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## More readers' misadventures in travel

**Note from Erik Lacitis:** What follows are a few more stories you sent me. Except for catching some typographical and spelling errors, they're largely as you told them to us. Enjoy!

### Danger Story No. 8

*From J. S. Parker, freelance writer and photographer, of Everett.*

Thailand.

Yeah, I read the Lonely Planet guide, and it recommended I visit Kao Sai National Park. So I did. And it recommended I go to this watchtower to watch wildlife really early in the morning . . .so I did.

I got up at 3 a.m. to walk the six miles or so to the tower. Walking in the utter darkness through the jungle with monkeys howling and everything alive jump-started my imagination into high gear, especially after the spotlight tour the night before where we had seen a six-foot snake. Then I got a ride from some other tourists, who had probably read the same guide I had and were headed the same place.

We saw no wildlife at the tower. But we did share an exquisite sunrise and a deer skeleton that from its contorted position had obviously been killed. I wanted to continue photographing in the golden hour, so I set off to circle a clump of jungle I had seen up in the tower, hoping I'd find something jungle-like.

Just ahead, a motion caught my eye. A deer grazing in the field. Aha! Wildlife! I followed at a safe distance, and the deer started circling the jungle clump, and before I realized it, I was in grass up to my eyes and the deer had disappeared. Never mind, I thought, I'd circle the rest of the jungle; I was half-way around at this point anyway.

I kept going, but this time blindly, as the grass was so high I couldn't see ahead of me. Then, a loud crashing directly to my left in the forest. THAT must be big, I thought, gritting my teeth. Several loud trumpets followed, and the crashing continued. Elephants. Big. Docile...usually. Far away. I let my breath go, unclenched my teeth, and focused on moving around the rest of the jungle. Three-quarters there.

Then I froze. Held my breath on purpose this time. There was something else in the field. Off to my right. Not far away. In fact, only 15 feet away, if that. Heavy. Slow. Methodical, maybe. Low to the ground. I realized with a flash it had been paralleling my movements for some time.

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I am a backpacker. I have spent a lot of time alone in the wilderness, even if only in the Appalachians, New Zealand and Korea up to that point, where there are no large predators. The one thing I could think of was: Don't run. Never run. You will become a target if you run.

The movement also stopped. Next ensued the longest moment of the life, and it was filled with screaming silence. The movement began again, quickly this time, and still stealthy. But away from me.

I don't know how long I stayed there. Finally I calmed myself with several deep breaths, and started walking again; this time, with a different mantra now: you will make it.

I hit some sort of briars. I didn't care. I went straight through, getting cuts all over me. And then through some jungle. I went as straight as I could, still believing I would make it to the other side.

A trail. I couldn't believe it. I followed it to the east, the sun still low enough I knew I was headed for the road where I had walked earlier. Finally, I hit the road. Just off to my right an outdoor restaurant was serving breakfast. I sat down, shaking, and ate.

I don't know what was out there, but I knew then I never wanted to know.

### **Danger Story No. 9**

*From Robert L. Herschkowitz, retired, of Bellevue.*

I worked 30 years for Boeing in customer support, and most of the time I had a job requiring extensive travel in Africa and the Middle East.

Here two of my "Harrowing Travel Stories."

*Egypt, about 1978.*

I had to visit the Egyptian Navy, with their headquarters in Alexandria. The Russians had just left and when I landed in Cairo, I found out at the rental car counter that there were no maps available.

I was on my own to drive from the Cairo airport to Alexandria, about 200 km across the Western Desert. I made it thanks to my few words of Arabic: left, right, straight and Inch' Allah! By the way, if you ever have to drive that road, these are the directions: drive to the Great Pyramids, turn right and go straight until you see the Mediterranean Sea.

A few days later, I had the day free and decided to drive back to Cairo to visit the famous Cairo Museum.

Leaving the museum, I saw that a sandstorm had started and that visibility was down to a few feet. Not knowing better and unaware how dangerous a sandstorm really is, I took off. The first cop I met and who spoke a few words of English told me to take the inland road to Alexandria, along the Nile, instead of the desert road.

It took me an hour to get out of town, and there I was lucky to pick-up a hitchhiker, an Egyptian army captain, wearing special goggles, the type that you always see on Field Marshall Rommel's hat.

