




2018

## Is There a GPS for Lost in Translation?

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### Recommended Citation

Garrison, Carole (2018) "Is There a GPS for Lost in Translation?," *The Chautauqua Journal*: Vol. 2 , Article 14.  
Available at: <https://encompass.eku.edu/tcj/vol2/iss1/14>

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CAROLE GARRISON

IS THERE A GPS FOR LOST IN TRANSLATION?

*The Kindness of Strangers*

Some years ago, 1979 to be exact, I lived in a small predominantly white middle-class NJ community, New Providence. I taught at Kean College. My teenage daughter was attending boarding school in Vermont and coming home by train for the Thanksgiving holiday; I was picking her up at the station in downtown Newark. With my 9-year-old daughter, Samantha, securely fastened to my hand we climbed the stairs to the platform to await the train. Newark at the time was a city with a reputation for crime and violence, and I felt uncomfortable, if not afraid, among the throngs of train station denizens and the large number of African Americans departing and arriving on the trains. I clutched my daughter tightly and waited as the train pulled into the station.

Debra arrived dragging what looked like a dozen large duffle bags. I thought she might be bringing home everyone's laundry or every item she owned for the weekend! I couldn't imagine how I was going to get off the platform and downstairs to a trolley while securing my 9-year-old, my purse, my teenager and her mountain of duffle bags!

Just then a large, neatly dressed, African American man came over and asked if I needed help. Holding my hand up as if to stop him, I said, "no thanks, we can manage." I pulled both my daughter and my purse closer to me! But as I looked around it was obvious that I couldn't manage and I turned back to the man and said, "Please, yes, I do need some help." Wordlessly, he proceeded to sweep up my 9-year-old, most of the duffel bags and headed down the stairs; Debra and I closely on his heels dragging the rest of her belongings.

As we came down the stairs a woman and a couple of children were looking up smiling and waving in our direction. The man helping me was grinning back unable to wave given all he was carrying! Our small band reached the trolleys at the bottom of the stairs; and he quickly unloaded his bundles and Samantha only to be crushed by his own family as they rushed to greet him. I called to him before he got away and said "I don't

know how to thank you.” ...He turned momentarily from his reunion and said “don’t thank me, just pass it on.”

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This opening story, “The Kindness of Strangers,” illustrates the pivotal, transformative moment when we learn to trust, a necessary element in building human community. Building human community is a greater task today as we reach a billion more people on our planet than just 12 years ago; then the earth was home to 6 billion people, according to the United Nations, and back in the 1960s, the earth’s population measured only half that number—3 billion. The concept, community, is over-broad and thus problematic. It covers both groups and individuals bound by similar and dissimilar interests. It can contain ideas across a broad array of cultural entities in life. A “Community” is a construct, an abstraction. Even as a member, we cannot see a whole community, we cannot touch it, and we cannot directly experience it. Like the words, “hill” or “snowflake,” a community may come in one of many shapes, sizes, colors and locations, no two of which are alike. A community has fuzzy boundaries; communities can be within communities; all communities have a life-cycle.

Building any kind of community is an organic and fluid process needing certain materials to grow and develop; remove these and it will wither and die. It can happen in a moment; it can take years... but one of its essential properties is trust. It is not a unique experience; we all have been faced with building community, the first day at a new school, moving to a new neighborhood, new job, military unit, or summer camp! Peter Block writes, “We are in community each time we find a place where we belong” (*Community: The Structure of Belonging*, Berret-Koehler 2008, v). Trust is a critical factor in belonging to and sustaining community, learning to trust as in the story above, is a prerequisite.

In 2007 (November 8) EKU hosted a Chautauqua lecture by a noted spelunker and biologist, Hazel Barton. Dr. Barton gave a talk called “Dark Life: From Cave Microbes to Astrobiology.” Her discussion of life in places of scarce resources, i.e., caves and asteroids, provided a fascinating metaphor for the construct of community. She suggested from her research that as resources became scarcer, communities of specific

species began to dwindle in number, almost to extinction; but, not to extinction. Organisms which survived the die off recombined into new multi-species communities, sharing, if you will, their unique survival skills so that these newly integrated communities could prosper. Dr. Barton suggested this as a metaphor to support using diversity and cooperation to assure the survival of human community. While organisms may not ‘trust’ each other per se, emergent cooperation and unity are among the essential properties for building and sustaining community.

