nearest village where I might find some help. I was now staggering over what seemed to be thousands and maybe even millions of ancient stone steps cut into sinister canyon walls, taking me up the sides of mountains and down into deep granite gorges rushing with raging waters which flowed directly off high hidden glaciers. These narrow stone paths weaved and snaked their way up one gigantic rock mountain and then disappeared down into the shadows of another. If you were lucky, your route took you over a wire and rope suspension bridge hanging like string in the wind over a three thousand foot gorge. You say lucky, yes, because that tiny contraption would save you a two day walk and a leg killing climb down into that gorge and then up out of it again. Finally after seven days of desperation and trying to find some medical assistance, (to at least keep the last of my liver and intestines from self destruction and begin some treatment for returning my eyes from yellow back to what natural color might be left) I reached what might be called civilization.

Civilization simply meant roads end and where bus travel begins. There, I took a rattle trap of a bus, so over crowded that I paid to ride on the top with the luggage and it turned out to be a most exciting and a very magnificent view from up there. We had to pass over a hundred miles of the Himalayan hills (which are mountains equal to the Canadian Rockies) before I saw a horizon without huge monstrous rocks thrusting upwards!

My journey further east was going to half to wait as I now searched out a place that one might receive help. When a human body is hit with such a powerful bug as that, no where but home sounds good. So after a year on the road, my worn out boots and my exhausted body turned back south into India and back towards New Delhi to sit tight for a few weeks and get over this onslaught of fevers, shaking, dizzy spells, wrenching cramps, vomiting and all the other wonderful traveling woes that go with it. Yes, I was a very sick boy and my Mommy was nowhere to be found.

I had to admit it. No hiding the fact. My situation was growing desperate and with my few last dollars I caught a train headed southwest back across to where I knew a few friends that might put me up for a time, while I convalesced---hopefully!

So now I found myself on the cheapest train clanking across India. I mean cheap and if you ever traveled on India's crowded trains you'll know what I mean by cheap transportation.

This was due to my present financial situation because I did not have the funds in hand to buy anything better. While I traveled I would only carry limited funds and have my family wire money ahead to a prearranged destination. Because of my illness I had to now go backwards with just enough funds to get where there might be some help and to also rearrange my finances...STUPID!

Now further unexpected dismay came my way when I was told the train I was on was coming to its end at some poor beggarly city in northern India. No problem, just get off and cash an old crumpled travelers check, buy another ticket to Delhi and go, I thought?

“No, no, sorry, it is a special holiday and all banks are closed,” they tell me. The ticket agent at the train station will not, cannot and will not even consider accepting my check, only real money. I tell him that he can keep the entire check of \$50 for my \$18 dollar fair, but he only shakes his head and tosses my check back to me; talking about a bummer!

I had waited an hour in line to be told this. I take a rickshaw around town but still cannot find anyone to cash my folded check. All the people with funds to do this are out of town. There is a three day Hindu festival just beginning and the black marketers seem to distrust my rather shabby appearance, my tattered traveler's checks and my obvious ill and feeble look; I am totally made anxious with this news, as my body continues to lose strength in the heat and stench!

So now what are my options? Either stay in this miserable town as a beggar or find some way to get on that last train out of town. It is filling up fast and my intestines are trying to say their last farewells and are weakening without further medications. So now I meet my first tangible angel. He comes in the form of a man just slightly older than myself and dressed far better than I, and somehow over hears my third exchange with the ticket agent.

“Sounds like you got some troubles hear friend.”

It sounds great just to hear the word friend as I look back over my shoulder. “Yes, lots of it for now.”

"What can I help with," he asks me with a real sincere tone in his voice.

Oh man, doesn't the word help ever sound good? At that moment I decided to forever, incorporate that word into my daily list of favorite words.

I explain that I got the money in my check, money in the Express Office in Delhi but cannot buy a ticket with any of it. I ask him if he might know anyone who will cash this little check, but he tells me the same thing I have heard all day, “No can do!” “But there's no problem,” he says, “I will buy you your ticket.”

He does say it will only be a third class one, “But that is better than staying here for the night.”

No doubt I admit, and ask for his address where I can send him the money back.
“No no, friend, no I do not want your money he tells me.”

I do not understand but he goes on to explain, “Hey we all find ourselves in trouble now and then, this is not that big of a deal. Now if you were trying to buy the train or a first class sleeper I could not help you but a ticket is not that bad.”

“But how do I pay you back?”

“No no, don’t worry about it, just the next time you see or hear that someone is or has a need, just take that same amount and if you want to add to it, do so, and help that next person out. I guarantee that in time it will come back to me.”

Shortly thereafter I was on the train in an anxious panic trying to find a safe and strategic place among the throngs. I did make it to Delhi but needed further treatments, so headed on back to London where I got the right stuff and in time I made it home, but it took me nearly six months to recover.

So now I would like to dedicate this to that stranger who so kindly took the time to assist me in my time of need. I am sorry that your name has been forgotten but I truly thank you Good Stranger, and you should be rich by now, for I have often taken the time to help others in their time of burden and I hope that the cost of my ticket has reached you a THOUSAND TIMES!!!

Thank you for the good deed and for the great lesson by a stranger in a strange land!

Have you ever been an Angel? Have you ever meant an Angel? They do exist, but do yourself a real big favor, don’t travel to Nepal or India and get yourself sick to have to meet one. Don’t worry, your turn will come, to either meet one or allow one to use you, but be ready to know it when the event does take place, it could be exciting! Help!

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By *Michael M. Tickenoff*

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