We drove at a speed of about 7 km/h with the good captain sitting with his head out of the window and telling me "Yamiinak," or "Yasaarak," right or left. I couldn't see a darn thing through the windshield splattered by

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**Daily find  
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This mod boutique is overflowing

with good stuff – Acme Made laptop cases, antler shaped wall sconces, polka-dot pillows and bunny art. Yes, bunny art.

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hundreds of dead bugs and covered with sand When we arrived in Alexandria, about 8 hours after leaving Cairo, the manager of the hotel told me that he always thought that the British were crazy, but that now he knew that Americans were not brighter!

I was covered with yellow sand, with the consistency of talcum powder. When I took a bath, the bottom of the tub had about half an inch of yellow mud! For days after that, my nostrils and ears still had some sand in them.

The next day, I read in the paper that the road through the desert, the road not taken, was closed for several weeks due to its total disappearance under the sand, also that 4 people had died on this same road between Cairo and Alexandria. I still have this newspaper to remind me how careless I could be.

#### *Zaire, 1984*

When leaving Kinshasa after a business trip, I was stopped by the Zaire gendarmerie from leaving the country because my Yellow fever shots weren't up to date.

I know for a fact that I had all the necessary shots before I left, as Boeing always took very well care of that problem. As luck would have it the regulations had changed while I was in Zaire, when the WHO discovered some cases of yellow fever in the Congolese basin. There I was stuck in Kinshasa, surrounded by Mobutu's gendarmerie, all looking fierce and armed with sub-machine guns.

I walked with a sergeant to the medical office and there I saw at once that nobody would ever stick a needle in any part of my body as long as I was still alive. The place was dirty, with flies all over the place, and an employee smelling of transpiration and with an apron, which had been last washed when the Belgians were still in power, twenty years earlier.

It wasn't my first trip to Africa, and I turned to the sergeant and asked him if I could buy my way out of this predicament. Of course, I could! I knew that! The only money I had was a \$50 traveler check.

He looked suspicious, but the medic, who must have known the facts of modern economy, told him that it was OK. I signed the check and left with celerity toward my airplane.

I was ready to step up the ladder, when I heard yelling. My heart was racing quite a bit when I saw that the sergeant and the medic were running toward me. I asked what the problem was, and the sergeant told me that they were three, and he didn't know how to divide \$50 in three!

Calmly, on the outside, I wrote on the back of the check: \$20 for the sergeant, \$15 for the medic and the rest for the sergeant's corporal!

They shook hands with me, and everybody was smiling!

Once in the plane I started to perspire profusely. It's only later that I was made aware that the AIDS epidemic had just started, and that it had started in Zaire of all places!

By the way, Boeing refused to consider my \$50 as a legitimate business expense, but the IRS did!

#### **Danger Story No. 10**

*From Pamela Harrell, patient placement supervisor, of Shelton.*

*Vacation in Turkey in Fall of 1981*

On my way to meet a friend in Silefke, Turkey, I was kidnapped when 'guerillas' commandeered the taxi that I was riding in from Adana.

When men in camouflage with guns are standing in the middle of the road at night and motion one to stop, one does. My driver revealed more to me with his trembling than his limited English.

He was motioned out of the car and one pointed his AK-47 type gun at me and yelled in Turkish for my passport. He looked at it in the light of the headlights and then called, "Americano!" to the other soldier.

The taxi driver was ordered back in the car, and two soldiers hopped in the back seat with their weapons pointed at us and we drove on. I was thinking that I would die and my mother would never know nor would anyone else.

I was not due back at my job as a flight nurse in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for over a week. We traveled a few miles in silence before the driver was told to stop. Another man, in camouflage, appeared as our armed passengers disembarked. The soldiers deferred to him, motioned to the car and showed him my passport. After a short time, one of the soldiers opened my door and threw the passport on the dash, slammed the door and motioned us on.

The driver drove on shaking so hard, I wondered how he managed to stay on the road. Down the road a few miles, we stopped at an open 'café'. Tables were lit by a row of light bulbs strung above them and someone was cooking on a grill. After ordering a beer, he asked how I could be so calm and not scream. He did not know if the men who stopped us were official soldiers or not and they could easily have killed and/or tortured us. I replied that screaming did not seem an option as there was no one to hear us.

