

## Stories About Incidents On the Job or While Traveling for Work - Part I

The following are some reminiscences of events that occurred on Harza and MWH jobs over the years. Some of the stories describe fond memories I have of my coworkers. Depending on how you look at it, I was fortunate or unlucky, to have spent much of my career at Hazra (and subsequently MWH and Stantec) working on overseas projects on assignments lasting from a few weeks to months. These jobs afforded me innumerable opportunities to enjoy diverse geographies (and geologies), a wide range of cultural interactions, and so many experiences that would not have been possible if I had stayed in one country. Probably most of the experiences would not be possible to repeat today given the wide-ranging changes that have taken place across the globe over the last 40 years. I have selected stories that are amusing or light-hearted rather than the usual war stories told by long distance travelers involving medical emergencies, hardships, accidents, crime, lost baggage, etc. - and I have enough of those (many of which I have not even told to my family).

### 1. Rickshaws in India

I was once assigned to a project we had in India, in the State of Orissa, now known as Odisha. This was the Upper Indravati Project. a multi-phase effort to rehabilitate a large multipurpose investment that had been partially destroyed by a devastating storm event while it was still under construction. Our first task involved initial damage assessment of the multiple dams, tunnels, powerhouse, canals and irrigation systems. Although the project was far out in the country, we had set up an office in Bhubaneswar, the state capital, which we staffed with about a dozen engineers from our Chicago headquarters. This was thirty years ago or more and at that time Orissa was probably the poorest and backward state in the nation and perhaps still is. We were all put up in what was billed as the best hotel in town, but given the overall poverty of the state, conditions at the hotel left an awful lot to be desired. The hotel was decidedly rundown and in need of complete renovation or even demolition and moreover was located near the railway station - not a salubrious part of town.

I was to spend the better part of a month in town though I was also required to visit the project site a few times. After a week or so in Bhubaneswar, I started to feel the need for physical activity, for some sort of exercise and temporary escape from the company of our pleasant but oddball crew. The hotel did not have an exercise room but advertised a swimming pool. However, my hopes in that regard were quickly dashed when I saw the pool covered in green scum and with things floating in it, including a dead cat. I was now set on a mission to find some sort of activity to serve as mental and physical diversion.

After work, I went in search of a soccer field hoping to perhaps pick up a scratch game. Seeing some young people kicking a ball around, I hurried towards them to see if I could join in as I had done on many other occasions around the world. Unfortunately, they took one look at me - a bearded foreigner, waving his arms at them - picked up their ball and took off. I remembered that I had seen some people playing cricket nearby and went off in search of a pickup game of cricket, a game that I had not played since I was a young teenager but at least it would be better than nothing. As I approached the small group of kids and young adults, the same thing happened again - they picked up their bat and ball and ran away. It dawned on me and was later confirmed by hotel staff that these young people playing soccer and cricket were playing in proscribed areas and probably thought I was shooing them off.

The last idea I had was to go running. I rose really early the next morning, before the town awoke and before the sun was up. I walked away from the hotel a hundred meters or so and started to jog along a side street, carefully avoiding cow dung and other unmentionable trash.

However, as soon as my stride and footfall changed from walking to running, dogs appeared from nowhere. Some barked, others snarled and bared their teeth menacingly. I stopped running immediately and thankfully the dogs disappeared back to the holes they had come from. This was definitely not a part of the world to get bitten by a dog. I walked to another district, one where there was no sign of dogs. To my dismay, the same thing happened again as soon as I broke into a run - snarling, growling mutts materialized out of nowhere. Darn it - even running had to be struck off the list.

I headed back towards the hotel, disheartened and in a black mood. Upon entering the hotel forecourt, I suddenly got a brilliant inspiration when I saw half a dozen bicycle rickshaws parked in the shadows. Why not borrow one of those and ride about town before people are up and the traffic starts to become congested. Splendid idea!

The next morning, I got up early again just before sunrise. I went out to the hotel forecourt and walked over to where some rickshaws were haphazardly parked with the owner/drivers asleep inside or underneath their vehicles. Selecting one, I jostled the driver awake and indicated that I wanted him to take me up the hill towards the center of the mercantile district and then to return. Agreeing, he sleepily pushed the rickshaw out onto the street and we slowly proceeded up the hill away from the hotel. After about a kilometer, we reached the top of the hill and I tapped the fellow on his shoulder indicating time to stop. I jumped down and motioned him to do likewise and to get in the back. He was still half asleep and did not really know what was happening until I got onto the saddle and started pedaling away. He squawked and remonstrated but I managed to get up a reasonable speed. "Hotel, Sahib! Hotel, Sahib!", he loudly protested. "Yes, yes!", I replied. Slowing down a bit, I tried to explain using hand signals that I wanted to take a little tour of the upper part of town and then return to the hotel. I don't think he understood at all, especially since my hand signals were constrained due to the necessity of having to control the bouncing, leaping handlebars as we went along severely potholed, and in places cobbled streets. My passenger was trying to take it all in and process what was happening, whether this was a hijacking, or what. A few minutes passed when I heard a gurgling sound behind me. Upon turning around, I realized that he was sobbing, presumably thinking the worst, whatever that could be. Anyhow, I continued my tour of the upper part of town, deftly negotiating potholes, cow-dung, nasty-looking puddles, and piles of rubbish. This was not easy since these rickshaws are tricycles and their wheels seem to find every obstacle *en route*.