The phrase, “United we stand, divided we fall,” has been attributed as far back as Aesop, the Greek slave and fable author who lived around 600 BC. It came from his fable, “The Four Oxen and the Lion.” Perhaps more famously, you think of it when you think of the Revolutionary firebrand Patrick Henry rallying against Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions. In a great effort at the end of his life, Henry was quoted as saying, “Let us trust God, and our better judgment to set us right hereafter. United we stand, divided we fall. Let us not split into factions which must destroy that union upon which our existence hangs.” Community can be diverse or homogeneous, but trust and cooperation are at its essence... and survival is its goal.

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Just as learning to trust is critical to community: so is building trust. The following story, “The Hajj” is instructive on the role of building trust in developing human community.

### *The Hajj*

In the summer of 2004 I traveled with friends to Iran to an ancient city called Estefan. We went to visit relatives and see the wonders of old Persia and modern Iran. My friend’s family is Muslim, some quite religious, others more secular in their observance. I am Jewish... I am an infidel... I am an American... I am a woman. Any one or all of these factors put me outside of this community. My exclusion was minimal, because the family with a few exceptions by the more religious members, embraced me warmly as Jaleh friend; and I assumed certain behaviors which allowed me to fit into the wider community. For example, I rarely wore a Hijab, head scarf, in the house; but dutifully put

one on to go outside or to any public place. I experimented with all kinds of scarves since most often I looked like a Russian Babch (grandma)... in a babushka, not very glamorous or attractive. Muslim women seemed to have the knack for looking gorgeous even when covered from head to toe in a black Chador, the outer garment worn in Iran by observant Muslim women! Frustrated by how I looked in a scarf, I took to blasphemy under my breath as I donned my scarf, “Allah is great, Mohammed is his prophet and they both hate women, or at least they hated me”! It was incorrect of course but allowed me to vent my displeasure with forced clothing restrictions that included not only a head covering but also long outer garments which added to my discomfort with the high heat of the Iranian summer.

There was one uncle, Salam Khale Joon, a robust man in his mid to late 60’s, who, because I was an infidel, would not touch me (shake hands or hug). In everything else he was gracious and friendly. One morning, Reza, my friend’s father, told me this uncle needed US dollars for a Hajj, a religious pilgrimage. The last time he had exchanged money he was cheated, given counterfeit bills. So they decided to ask me if I would exchange some of the traveling cash I had with me for Iranian money. Why not! I was still anticipating a few days shopping at the old bazaar and would need to exchange dollars anyway. The Uncle and Reza took my cash and went off in a corner to figure out the exchange. I sat quietly unconcerned on the couch reading. When they finished, Uncle wanted to know if I wanted to count the money to be sure they hadn’t cheated me. I stared at him... thinking to myself “how in hell would I know... I don’t have clue what the exchange rate is or even how to read Iranian money, the Rial”! But to him I said, “No, I have no need to count it, I trust you completely.” In the next moment I was squeezed in a massive bear hug, my breath coming in ragged heaves against his chest. He held me so tightly I could hear his heart beat... Uncle was smiling broadly as he made me a member of the family, of the community. The entry fee into this community was not money; it was trust.

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In this next story, “The Hanging Offense,” in order to survive I had to build a community with my captors... again the critical variable was trust.

### *The Hanging Offense*

No sleep, just the clatter of rats' nails as they kept up their steady run along the walls of the cell. I was close to giving up to hysteria and could already see myself vainly screaming hysterically at the cell bars "I am an American, let me out!" Just when all my composure was dissolving guards came to the cell door and motioned me to come. I saw A'hron, the deputy police chief smiling.

I had left days following the July 5<sup>th</sup>, 1966 coup by Hun Sen and his Cambodian People's Party. We—my newly adopted daughter Tevi and I—had to be at the Australian Embassy to check in and time was running short. The Cambodians were warning of robbers and soldiers on the road. A long-time friend and colleague, Robin, the Embassy's doctor, handed me a Czech 22 semi-automatic pistol to protect Tevi, our money and myself from the desperate aftermath of the coup. "Here, you know how to use this." I took it, ejected the magazine and threw the two pieces into a suitcase.