Then, the driver related a story of having had his car hijacked before by bank robbers who had thrown him into the trunk after a robbery so he had mounted a special switch in his car that would disable it, but it would not have helped us, so he did not use it. He had escaped when the car went around a corner, but the police at first did not believe he was not in on the robbery, until he called a General whom he had worked for in the military to vouch for his honesty.

He also talked about the screaming he heard and the bleeding woman who was dragged from the interrogation room next to his, and he was afraid that would happen to me.

When we left the open café, he showed me the switch in his car to thwart car hijackers. We finally arrived at my hotel, which was very dark. No lights were on. I asked him to wait, which he did reluctantly. When I went inside, there were people sitting on a rug listening to a portable radio by candlelight.

One of them jumped up and went behind the desk, assured me that I was expected, and they were having a power outage. I paid the cabby (more than agreed on, per his request) and he quickly left. I asked for a bottle of wine and assured the man at the desk that, "No, I did not want any company."

When I returned to work, my boss, the president of the company, told me

that Turkey was on the list of countries that US citizens should not visit.

### **Danger Story No. 11**

*From Beth Kolle, harpist, of Seattle.*

My girlfriend, Lora, and I were driving up on the North Cascades Highway. We were supposed to pick up a couple friends at a trailhead at the end of their back-packing trip.

Lora and I were woefully unprepared for any unusual occurrence, which is of course what we experienced.

We arrived in the vicinity of the trailhead right on time, about 6 in the evening, and our friends were not there. We searched around for awhile in the twilight, using my flashlight until the batteries died. We yelled and yelled, but no one answered. It started to rain.

We drove back down to the ranger station to ask for help, and the ranger was quite detached about the whole situation. He wasn't at all concerned that our friends were missing, and basically proposed to do nothing until morning. He even refused to let us use his bathroom.

That left us, two young women, with nothing to do but wait until morning in a small car, with no food, no blankets, no batteries, no water and no bathroom. And now it was really pouring outside.

While we were driving back up the hill to look for a place to park the car for the night, I asked Lora to pull over. I planned to hop over the ditch and water the weeds on the other side. It was so dark and wet by now we could hardly see anything.

Just as I was sliding down the little bank and getting ready to hop over the ditch, Lora let out a horrible scream which stopped me cold. I jumped back in the car, expecting to find a bear at her window.

All she could say was, "Didn't you hear that awful scream from that animal?" I had heard nothing of the sort, and thought she was nuts, but decided to stay in the car just in case.

We found a place to park in a campground (with a restroom!) and huddled under our jackets, trying to sleep between noisy episodes of bears and raccoons attacking the nearby garbage dumpster.

After a perfectly miserable night, we drove back out onto the highway and drove past the place where we had pulled over the night before.

There were our wheel tracks, there were my footprints, but instead of a little ditch with weeds on the other side, it was a straight drop down about 200 feet. One more second and I would have hopped to my death.

We managed to find the hikers, who had decided to camp over the ridge instead of waiting for us. We all decided we deserved a good meal, so we treated ourselves to a huge pancake breakfast at a local restaurant, celebrating lost hikers found and one near miss.

I have never forgotten that Lora's scream saved my life.

We often wonder what it was she heard, and why I couldn't hear it when I was outside the car. Maybe she heard 'me' screaming as I went over the cliff.

## **Danger Story No. 12**

*From Greg Ebersole, photographer, Longview.*

One of the things I've always done for excitement and fun is to travel abroad. I have been to 27 countries so far. I particularly like to go to countries which are exotic, potentially dangerous, cheap and often not recommended by the US government for travel. Often I have worked on stories for my newspaper, sometimes at my expense.

I have gone to Nicaragua during the contra war, traveled in Myanmar (before the "year of the tourist"), Cambodia, Haiti, Cuba and Albania, during the Kosovo refugee crisis. Last summer, I took my three kids all through Vietnam with several days of hiking near the China border.

One of my most potentially dangerous and interesting trips was to Croatia and Bosnia in Dec. of 1997. Months earlier, I had taken a portrait of Kris Campbell, a local woman who was going to be in command of an army support hospital in Tuzla, Bosnia. I later thought it would be interesting to go there and photograph her on the job.

