

Hairy Legs by Ed Landry

The paths less traveled by

Over the years I have had the privilege and challenge of leading pastoral seminars in very remote and difficult locations. It is one thing to go where tourists go and quite another to go where tourists would not. There were times when it would have been nice to have a five-star hotel, familiar fast food, and someone who actually spoke my language, but that was not to be my pattern. I was usually assigned to the “armpit of the earth” types of places. But as I look back, I can honestly agree with the poet that it was the “path less traveled by that made all the difference.” So here is a small collection of some of my “paths less traveled by” experiences. One trip to Liberia was a trip I would never forget.

Liberia had been at war for five years when I went there to lead a pastors’ seminar with 180 Liberian church planters. These men knew what sacrifice was. Most had not seen their families during the entire five years the country had been in civil war. Over 20,000 citizens had died in Monrovia alone. I learned this shortly after getting off the plane, and in our taxi I asked my guide why all the houses and churches had bullet holes in them.

We arrived at our hotel. I use that word generously. Like the rest of the terrorized city, it had not seen water or electricity for five years. It was a dive, a dump. The room they took me to was filthy. I am used to dirt and bugs having been a missionary for 20 years in third-world countries, but this was bad. There were no windows and the mid-summer room temperature had to be 120 degrees. I was tired from the excruciating 40 hours of

travel that had elapsed since I left my comfortable bed and familiar surroundings. I barely noticed the almost one-foot- high lump in the middle of the bed. I had slept on manure filled mattresses before. I was so tired. I went out. I also barely noticed the wailing outside the walls from families who had children dying of cholera. I began to hear it more the following nights. But this night, nothing was going to wake me up. That is what I thought.

The Night was Alive

Many of you reading this don't understand the depth of sleep that comes with jet lag and hard journeys. It is very deep. There were cockroaches climbing through my hair, but I had grown accustomed to dealing with those while living in the Philippines. I would grab them in my hand, crunch them and go back to sleep. I think I crunched most of them in my sleep that night. But that night something else woke me up.

I awakened with something very large crawling up my leg. Can I somehow emphasize the words, VERY LARGE. I was still groggy when the thought began to sink in. "Hey, there is something VERY LARGE crawling up my leg. It was pitch black. The room was sweltering and still. Sweat was pouring off my body. I was slimy. But that was not a problem. The problem was something VERY LARGE was crawling up my leg.

I was now awake, so I swiped at my leg and hit something. It felt like I had slapped a cat. Maybe it was a large rat. I had a rat on my chest once in Manila. It jumped up on my chest with its cold, wet nose pressing against my throat. Then it jumped off me and landed on my wife. But that's another story. "Yes, maybe it's a rat," I said to myself as I bounded out of bed and fumbled for the flashlight. But when the

light came on and illuminated the bed, I saw the largest spider I had ever seen. You need to understand something. Missionaries are people, not super humans. We have phobias like you do. We get scared of creepy crawly things like you do. I hate spiders. I am convinced that they were not part of the original creation but are part of the curse. I have trouble imagining God looking at a tarantula and saying it was "good." I have arachnophobia (fear of anything that resembles a spider and is crawling on my leg). I stood there paralyzed in my room staring at the immense thing. It had been crawling along my leg and was planning to eat something. What was it going to eat? I shuddered over and over having a panic attack. It probably took me five minutes before I got the courage to splat it all over my bed with my tennis shoe. And after I had killed it, I splatted it over and over and over and over. I didn't sleep for the rest of the night. The walls in the room seemed to be moving. There were insects of all kinds in the room. This was not a happy place.

Counting Legs

What kind of spider was it? Big, that's what kind. Someone said they had camel spiders in Liberia, but most likely this was not one. Camel spiders are huge and rumored to make squealing noises like a child screaming when they scamper about. Worst of all, they are called "camel spiders" because they climb onto the bellies of camels and eat their stomachs from the outside, numbing the flesh by secreting a natural anesthetic. The camels don't even notice until their intestines fall out. What a delightful thought.

Spiders and Arachnids are different, we are told. Spiders have eight legs and arachnids have six. I had no idea what was crawling on my leg that night. It was the size of a small pig and even when I smashed it into the sheets and panted for five minutes

trying to get my breath, I still didn't bother to count its legs. It may have had ten, each about the size of a good chicken leg. Spiders are also put into two major categories, trappers and hunters. Some sit and wait and other less patient ones go on a vicious hunt. Guess what was on my leg? The following description exactly describes what that spider was intending for me:

A spider is a remarkably efficient killing machine The two fangs mounted below its head are connected internally to venomous glands, enabling it to sedate and paralyze its prey immediately upon capture. Some spiders inject a digestive enzyme (which liquefies body tissues so that they can be easily ingested) directly into a victim's body cavity, while others first crush their quarry and then cover its carcass with the substance. (Mother Earth News)

The next morning when the pastors came to get me they asked, "How was your sleep?"

I told them about the spider the size of a large dog that was chewing on my leg and injecting paralyzing toxins into my body cavities. They casually commented, "Oh, that spider." No big deal to them. They have those things crawling on them all the time. It is like a fly on the table to them. Just shoo it away and keep eating.

People must wonder about me. When I get back from trips like this and folks ask how my trip was, I tend to stare a lot. They have no idea. They go to malls and sleep in clean places and buy bug spray to kill ants. No idea at all what it is like to be hunted all night by a giant leg eating predator and shaken from side to side like a rag doll in the mouth of an angry pit bull. Not quite the same as dipping French fries in ketchup at McDonalds. Yes, I am sure they wonder about me.

Ed Landry - Married to Janet for 46 years and counting. They have five children and seven grandchildren. They served 31 plus years with ACTION living in the Philippines for 20. They started Village Handcrafters and White Fields Philippines. Most of their years have been spent mobilizing, launching and training church planters and much of

that was under the banner of the Bible League's Church Planting Partners program. Following their retirement from ACTION, they opened a cabinet business in the Nashville, Tennessee area and continue that today while they lead a small group Bible study in their home. Over the years they have written many Bible study guides and several books. Their goals today are to grow the cabinet business, keep 12 chickens alive and one day rule the world (but they will settle on two of those three – after all they are just chickens). The stories you are reading are a small sampling what will go into their next book that like the others will never get published. They hope you enjoy them half as much as they were privileged to live them. Their journey with God has been amazing.

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