Tevi and I boarded a C-130, leaving Cambodia. Two hours later we landed in Penang, Malaysia. We were cleared through the Australian reception and I went to secure tickets to Kula Lumpur so we could head home. But there were no seats to Kula Lumpur or from there to the United States, at least not for a few days. Forgetting about Robin's well-intentioned gift somewhere in the bowels of my bag, I claimed our luggage and took a bus to a moderate hotel on the Penang beach.

When they stopped us at the airport the next day at the baggage check-in neither Tevi nor I was the least bit perturbed when the security man asked "do you have something metal in your suitcase?"

"Oh!" I flushed red.

I actually had totally forgotten and when the question was posed I was stunned with the confrontation. I immediately responded by digging into the suitcase painfully aware of every fabric, every item of clothing. Luckily I had removed the magazine so that the gun was unloaded when I finally retrieved it from the bag.

The guard looked squarely at me, and then, very politely said "Please follow me."

I did! Holding tightly onto Tevi, I was ushered into a small waiting room with old 50's naughohyde furniture and the heavy smell of stale cigarettes.

A young thin Malaysian man in a police uniform said "It is a holiday and my superiors are away. There is no one here but me."

He paused and then added, "this is very, very serious. You have broken the law of my country." There was not the slightest hint of irony or bluff in his voice or manner.

A flood of explanations exploded from me. I tried to keep the desperation out of my voice but also any hint of flippancy. "I'm sorry, I forgot that I even had that gun in my bag. It wasn't loaded—just take it and let us go. I have to get to Kula Lumpur and meet my brother. We have to go now. I have this baby with me. She is an orphan from Cambodia. We were evacuated; soldiers were in the streets. Surely you can understand."

The young sergeant clearly did not appreciate the situation. "You have committed a hanging offense; you can be hung."

He left the small room and I sat. Other people came in and out to see the "American woman criminal"—some were polite and others just quietly curious. I was given coffee and cigarettes. A woman wearing a headscarf came in and sat silently in one of the plastic covered chairs. Later, I found out she was my guard.

The time to catch the plane to Kula Lumpur had come and gone. I had been incarcerated in the small waiting room for close to two hours. Occasionally, I would be asked a few questions, notes taken, and then abandoned to smoke cigarettes and wait. I smiled deferentially at anyone who came in, hoping to gain allies among these quiet strangers. I conversed with everyone who wanted to talk and I began to slowly leak out personal information that I hoped would either intimidate or create a connection.

Finally, a face which had a different countenance; both authority and kindness combined in a stocky, handsome man. I instinctively decided to gamble on this man. He looked and talked like a professional; he was moderate in his approach and clearly not looking to create a "situation."

We left the airport and went to the police station. A small crowded office with lots of old gray metal desks and a haze of smoke. By now I had pulled out my folder of

documents adoption papers, resume, anything which would make me legitimate, worthy of sympathy, less suspicious. I kept reminding myself to stay this course of friendly obsequiousness and not let fear result in panic or hysteria. I had to match his professionalism and create a bridge for us to meet upon half way. I remembered how often I had convinced highway patrol officers to treat me kindly when I got pulled over by making us more alike than different.

“Hi officer, gee, I remember days like this when I was A COP in Atlanta. Hard to be on traffic detail in this weather, but I appreciate your efforts, I know this is a bitch to do 24/7.”

I also knew that my resume with references to work with DOD and the UN made it at least seem obvious that I would be missed and at fairly high levels of the US Government.

He and the other investigators asked:

“Did I know the FBI?”

“Where are you a professor in the US?”

“Is it hard to get a Ph.D. in Criminal Justice?”

Slowly, slowly I could feel the bond take place but when I had to go into a back room for a mug shot. I knew I was far from home free.

Anxious, I explained “My brother is in Kula Lumpur, he expected me to arrive tonight; he will be worried.”

I asked the detective quite sincerely whether I should let my brother know what was going on. “No,” A’hron cautioned, “We believe you and want to find a way out of this. It will not help to bring others in.”

But then, apologizing profusely, A’hron took Tevi and me to the 147-year-old prison in Penang. I had insisted we stay together and they honored that. In moments we were alone in the booking room. Two female guards speaking little English instructed me to unpack my luggage. Slowly they inventoried jewelry and \$10,000 in US bills. I then was asked to strip. I can hardly recall now what I was thinking or feeling. I was numb



from fatigue and fear. I remember them giggling over my lace bra and me arguing with them about my luggage, demanding they put it up high where the rats I had seen running in the hall couldn't chew on it.