Everyone at The Daily News, including the editor, thought I was crazy--that it was too dangerous. That really pushed me more. I wrote a proposal to the managing editor that I go for two weeks and record interviews, take notes, photograph everything and later work with the editor on the story upon return. The proposal was accepted.

After emailing news photographers working in Bosnia for any information regarding this trip, I began to make plans. In December, I flew to Zagreb, Croatia, rented a car at the airport, found a cheap hotel room and went to sleep. The next morning, I went to the local SFOR (international peacekeeping force) office to get press credentials so I wouldn't have so many hassles crossing the border. Soon I was on my way driving the highway to Bosnia.

I was averaging 90-95 mph and cars were still whizzing by me. I was starting to feel good that everything was going so smoothly, when all of a sudden a screw popped out of the left side of my glasses frames and the lens flew out. With everything fuzzy, I stopped the car, found the lens, but couldn't find the tiny screw. A minor panic set in. I couldn't see very well, but decided to go on and look for a gas station.

Within a half hour, I found one and got some gas. Then using sign language, I managed to let the Croatian man (who didn't understand English) know I needed some tape to hold my lens in the frame until I could get it repaired. He finally realized what I said and found some tape in the back room and helped me to tape the lens in place, temporarily solving the problem until I could get it fixed in Tuzla.

After getting lost for awhile in Slovonski Brod and slow security checks at the Croatia/Bosnia border, I eventually made it to Tuzla, Bosnia. I had traveled through a war-ravaged countryside with bombed out homes, buildings, buses and cars everywhere. I'd never seen anything like it. I had been warned by other photographers to stay on the main road because the country was heavily mined.

After photographing in the hospital for a few days, I decided I needed more excitement and photos. I wanted to go to Brchko, one of the hardest hit areas in Bosnia, to photograph and interview Muslim survivors who'd suffered major bombing attacks. I couldn't afford a regular interpreter.

I met Max, a 17 yr.-old kid working at my hotel in Tuzla. I offered to pay him a little and buy him lunch if he could help interpret for me in Brchko. He agreed to and said he knew the area. He was Muslim and his father had been killed in the conflict. As we drove along, we stopped often to interview and photograph Muslim folks near their destroyed homes. He was valuable as a translator.

As we got closer to Brchko, he became quite scared. He said we were in Serbinska territory and since he was Muslim, he could be killed. He said our car had Croatian plates and the Serb cops might stop us. He also admitted to me that he had never been to Brchko.

When we reached Brchko, we parked the car and walked some. Max was really afraid. He said everyone was staring at us, knowing we were strangers in town. I photographed a poster of a Serb politician in a window. Under his face was spray painted, "Go Away."

A man stopped and told Max it was illegal to photograph those posters. He said if the Serb cops see you taking pictures, they will take your camera. We soon left and headed back before Max fainted from fright. On the drive back, we stopped for more interviews and photos.

The folks all had a look of fear, terror and sadness in their faces. They talked of all the friends and relatives killed and homes damaged or destroyed. I began to feel the terror that people on both sides were feeling towards each other.

During the time I was in Bosnia, I was never sure what was going to happen. I just tried to keep my wits about me and be ready to deal with any situation or crisis calmly. After more days in and around the army support hospital, I soon found myself driving back on the highway through Bosnia and headed for Croatia. At one point, I needed a bathroom badly. With no rest area or gas station nearby, I decided to stop near some bombed and burned buildings and bus.

I figured I could wander out, relieve myself in the bushes near them and get a few photos at the same time. After several minutes of walking around and photographing, I returned to the car.

A few miles down the road, I suddenly started shaking uncontrollably. I stopped the car to compose myself. I yelled to myself, "Oh, sh-t! I totally forgot about the land mines!" I couldn't believe what I'd done. That was the only time I slipped and let my guard down. I had wandered around a potentially and probable mined area for several minutes. I said a prayer of thanks for my life and drove on to Zagreb. That evening was New Year's Eve.

The hotel manager said I should go to the town center for the bands. He said thousands of people would be there. He was right. Just before midnight, the band Dinamo played. The crowd all seemed to know the words to every song and sang loudly. One man told me the group was the number one Croatian rock band. Fireworks were exploding all around, sounding like bombs going off.