I was just turning on to the main road leading back down to the hotel when I saw a couple of other rickshaws going in the same direction. I whistled and waved in their direction and tootled the ineffective horn which to my surprise sounded like a wounded goat. My passenger recognized them as friends of his and let out shouts of greeting and relief. Before anyone started any discussions as to why a foreigner was in command of his rickshaw, I cried out "To the Hotel!" and sped up. The others quickly followed and by the time we started down the hill, we were joined by another four rickshaws. To the shouts of "To Hotel! To Hotel!", we started to tear down the one-kilometer thoroughfare towards the hotel. The speed picked up, everyone had crazed grins on their faces, and the posse spread out so that we took up at least half the road. Having undergone a 180-degree transformation, my passenger had now become the cheerleader for the group and was urging all of us to go faster. I realized that it had turned competitive when he stood up in the rickshaw, waving his shirt like a standard, and flicking it in the direction of any competitor approaching too close.

In a cloud of dust, along with a bunch of barking dogs (yes they eventually came out too), we roared shouting and laughing into the hotel forecourt, much to the bewilderment of the hotel

staff. Braking was not easily done - we just sort of crashed into one another. But the bikes were sturdy, and miraculously no one was hurt. There was much laughter, heightened when I suggested that my rickshaw driver should pay me for giving him a ride back to the hotel. I gave the poor confused fellow some money - probably equivalent to his average earnings for a week - and entered the hotel looking forward to a nice shower before breakfast. I had barely reached my room, when a hotel bell hop rushed up and said I was urgently needed in the hotel lobby. Apparently, a near riot was developing outside, with about twenty cycle rickshaw wallahs each demanding that they take the foreigner out for a ride about town (and presumably get paid handsomely for it). In a quick huddle with the hotel staff, I said that I wanted to repeat this exercise every day but recommended that they work out a daily rotating roster of six rickshaws and a payment schedule for the owner/driver of the rickshaw I would ride and a fair payment for the other five. This worked out satisfactorily and in this way, I had excellent exercise for the next three weeks until I was required to go to the field - and perhaps to this day, there might be still some people who remember that crazy Englishman who commandeered cycle rickshaws for no obvious purpose.

## 2. Flute of the Room

This this story nowadays would probably be deemed guilty of exhibiting cultural insensitivity and being politically incorrect. Nevertheless, I will go ahead and write down what I remember and leave it up to the readers to censor (censure?) or not. Like the preceding story, this one took place on Phase 1 of the Upper Indravati Project in India. One feature of this project in its initial stages was the number and diversity of Harza staff assigned to the job. During the design and pre-construction review stage, we had up to about a dozen people from Chicago working from a temporary office in Bhubaneswar and staying at a tolerable hotel. These were mostly mid-career to moderately senior engineers, I was probably the youngest and therefore kept my mouth shut to the extent possible, observed, and learnt from others. To say the least, they were a bunch of characters which was typical of Harza at that time. The team included Bill Kohl (Phase 1 team leader), Ed Moore, Philippe Martin, BK Lee, Archie Sundaram, Khalid Javed, Ram Dabagdav, Tony Liu, Evan Krith, and a few others whose names I have forgotten. This group included quite a range of personalities, idiosyncrasies, and associated cultural quirks. It was quite remarkable that the gears not only meshed with this team, but the wheels actually turned around when the group got to work. It was when they were not at work, I found occasional incidents to be most interesting and amusing.

One morning as we were finishing breakfast in the restaurant, someone asked “Where’s Bill (Kohl)? He should be here for the daily meeting before we go to the office”. No one had seen him yet. I should mention that I liked working with Bill - he was quiet, urbane, and had travelled and worked all around the globe, mostly in remote impoverished areas. However, after years overseas he had some quirks (like us all) and was known to be ascetic, exceedingly frugal, and strict with expenses, preferring to eat rice and beans day after day rather than more typical American/western fare. He read a few books but often entertained himself of an evening playing on a large wooden recorder, the size of a flute.

The call went around again, “Hey, has anyone seen Bill this morning?” No one had seen him. I remembered that Tony Liu was in the room next to Bill, so I turned to ask him. Again, an aside, Tony Liu was a brilliant structural engineer and perfect for this assignment involving forensic analyses of complicated structures. However, although Tony had been in the USA for nearly 40 years, his pronunciation of English was almost unintelligible. As with many Chinese and Koreans, he had great difficulty in pronouncing certain sounds, in particular the letters L and R.