Finally, we were led down the long dark hall where I had seen the rats coming and going. No private room or cell awaited us. Instead, we were unceremoniously sent with one change of clothes into a large holding cell. The room was about 24 by 40 feet with a small walled shower and Turkish toilet in the back. On either side of the cell were cement 8 by 12-ft. platforms, about 3 feet high. They were covered with a thin sheet of wood, mostly chipped away as toothpicks or more likely picked away from boredom or stress. It was dark and most of the bodies hardly shifted as we came in. I could only tell that they were women, maybe a few small children. They lay on the floor and on the cement platform. I took Tevi, half sleeping, onto the platform toward the back of the cell. No sleep came, just the clatter of rats nails as they kept up their steady run along the walls of the cell. By mid morning I was close to giving up to hysteria and could already see myself vainly screaming hysterically at the cell bars "I am an American, let me out!" Just when all my composure was dissolving guards came to the cell door and motioned me to come. I saw A'hron, the deputy police chief smiling.

As we hurried down the hall away from the cell he said "it's not over yet, we are sorry we couldn't come earlier."

We were still in danger—I had to behave; it wasn't just a bad dream that would suddenly go away with the dawn! But we were also out. We were one step closer to home and it was a big step. I wasn't able to determine how much closer we were however. Despite the friendliness there was an atmosphere of caution and I soon caught the sense of "negative possibilities" from my captors.

The detectives drove us to a clean, modern Muslim hotel. I don't recall much of the detail of the next few days. I was well beyond tired. I was only just "on." Another woman, thin boned, wary and older, also in Muslim headgear, was assigned to us. We were under house arrest. Our inability to speak made our movements awkward. I didn't want to scare or alarm her and I couldn't quite figure out what the rules of our confinement were. At first even the bathroom was off limits to privacy.

Her replacement was a jovial younger woman who didn't appreciate being confined in the small room any more than we did. She played with Tevi, tried to converse with me and was generally more relaxed.

I was constantly on my best behavior, masking any frustration or anger with perfect politeness for fear of unraveling the delicate negotiations taking place with some unknown superiors in the higher government echelons. No one was representing me, my case, or my point of view, except the good will of these local officers. In the late afternoon A'hron's superior came to our room. Similar in style to A'hron, he was surprisingly apologetic.

"I am so sorry you had to be overnight in the prison and now, here in house arrest. We don't want to add to your troubles escaping from the fighting in Cambodia." He and his officers understood why I had the gun.

But he too left saying they were "working on it - it shouldn't be long now." Then, "I am optimistic, it will be okay."

He left with a final "A'hron will come tomorrow; he will take you out for some sightseeing and shopping."

A'hron arrived with mixed news, "the government wants you gone. They want to avoid a potential international incident."

He went on "You don't mind, we must confiscate the gun of course."

"But of course," I responded eagerly to his news.

But then the catch came: "you will fly to Kula Lumpur and there the local police will keep you and Tevi under house arrest until you can catch a flight to the US."

"Could I fly to Singapore and go home from there?" I offered in desperation.

A'hron liked this suggestion. They could arrange it and be done with this. It was a tenuous situation for them as well, nothing guaranteed and by now they cared about the American Policewoman and her little orphan. Closure would be good. He called airport police and they began to check out the possibilities.

A'hron and Teng arrived mid-morning. Teng, middle-aged, thin and gentle with a quizzical face and toothy grin was another officer who found himself entwined in our odyssey and devoted to Tevi. They had come to take us sightseeing and shopping. Knowing full well that everything is a TEST... I was 'in play"! First we stopped at a fairly modern shopping area where I bought a few things, some books for Tevi and hand cream I didn't need or want.

I noted with great authority, "Wow! What a modern the mall this is, just as good or better EVEN than the US."

We then went to a famous Buddhist temple and tourist site. But first we visited the snake handlers. A'hron held Tevi, while I, in a show of bravado, held the big boas on my arms for photos. Teng wanted us to have the opportunity to pray and give thanks. Thanks to be out of jail? Thanks to be going home? Was it possible?

"Yes," A'hron said. "We will go to the airport after you pray. I am waiting for the call to come. As soon as they call it will be final. Go pray."

Holding Tevi and clutching the small, wooden Buddha I had worn for years, we went into the Pagoda—lit incense and gave thanks, while I warily watched A'hron, waiting for his cell phone to ring. His face was all I needed to see—broadly smiling, A'hron signaled for us to come.