It seemed quite ironic to me after seeing so many bombed buildings. But, the Croatians seemed so happy, at least for the night, smiling and singing to the music. It was a wonderful way to end a frightening drive and an intense two weeks.

### **Danger Story No. 13**

From **Jon Letman**, Japanese guest-services manager for a hotel in Kauai, of Hawaii.

*10 a.m. Khabarovsk International Airport*

"Flight is delayed, sir. Please go to Dalavia counter."

This could have been expected.

"There is problem with plane. Please come back around three," I am told in a thick Russian accent by a woman at Dalavia, one of the minor Russian airlines which took over the old Aeroflot route to Petrapavlovsk-Kamchatsky and other cities in the Russian Far East in the mid-90's.

Outside Khabarovsk International Airport a man is playing a melancholy song on an accordion as two unshaven Azerbaizhani men talk on the edge of the parking lot, one is turning shashlik on an open grill. Fleshy babushkas in purple and orange rayon scarves crouch beside buckets of ripe tomatoes and long red gladiolas. I take a bus into the city. 3:00 p. m. back at Khabarovsk International Unable to follow the Russian explanation, a Chinese girl from Harbin named Victoria interprets. "There is a problem with the plane. No flight today, probably tomorrow morning. Please telephone again at seven tonight."

Back on the bus into Khabarovsk and check into the Hotel Turist on Ulitsa Karl Marx.

Seven p.m. down at the front desk I ask the administrator behind a protective glass window if I can make a phone call from the hotel to which she replies, "International only."

Local calls are impossible?

The woman tells me I must go to a phone booth but I know that will involve a search for not only a phone that works but also a place that sells phone tokens. It could take an hour.

I appeal to her. "I can't make a local call here?"

And then with no resistance she says, "O.K. It is possible. One call."

I dial the airport and a voice on the other end says, "Yes, flight at three o'clock this morning. Come to airport at two."

"Three o'clock? This morning? You mean like eight hours from now?"

"Da. Be here at two," and they hang up.

*1:30 a.m. standing on Ulitsa Karl Marx*

I am standing on the road leading to the airport. Hitching a ride at this hour is dubious and I imagine a taxi will be extortionate but suddenly an unlit city bus approaches. It appears to be going back to the bus station, but stops when I hold out my hand. The door opens and the driver takes me to the airport. It seems unlikely but then again, this is the Russian Far East where the simplest of things can be a wearisome task and what looks impossible happens effortlessly.

Inside the terminal a long line trails from the Dalavia check-in counter beneath a sign that reads: 523 Pet.Kam.-- my flight. From past experience I know that, as a foreigner I am required to check-in at the international hall

even though this is a domestic flight. The high ceilinged Soviet Hall of Aviation is decorated with raised reliefs honoring great Soviet cities; Irkutsk, Novosibirsk, Leningrad, Kiev... The hammer and sickle still remain.

An overhead reader board displays foreign destinations: Singapore, Tashkent, Seoul, Aomori and Seattle but there are no other passengers besides myself and one middle-aged Korean couple whose hushed voices echo in the empty hall. It is now nearly three a.m. but there is no sign we will be departing soon. An airline employee tells me to wait. By this point I am feeling completely drained and in a kind of surrealistic fog. Thirsty, I buy a can of Coke from a kiosk but it is frozen solid.

*3:45 a.m. International Departure Hall, Khabarovsk Airport*

I am given a cursory body check, pass through the metal detector and am led onto the tarmac where a transport bus takes me out to the plane. I am the only passenger on the bus. When I ask about the flight time and time difference between Khabarovsk and Kamchatka, nobody seems to know so I don't bother asking why the Dalavia flight has been changed to KRAS airlines.

A set of stairs leading up to the plane is crowded with tired Russians clutching bundles and bags, all dressed in heavy jackets and sweaters even though the night air is comfortably warm. On the runway a light breeze blows, inside the plane the first thing I notice is a wall of stagnant air. My boarding pass says D-14 but every seat is occupied with most of the passengers already asleep. I look in the back, and then in the front but there are no empty seats.

