

Kissing the Exhaust Pipe: Ode to Andre Pradesh

by Ed Landry

The director of Action International Ministries loves hot food. I once traveled with him in Southern India which has the reputation of having the spiciest and most deadly cuisine in the continent. Doug and I had just returned from a grueling trek to the interior villages, and he said he wanted to eat some of the famous hot goat meat of Andre Pradesh. I told him I didn't think it was a good idea. So he asked our guide where the hottest food in the region was to be found, and we were led to this dilapidated, hole-in-the-wall eatery. As we were walking in, one of the customers was being dragged out unconscious with what looked like severe facial burns and half his polyester shirt melted onto his chest. It was really disgusting. His friends were all laughing. I reminded Doug that I **REALLY** didn't think this was a good idea at all.

When we sat down, Doug made it quick and simple. He ordered the hottest thing on the menu. Our guide was impressed. I was scared. I was sweating before we even started to eat. There was something acidic in the air. As a former firefighter, I remember thinking as we walked in that there must have been a fire next door in a battery acid plant. My eyes were burning just sitting there, and it was getting hard to breathe. The waiter smiled as he carried out the food and gave a high five to our guide. Half the restaurant stopped eating and watched us. Doug said, "Wow, let's do it." Oh, what the heck. How bad can it be? We dove in.

I want to try to describe the experience without scaring off potential missionaries or travelers. We were about to eat the hottest food ever found on the earth. By the time the first bite of the hot goat meat reached my stomach, I felt like I had just drowned in kerosene. You could actually feel the skin peeling off the throat and falling in sheets into the stomach. My bowels started cramping just for practice knowing they would be called on big time shortly. It soon developed into a rebellion of the entire body. I kept eating. Macho Ed was not going to wimp out. By now salty sweat stains covered my shirt and pants. Let me introduce a very important

word at this time –Limpka. Limpka is an Italian soft drink that tastes like lemon-lime. Since they don't often have refrigeration in the interior of India, the bottles are kept covered in cow dung to keep them cooler. Think how much money we would save in America if we just did that? I gulped down the entire bottle in one breath. Chunks of dried cow dung flaked off onto my shirt. I restrained myself from drinking another Limpka and decided to try some of the rice to calm my gurgling stomach. I like rice. This wasn't rice. This was chunky-style paint remover. There were pock marks on the ceramic plate. I went back to the goat meat. But before I started again, I ordered another Limpka.

I looked over at Doug and he was looking pale and his smile was gone. I said, "You OK, Doug?" He looked kind of scared, and then in a quick manly recovery said, "Sure no problem." But his voice broke and he sort of squeaked the words out.

I took another bite of the goat stew. At the table next to us a man had fallen to the ground unconscious, and his friends were pouring beer all over him. I made a mental note. I don't drink alcohol, but somehow I could see this happening to me. I kept eating...

I think it was the next bite that melted my lips off. If you ever eaten very hot food, you learn it is wise to observe how the locals do it. They never let the food touch their lips. Anyway, it didn't matter now, I had no lips. My biggest concern was brain damage. I finished my next Limpka without taking a breath. Our guide said he had never seen a Limpka consumed that fast. It was also the first time he had seen someone shake the carbonated beverage like that and hold his thumb over the bottle while spraying it all over his face. I was also able to buy an ice cube and just wiped it over and over on my throbbing, missing lips while moaning.

The pain and insanity increased for the rest of the meal.

I then noticed that Doug was not looking too good. He was bent over in pain with a horrible gas attack. His intestinal track resembled Mount St. Helens and when it erupted three minutes later, he literally cleared the table. Two people eating nearby passed out.

Then my intestines started to send an equally urgent message. I excused myself to pay a visit to the local comfort room. As I stumbled past the table where the two had passed out, I grabbed an unfinished Limpka from their table and poured it on top of my head as I stumbled into the restroom. I barely had time to sit down when steaming lava erupted from the heart of the earth. We are talking about a Richter 10 caustic explosion. I needed another Limpka to wash off but I had none. I wanted to sit on an ice cream cone. My eyesight was almost gone. I barely recognized Doug when I went out. He was leaning over the table waiting for something else bad to happen. His chin looked like he had been drooling Drano. I think his mouth was totally paralyzed. The entire front of his shirt and pants looked like he had fallen into a restaurant grease trap. He asked where the Limpka was and I just told him I was going outside to die in the alley. He said, "OK." Both our brains were now gone. We had no lips, brains, bowels, or shirts left. We looked like we had been beaten senseless by a herd of rabid monkeys and dumped into a pig trough.

I went to see Doug the next morning in his hotel room. He was half conscious sitting in his kitchen corner in the fetal position. I noticed three empty cases of Limpka scattered around the living room. We both had trouble talking. We ate yoghurt the rest of the week. Our lips did grow back and our bowels returned to normal pre-volcanic activity. I have never been normal since. I twitch a lot when I talk. Sometimes I just slobber when I think about it.