

The Frosty Goat by Ed Landry

Some stories are just too bizarre to go around telling. We had a livelihood program running for years in the Philippines which helped impoverished churches support their pastors in extremely depressed communities. One of the products we trained the people to make was handmade paper from banana plant fibers. To process these tough fibers into pulp requires several operations, and one of them is cooking. We began small and cooked them over a wood fire in a small pot. Then we needed a big pot, and that eventually led to a point where we needed to get serious about cooking large amounts of fibers. The best solution was a steam system and that meant a boiler.

A boiler. I knew nothing about boilers except they are big, hot, expensive and they are found in Canada where you have 11 months of snow and one month of bad sledding. But this California boy is boiler-challenged. Where would one find a boiler in the Philippines? This is not exactly a country where central heat is a priority. A boiler, right, good luck finding that one. Did you ever have one of those things in your life that you felt silly asking God about. I was sure he was going to laugh. So I prayed, Uh, God, this is Ed in the Philippines again. I know I am always asking for dumb stuff but I think I may have outdone myself this time. We need a boiler.” Then I ducked.

This story gets crazy. The associate missionary who was working with us at the time attended a small barrio church near us. A Filipino banker was pastoring that church. I have no idea how the subject came up but our associate mentioned to the pastor/banker that we were looking for a boiler. I imagine he just said something like, “Brother Vern, I noticed that you need Bibles and windows in the building and your new Sunday school rooms are taking shape. By the way, do you know where I can find a boiler? OK, I don’t know how the subject came up but it seems that the least likely person in the world to ask about a boiler is a pastor in a depressed area. So what did Vern say? Are you ready for this? He calmly looked at my associate and remarked, “I have a boiler and I could give it to you.” I told you this story is going to get bizarre.

It gets better. It turns out that pastor Vern was not just a banker and a pastor, but he was also an entrepreneur. About ten years earlier he was approached by a Korean Christian who had a plan for an exciting new product that was going to sweep Korea, and he needed a Filipino business partner to run the production side. The product was liquid goat. I am not making this up. Liquid goat!. The Korean wanted to use high pressure steam to vaporize goats and turn them into this cool carbonated soft drink. I still have trouble visualizing not just the process, but the product. Can you imagine having some friends over on a hot summer afternoon for a barbeque and yanking some cool ones out of the reefer, “Who wants a goat?” Visualizing is not coming easy for me on this one but cultures are different.

From what I was able to understand the liquid goat industry didn't exactly take off. I could say, “Duh” at this point but that would not be kind so let me just say, That is really too baaaaaaad.” By now the two partners in the new liquid goat business had built a large building, imported numerous huge stainless steel steam vessels, and a boiler from Korea and installed it, and had actually made their first goat drinks. Yep, they wiped the Manila sweat off their faces and had the ultimate satisfaction of being the first to pop the lid and down the goat. Then they just stared at each other. Was it satisfaction and the joy of accomplishment? No, it was the realization that liquid goat was not very good. Actually it was horrible. Wait, I just have to say it, “DUH!”

Since we can't begin to imagine what goes through a person's mind when they have their first frosty goat, and when you experience the death of a vision in such a burst of blunt realization and heartburn, we will just leave the rest of story to your imagination and get on to the final part.

The Korean went home and was never heard from again. Vern, the banker, locked up the giant glistening food facility and got on with his life. Then one day while pastoring his church, this American missionary says to him, “Do you know where we can get a boiler?”

Two days later we toured the deserted food factory and saw not just a large boiler but large stainless cooking vessels, piping, motors, pumps, spinners and and and . . . We just stood there amazed without mouths open and with perspiration dripping from our faces. I am sure glad he didn't offer us a goat. The bottom line is that Vern visited our papermaking facility and loved the ministry. He then donated the entire steam system to us. And then, just as quickly as Vern had come into our lives, he died in a car accident. I can't help but smile when I think of the hug God gave Vern for his last generous act before he died. God has a way of rewarding his kids and I am so glad for Vern's sake that he laid up treasure for himself in Heaven and he didn't delay in doing it.

Once again my imagination takes me to a conversation, this time between Vern and God. "Vern, well done. You have been a good and faithful servant. But I one question for you. What were you thinking? Liquid Goat?"

Almost overnight we had this incredible steam system and absolutely no idea how to operate it. So I prayed, "Hi God, it's Ed again from the Philippines. Remember a few weeks ago when I asked for a boiler and then I ducked? Well, as you know, we now have a complete steam system worth a gazillion dollars at our facility, and I just wanted to thank you. But if I can add a small addendum to the request, we could use someone to help us set it up and show us how to use it."

Before we went to the mission field I did what many thought was a foolish thing. I quit my secure job with the San Diego Fire Department and packed up my wife and five children and headed off to Bible School in Canada. While there for three years, I studied the Word and waited on God for directions. I also worked on summer staff to help feed the family, and in doing so I got to know many of the behind the scenes workers who kept the Bible School running. One of those people I met was a steam engineer who ran the big boiler and kept our classrooms warm when the temps dropped to 40 below. Yes, 40 below. That was fun. Art was one of several steam engineers who worked there. Now move ahead 20 years. I am standing in Manila looking at large steam system we

have just been given and praying for help to put it in. God brought Art back to mind after all those years, and I sent off an e-mail to the school and had no idea if he would remember one of thousands of students since we had only briefly met, or if he even worked there anymore. I got an e-mail back from Art. Yes and yes were the answers.

After a few more e-mails, Art decided to use his vacation to come over and help us. His church even helped with expenses, and so Art came to the Philippines. It was his first out of country experience, and what a treat it was to have him join us. He repaired everything, tested it all, and hooked it all up, and then he trained us. When Art left we had a fully functioning steam system, and we were not afraid to use it. It has worked flawlessly over the years and has helped us cook over ten tons of banana fibers and has helped keep impoverished churches alive.

One day in glory I envision Vern, Art and myself sitting down together in Heaven and having a nice cold goat together marveling now God used each of his for his Kingdom. Hey, maybe liquid goat will be the drink of choice at the marriage supper of the Lamb.