Finally I find a vacant spot at the very front of the plane next to a boy, perhaps nine-years-old who is too busy playing with a plastic toy gun to take notice of me. The overhead compartment is barely wide enough for even a jacket and so I place my pack on top of a pile of luggage wedged behind the cockpit, blocking an emergency exit. A group of tired men who appear to be the pilots push past as I sink into the half-collapsed seat. Trying to fasten the seat belt is impossible; it hangs slack around my waist and cannot be adjusted.

The boy beside me intently fires orange plastic pellets into his seat which is already leaking stuffing. The inside of the plane is stifling and has been flown to the point of extreme shabbiness. I start counting the flies which buzz about the cabin... One, two, three, four...

From the cockpit comes ringing like that of a child's toy phone and then the sound of a door banging shut.

The lights dim and a muffled Russian voice makes a hurried announcement. It is now 4:25 a.m. The boy with the gun begins to shoot pellets into an apple. My seat belt still hanging limp, the decrepit plane begins its long, slow taxi down the runway bobbing and rocking like a child's wagon overloaded with bricks with one wheel missing as it is dragged up a bumpy hillside. The plane shudders violently though I doubt we are doing even 40 kilometers an hour — nowhere near fast enough to become airborne. Suddenly there is a swerve and gravity-defying jerk that takes us into the sky.

My palms are sweating, a plastic gun is pointed at me and the child's toy phone in the cockpit is ringing. I tell myself, " the pilots are very capable...the pilots are highly trained...weather conditions are good...the

aircraft is in better shape than it looks...." and so on.

Exhausted, I want to sleep but fear that if I do, I may never wake up. Closing my eyes, images of an ITR-TV documentary on Russian air safety which I saw the day before at a friend's home in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk flash in my mind. I recall the panel of aviation and military experts discussing Russia's disaster plagued airline industry as they review graphic footage of smoldering wreckage, rescue crews digging in blackened snow and broken wings jutting out from destroyed apartments-- all horrifying testaments to the potential terror that awaits passengers on Russian planes like the one I am now on. As gruesome scenes of mangled bodies and burnt fuselage play over and over in my mind, I remember that we were now flying somewhere over Sakhalin Island-- the point where Korean Air flight 007 was shot down by a Russian airforce jet killing all on board in 1983.

There is nothing like fear to make a flight pass quickly. Soon the night gives way to the lavender veil of dawn and the now familiar plastic toy phone begins to ring as we start our descent into the Kamchatka peninsula on the far edge of Russia. The boy next to me has fallen asleep, his gun resting peacefully in his lap.

Outside there must be snow-capped volcanoes but the window is blocked by gun boy's mother. As we descend, the plane once again begins to shake, this time like a length of bamboo with two heavy buckets balanced on either end so that the front and rear of the plane seem to be moving up and down while the mid-section remains stationary. I take consolation knowing that if we do crash it will be quick and in a beautiful setting but in spite of the convulsions, we land smoothly and come to a halt beside three airforce jets sitting just off the runway in patches of high grass.

Outside it is cold and windy but I am elated to be on the ground. Waiting for the bus to drive us to the terminal in the distance I look back at the plane with its big blue letters:

"KRAS" on the side and wonder who left off the "H" when they painted the plane.

#### **Danger Story No. 14**

*From Ron LaCroix, commercial fireproofing contractor, of Lynnwood.*

Here's a couple of incidents of mine while I was in Iran.

When I was in my late twenties I spent five years overseas traveling and working in some 40 countries. Along the way in 1977-79 I ended up in Iran getting a job teaching English as a foreign language, like a lot of English-speaking young travelers.

I was in Tehran right before the Revolution and then returned right after the Revolution, after the mullahs took over.

Although the country was full of foreign workers up to the time of the revolution, afterwards there were very few of us. I got a job at my old school, Iran-America Society, which was a joint government cooperative with U.S. Foreign Service people running it, and presumably, Iranian government officials jointly administrating the operations.

Working there after the revolution was, of course, much different, than before. I was constantly asked questions by Iranians suspicious that I was working for the CIA, and tailed by cars whenever I went home from work.