Teng had gone for the car and soon we were riding through the resort town of Penang towards the airport. For days I could only see in black and white, but as we rode in the car I began again to see the lush tropical palette of Penang. I purchased our tickets to Singapore and we went upstairs to have lunch. The plane would board in two hours and we were still officially under arrest. My "guards" posed with me for photos, exchanged addresses, and played with Tevi in the kiddy section of the airport. But now my facade began to fall away, A'hron looked at me as if he was seeing someone new. Not the strong American woman who had looked the "new 40." My eyes were flickering and my face sagged with exhaustion and tension. He was disappointed but not unkind.

"You know" he said confiding in me, "it was sergeant Euphatis who got you out of jail; he worked thru that first night to get it done, everyone else was on holiday." I

remembered the young scornful sergeant who was so formal and cold, now I would have another person to be grateful for.

The plane was boarding. A'hron handed Tevi to me “good bye” he said, his face splitting into a wide smile. RELIEF! I shook his hand and then Teng's. I turned and walked up the stairs into the plane. I wanted to run. I didn't look back—I couldn't look back. Tevi and I finally reached Los Angeles on July 18th, eight days after we embarked on our journey out of Cambodia.

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The following story, “The Fire,” builds upon the themes of trust and acceptance as well as introducing sacrifice, and perhaps humanity, for the good of the community.

### *The Fire*

My small street was a metaphor for the glaring cultural and economic gaps in 1996 Phnom Penh. Mansions and squatter shacks stood in stark contrast to each other in the same space. I lived in a small two story house, a wooden upstairs and a cement bottom. It was just across a narrow dirt lane from a huge old pagoda that hosted a squatter's village of unthinkable density. My house sat in a walled compound as well, with 10-foot-high walls topped with glass shards. The front yard was cement maybe 35 wide by 40 feet long. The stone bottom part of the house, which I must admit I had never entered... opened onto this cement courtyard. The big iron gates opened to the lane. Often when I returned home in the evenings from work I sometimes crossed paths with Vietnamese taxi girls coming home from their evenings labors; still wearing heavy makeup and gaudy slinky dresses to sleep the day away in dingy huts with no electricity or water.

As I settled into my new neighborhood I began to get to know my neighbors, the children and adults who inhabited the wall across from me. In the beginning it was just smiles and waives as I came and went

Then I started to take photos. Cameras were a rare commodity among the local people, one of the more obvious victories for the anti-tech reign of terror by the Khmer Rouge. Very few peasants had access even to important event pictures such as wedding

portraits, much less family photos. The cost of processing a roll of film was equivalent to a week's pay for one of the families that lived across from me! Most of the expatriates like me working in Cambodia were on a holiday from their western, modern, high-tech lives but, like all good "tourists," we had our equipment if we wanted or needed it. I began to routinely take snap shots of children, families and even special occasions when they finally got up the nerve to ask. I would get the film developed and hand out the eagerly awaited photos. Soon they were waiving to me, shouting my name or occasionally bringing me some Vietnamese delicacy. They waited patiently for the evenings when I would arrive with pictures... but when they saw me crossing the lane with an envelope in my hand... all the shyness gave way to giggles, smiles and the slightest of bows of the head from the elders. We had no common language. We only had this little gesture of friendship and trust.

I had gone home for lunch and a nap instead of sleeping at my office for the noon siesta. I smelled it before I heard it; I heard the roar before I saw it... the hundreds year old pagoda went up like kindling, the flames 40 and 50 feet in the air. Black smoke was pouring across the road and a huge burst of flame gave off so much heat I could feel it on my porch. I could see huge billows of black smoke spewing from the interior of the squatter camp; shouting people were rushing everywhere, carrying babies, meager possessions, prized TVs and boom boxes. The flames climbed higher but the wind was blowing in the opposite direction from my house. Khmer friends came over to make sure I was okay, turned off my stove and electricity and begged me to close my gates. "Shut your gates mum," they shouted, "Please," they begged, "close the gates before all the squatters run in here." "No," I yelled from my porch... "open the gates wide, tell the people living in the wall to bring their belongings and children inside." They came, they came with sewing machines and bedding, they came with toddlers and infants, they came until there was no room left in my small compound and the gates were closed.

We stood watching as the entire shanty town of two to three hundred shacks became a wall of fire, an inferno of immense heat. Most of the expatriates on the street fled in their cars and locking their gates behind them, but the three of us closest to the pagoda stayed and kept our houses open. My yard looked like a flea market but quickly took on the look of a refugee camp. I bandaged toes, held little Vietnamese children in

my arms to calm them, sedated one of the old ladies and basically just gave moral support to those families who I knew and lived directly across from me. Miraculously, we knew of only one death.

That night six or seven youngsters, terrified from their ordeal, came upstairs to the safety of my house and slept with me. They smelled like gerbils, only more sooty and dirty. Outside, little pink and blue mosquito net tents sprang up like mushrooms across the courtyard. The old women and babies slept in the downstairs salon, or what was left of it. We had opened the doors to the bottom stone part of the house and many stowed inside their few belongings they had managed to save, including motorbikes and sewing machines. I gave one man who spoke a little English the key. Others slept in the yard while most of the men stayed outside the gates and guarded what was left of their homes.

It was winter and the night air was damp and cool... inside the burned out Pagoda, families slept on the damp burnt earth; inside my compound, they slept on cold damp cement. We set up a clinic on my porch and a friend, the doctor for the Australian Embassy treated infants for exposure, colds and dehydration. The Vietnamese that were now living in my compound helped with the lines of Vietnamese and Khmer refugees from the fire that came to the little clinic for help. The Cambodian Red Cross had refused to help because so many of the victims were Vietnam squatters and the government was committed to remove them from the country. Old and ancient enmities and claims they took jobs from the locals supported the Government's position. The International Red Cross gave into political expediency; rather than offend the government, they did not offer assistance either. To make the situation even direr, the major humanitarian organizations also refused to provide aid lest they run afoul of government disapproval. People were cold, people were sick, people were hungry.

I was the executive director of the Committee for Cooperation in Cambodia, the CCC, a network of all the humanitarian organizations working in Cambodia, but I did not have actual programs, resources or staff to provide rice and other necessities for survival. I was able, at the risk of losing my job, to convince some of the less politically dependent NGOs, notably the Lutheran World Service, to bring bags of rice to my compound. They wouldn't actually be disseminating it... just storing it! Once the rice, 2.5 tons of it, was

delivered to my house the Vietnamese men who were living inside my compound carried these 100 pound sacks of rice on their backs across to the burned out Pagoda and passed it out to everyone, Khmer and Vietnamese alike, who needed or wanted it. They also passed out 500 sleeping mats, 300 mosquito nets and tarps. They worked while much of Phnom Penh stood by indifferent and watched.

As it happened, I had already rented a new house across town before the fire and so, my guests and I had to leave my compound by week's end. The majority of people had drifted away from the burn site, finding new places to shelter—but all my neighbors stayed with me until moving day. At night I would see their little cooking fires and smell the exotic Asian aromas as the smoke curled up towards my little porch. Several of the children slept under a net tent on my porch. Except for the free clinic, most days I left for my office, emotionally drained from fighting with the heads of the large NGOs who wanted to skewer me alive for aiding the refugees against government wishes, while my “community” went about their individual business finding shelter and work. On the evening before I was to move to my new house, I arrived home to a frenzy of activity. Food was cooking everywhere, the children were scrubbed and blankets layout neatly in a large circle. In some sort of pidgin English, my ‘guests’ made it clear they wanted me to join them for a last dinner together. Everyone had contributed to the community dinner and it was a veritable feast. With my guard Lucky as my translator, they wished me to live more than 100 years. I sat cross legged on the ground surrounded by happy faces, people eating Pho and savory pancakes, Banh Xeo, fumbling with my chopsticks and trying to make conversation. But words did not matter; we were celebrating life, we were celebrating community and Trust abounded.

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This final story, “Angel from Allah,” adds one more important variable to the factors necessary to the building of human community: friendship.