At night for a couple of months after the revolution, I could hear gunfire outside in the street. There was an army headquarters nearby and I guess some were still trying to get weapons from it. I lived only 4 blocks from the embassy and one block up from the main street where most of the demonstrations were held, which on Thursday night (Iran's equivalent of our Saturday night) provided entertainment with the chanting of slogans and speeches.

I would on occasion, sneak out with my Iranian girlfriend and mingle in the crowd, though I had to wear a hat to hide my brown hair, which would stand out like a sore thumb in the sea of black-haired Iranians. It was very adventurous.

In those months after the revolution there were checkpoints all over Tehran, especially at night, where cars had to slow down and Revolutionary Guards would look you over and sometime demand identification papers and ask you questions. One evening, my girlfriend and I went up to the North of Tehran to spend an evening with some friends. We were driving home on my motorcycle around ten o'clock, which was the curfew time then, when we had to slow down and go through a checkpoint. I nodded to the thugs and continued on down the road. About ten minutes later my girlfriend squeezed my arm and yelled at me to stop. I pulled over and all of a sudden three jeeps full of Revolutionary guards surrounded us pointing their rifles at us - I was a little unnerved.

Fortunately, after my girlfriend talked with them, they were satisfied we weren't dangerous spies. I guess they had been trying frantically to catch us in traffic all that time, and she told me we were lucky they hadn't taken pot shots at us, and asked questions later.

Later that year, the embassy was stormed and the hostages were taken. That day all communications to the USA were apparently switched to the Iran-America Society School where I taught, and our US administrators were apparently providing the US government with information about what was going on there. Of course the Iranians found about about this. At around noon the day after the embassy was stormed, I was standing in the lobby of our school building, when a student of mine came up to me and said, "Mr. Ron, you must to go. Revolutionary Guard are here. Big trouble."

As I looked around I saw three big goons in fatigues, waving automatic rifles coming into the lobby. They started asking questions of the Iranians sitting around, then one saw me and came over to me.

He asked me, "Where is the Mr. Ron?" I played dumb and said I didn't know and he turned and went over to the receptionist. I immediately went down to my classroom and told my students that I didn't know if I would be staying there or not, but we'd go on with the class. Nobody came, and so I taught the class. After it was over I returned to the teacher's room and asked what had happened.

I was told that the Guard had arrested our two bosses, Katherine Koob and William(?) Ryan, along with our Armenian receptionist, who apparently had given them a ration of crap, and taken them all to the embassy. Well, I guess the thug had just got his names mixed up and was looking for a Mr. Ryan, so thankfully, I hadn't been taken hostage by mistake. They did finally let our receptionist return, but as you may know, Koob and Ryan had to go the distance.

One month later I walked through passport control at the airport, was taken

aside and asked a few questions, and miraculously, let through to board my flight and head for Pakistan.

I guess I'm pretty lucky, but at the time it was just good adventure.

### **Danger Story No. 15**

*From Carol Ann Carnahan, retired teacher, of Concrete.*

I've been leery of rivers ever since I nearly drowned in the McKinley River after my climb of Denali. But the little river on the Big Island of Hawaii seemed innocuous. Knee deep and flowing gently, it was easy to ford.

A friend and I were on a two day backpack during our mostly condo-based Hawaiian vacation. We spent a full day descending the steep muddy trail that was the only access to a horseshoe shaped canyon walled by steep cliffs and fronted by the ocean. The canyon floor was almost flat. The little river, which meandered through the valley, was fed by seven waterfalls on the cliff walls. After fording it, we set up our tent in our assigned site. It was November, the off season, and only one other couple shared the campground with us. Life was good and no alarm bells rang when it started to rain during the night.

One look at the river in the morning, however, changed our plans to pack up and head home. It had become a raging torrent and the trail was on the other side of it. There were now thirteen waterfalls feeding the river from the cliff walls. We resigned ourselves to being tent-bound until the rain stopped and the river went down.

We spent most of the day staring gloomily at the walls of the tent in a kind of depression-based withdrawal state. This was too much like backpacking in Washington. The rain pattering incessantly on the tent drove us out for a brief walk.

We saw a ferocious looking wild pig with seven piglets. I wondered if I could climb a palm tree. Probably not. She didn't notice us.

As the rain continued, it became obvious that we would be spending another night. We had enough extra food to get by but it bothered me that we were paying for a nice condo we couldn't use.