*Angel from Allah*

One morning in the fall of 1992, two United Nations Civil Police (CivPol) from Kampong Thom, a rather dicey province north of my village, arrived in front of my house on a motorbike. They were Middle Eastern and, like me, part of UN Peace Keeping Mission in Cambodia. The one sitting in back had a makeshift bandage around his head and arm and was barely hanging on one-handed to the driver. After a lot of gesturing, shouts in French and Arabic and general confusion, I sent them to the house of the United Nations Military Observers (UNMO) for assistance. Curious and more than a little distrustful of the UNMO's willingness to respond to the situation, I went over to find out what was going on; but they were gone. The UNMOs were out and I was left wondering where the injured men had headed off to. As it happened, the UNMO's house was quite near to the UN Chinese Battalion and the next most likely place for them to get help. I found them there being treated by the Chinese doctor. The one who was most seriously hurt had a more impressive looking bandaging on his wounds, but no one was there who could speak enough of the same language to provide coherent information. I decided to bring them back to my house in order to radio the UN Civil Police central command in Kampong Cham. The second in command at the central office was an Egyptian captain I had dined with not that long ago on a trip into the provincial capital. Through him I finally was able to discover that the Egyptians and Jordanians were going to Phnom Penh on vacation when their car had wrecked about 30 kilometers north of our village in Khmer Rouge (guerrilla territory). The anxiety mounted when we realized they said that two guys were still with the car.

By 10 a.m. the CIVPOL from Battheay, the neighboring district, had arrived. These guys were mostly Jordanians, Moroccans and Algerians who spoke Arabic and French but very little English. There were 5 crammed into one small car plus the driver! The man who had reported the fire earlier in the evening also returned, insisting the CIVPOL must respond to his crisis as well. They, however, were intent on rescuing their own buddies and could be described as disinterested, at best, in his problem.

Only one of the Battheay CIVPOL, Mamud, spoke enough English for me to understand much of what was going on, but even he was drowned out by the frenzy of



shouting, and hand wringing among the other Arabs, hysterical with worry about their “brothers.” With the little information I could gather and the palpable panic of the CIVPOL, my fear was exaggerated. The scene was more like a Chinese fire drill than a rescue mission and a real, live Tower of Babel right in front of my eyes.

Without much in the way of alternatives, I decided that I would drive them to the accident site. The drive would be somewhat dangerous because of the guerillas but doing nothing was not an option. The road to Kampong Thom was perpendicular to the national road from the capital, Phnom Penh, to Kampong Cham but in even worse condition. It had two very small lanes and it dead-ended into the center of my village. Going north, you crossed a bridge that the UN Chinese engineers kept repairing while the formerly Chinese-trained Khmer Rouge guerrillas kept blowing it up. This was something that the locals sniggered about when they saw the Chinese soldiers frequently reconstructing the bridge. Making this bridge crossing was always precarious. The road then went north through the flat scrublands until it reached Kampong Thom. The stranded and injured CIVPOL were somewhere in between... a sort of no-man’s land, sparsely populated and barren.

I braced myself for what I might see as we drove on but, rather than finding a horrendous accident scene with injured or dead CIVPOL, or worse, a deserted vehicle, the accident scene was strangely benign and a bit curious. I was told they had lost their windshield but I didn't see any glass on the road and the remaining CIVPOL seemed relatively unscathed. We put the two rescued Egyptians in my car, intent on taking them temporarily to my house in Cheong Prey. They were understandably jubilant at seeing their comrades, embracing each other with much cheek kissing, back rubbing and shouting.

The trip back was a barrage of animated Arabic punctuated by continual declarations in broken English that I was an "angel sent from Allah." They had already had a bad enough day, so I didn't have the heart to tell them yet that I was a Jew!

After that, the men often came to my small house with flowers; I was invited to join in all their celebrations. At the urging of the Egyptian CivPol commander I finally

told them I was a Jew. By then... we were community; trust and friendship trumped religion!

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I have played the role of the storyteller, weaving my experiences into fabric of words and ideas. The real work is the listener's, the reader's. The job is to be reflective; reflection fosters familiarity; familiarity breeds understanding; and understanding can lead to knowing and caring for others as we know and care for ourselves.

There are social movements and humanitarian groups who are committed to building and sustaining human community. They have web sites and action agendas. They posit individual and collective action. One such group, the Community Tool Box (<http://ctb.ku.edu>) reminds us that "Friendship is powerful. It is our connection to each other that gives meaning to our lives. Our caring for each other is often what motivates us to make change. And establishing connections with people from diverse backgrounds can be key in making significant changes in our communities."

As individuals, and in groups, *we can* change our communities. We can set up neighborhoods and institutions in which people commit themselves to working to form strong relationships and alliances with people of diverse cultures and backgrounds. We can establish networks and coalitions in which people are knowledgeable about each other's struggles, and are willing to lend a hand. Together, we can do it!