The next morning we joined the other couple at the river's edge. It was still raining and the river was now slightly out of its banks. I suddenly realized that we were in a precarious situation. The canyon was so flat that it might fill up like an estuary if the rain continued. I wondered again if I could climb a palm tree; we certainly couldn't climb the steep walls.

The other couple was frantic. They had left their baby with a hotel babysitter and were now a day overdue. They intended to ford the river no matter what.

I tried desperately to dissuade them. No one can know the power of a river in flood unless they have been caught in one, and I had. My friend and I wondered if we should try to stop them by force. The couple then decided to use a picnic table as a raft.

As they started to lower it into the water, the river snatched it from their hands and rushed it out to sea. They gave up the idea of crossing the river.

The woman was now extremely distraught. But I told her we could easily be rescued because helicopters had started flying into the canyon to show the

waterfalls to tourists. They came as often as once every thirteen minutes.

All we had to do was show the international distress signal. We formed a cross on the beach with red and orange items from our packs and took turns giving the hand signal, a wave which looks like the top half of a jumping jack. We signaled helicopters with it for four hours.

They were flying so low over us that we could have seen the whites of their eyes-- if they had looked at us. The pilots determinedly looked the other direction even as their passengers tapped them on the shoulder and pointed frantically down at us.

Finally a helicopter landed on our beach. It was not a tourist helicopter, but a small one with a pilot and his girlfriend out for a ride. He promised to radio the fire department at Hilo.

Soon the fire department helicopter came. We were all embarrassed about the trouble we had caused by being unsavvy tourists who were too dumb to listen to the weather forecast. But they were kind. They congratulated us for not trying to ford during a flash flood, saying, "If you had been swept out to sea, we couldn't have rescued you."

They flew us two at a time to a ball field near the trailhead. It was an exciting ride as the bubble helicopter flew straight up the canyon walls. They even made an additional trip to bring out our gear. At the ball field an ambulance and the fire chief were waiting for us. To our effusive thanks, they implied that this sort of thing was routine for them and they were pleased to perform a rescue with a happy ending.

When we returned home, my friend and I each sent the Hilo Fire Department a check for a hundred dollars. They sent them back with a note saying they weren't allowed to accept donations since rescue was their job.

Since then I've encountered flash floods while backpacking in New Zealand and in Alaska's Brooks Range.

Both times I've watched from high ground.

### **Danger Story No. 16**

*From Janice Seino, teacher, of Woodinville.*

It was 1971 and I had just graduated from the U of W. I sold everything I owned including my car, furniture, records and my stereo. I set off on the "Adventure of a Lifetime" and I was only 21 years old.

I was traveling with my boyfriend on an around the world trip and we started by going overland from London to India. We got separated for months in the Middle East when he went to Lebanon and I went to Israel. We were held up in Iran and Afghanistan when war broke out between India and Pakistan but finally we met up made it to the "Roof of the World," The border of Nepal and Tibet.

We were trekking back to Nepal between the beautiful Annapurna and Dhaulagiri Mountains when suddenly a huge wide river appeared before us with no bridge in sight. We didn't have a guide or sherpa to tell us what to do but some local Nepalese showed us where to cross which was in fact the widest part of the river.

We took off our boots and tied them to our packs and held all of our stuff above our heads and we started across. Suddenly I felt a leech attach its

ugly little self to my heel.

I froze in fear, was the river infested?

Would we be covered by blood sucking leeches and die from loss of blood?  
My imagination took off on a very negative tangent.

I started to scream as I felt another attach to my other leg.

My boyfriend, David, took my pack and hoisted up on top of his head along with his own heavy gear. He tried to calm me, he cajoled and soothed but I continued to yell and cry.

When we finally reached the other side, I couldn't even look down at my legs.

I begged him to be quick, use a knife or burn them off.

He assured me he could handle it. I closed my eyes and prepared for the worst. I knew from other travelers that it was hard to stop the bleeding from these horrid Himalayan leeches.

It didn't take long. David said it was all over and I could relax.

I opened my eyes as he waved two dirty wet band aids in front of my face.

"Brave girl, its over. Let's go..." he said.

We never talked about it again on that trip. But after we returned and married, it became one of our favorite travel stories.

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