Everyone was looking at Tony when he suddenly spoke up and quite clearly stated “The last time I see him, he was in his room, praying with his fruit!”. This left us all speechless, in fact I cannot imagine what images shot through our minds as we tried to take in this stark information - until someone translated. “Oh, so you mean the last time you saw him, he was in his room playing on his flute?”.

At that moment, Bill appeared and asked “What are you all waiting for? The cars are all waiting for us up front”.

There were quite a few other incidents on this project that I will eventually write about.

### 3. Trousers in Amman

In the early 1980's I was working on the King Talal Dam Project in Jordan. During the design phase for the raising of the dam, I was assigned to the field to carry out geological and geotechnical investigations at the dam site and to collect any other information from the field needed for design. I mostly stayed at the site in a reasonably furnished staff house but was occasionally obliged to go into Amman for meetings.

One day I was requested by our client, the Jordan Valley Authority (JVA), to attend a meeting in Amman the following day. I thought I would go straight to the meeting in the morning and have a site vehicle drive me back to the project the following morning. I arranged to stay at a friend's house since it was on Jebel Amman, a nice part of town, and a welcome break from staying at a hotel.

All went well at the meeting. I was dressed in blazer, grey trousers, white shirt and tie. I think the Client was surprised to see me dressed in clothes other than the usual jeans and T-shirt. I took a taxi back to my friend's house, sensing that these trousers were rather tight, either I had put on weight, or it was just fashionably tight trousers. Arriving at the house and after squaring up with the taxi driver, I jumped out of the car, but in doing so realized I had ripped my trousers, badly, very badly. I hobbled into the house holding my briefcase behind me for modesty sake. Once inside, I inspected the damage and saw that the seam had come undone from stem to stern, all the way from the zipper to the belt loop at the back. Disaster - because I had no change of clothing with me.

My friend was not home, in fact was away for a few days. I searched his house from top to bottom, hoping to find a needle and some thread, or an old pair of trousers - nothing. Panic started to set in. I searched my friend's office and desk, found some string and rubber bands, but nothing that would work as a temporary repair. I then went through my briefcase in a last-ditch hope to find something useful. To my pleasant surprise, I was successful. A stapler and a small roll of masking tape (drafting tape). So, staples went in along the broken seam and, as a health and safety measure, a layer of masking tape to prevent any nicks or scratches. Say no more.

The next morning, taking very small steps, I carefully approached the car sent to take me back to the site. I gingerly got into the car and did not move until we reached the dam site. I quickly changed back into my work jeans and forgot all about those grey trousers. A few weeks later, I was flying back to Chicago, and threw all my work clothes into a suitcase and put on my blazer and grey trousers. On the way to the airport, I remembered the hazardous state of my trousers and thought about potential disasters *en route* to Chicago, let alone getting through metal detectors at airports. So, as soon as I arrived at the airline Check-In desk, I quickly retrieved a pair of jeans and changed out of the grey trousers.

I totally forgot about the trousers once I got home, I unpacked and just hung them up in the closet. About a month or so later, while she was looking for things to take to the dry-cleaners, my wife found them. I heard some very serious commands summoning me to the bedroom - "Peter! Whatever have you done to your trousers! What is this?" I was at a loss for words. They did not look the same as the last time I had worn them. In the summer heat, the masking tape had shriveled, crinkled, and become hard - and the staples were poking out ominously. I took a while to explain, but then the wives of geologists and field engineers tend to be very understanding.

#### **4. Exploding Beans**

On another assignment on the King Talal Project (Jordan), I had an extraordinary experience with a meal at the job site. Although, I was permitted to go into Amman and stay at a reasonable hotel every weekend, I preferred to do this on alternate weekends, partly because I hated the drive to and from the site, but also I enjoyed a weekend of peace and quiet at the site, tending to letters, reading, laundry, etc. I remember one weekend in particular at the job site. I had stocked up on some food items that I was looking forward to and took these down to the mess kitchen - a can of frankfurter sausages, a can of baked beans, some fresh fruit (oranges and grapes), and a packet of cookies. The usual cook and assistant cook were not on duty, but two other men claimed they were in charge of the kitchen. I asked if they would kindly heat up the sausages and beans and provide some tea and bread to go with the meal. No problem, sir.

After a good twenty minutes waiting, I called out to the deputy cooks to ask for progress. They quickly came out with tea and bread and said the rest would be arriving soon. Another twenty minutes elapsed. My patience had also passed. I went to the kitchen door and as I opened it, there was a loud explosion from somewhere inside. I entered the kitchen, catching sight of the backside of one of the cooks disappearing out of the back door. The other man was standing by the stove, trying to shovel beans back into a bowl, they were spread all over the stovetop and the wall behind. The split can was on the floor. A quick glance at the stove confirmed that the other can, situated right above an open flame, was rocking gently and about to explode too. The cook saw this too and quickly threw a towel over the can. However, it still exploded, and shreds of sausage shot all over the kitchen. I did not say a thing; I just walked out of the kitchen and mess hall, taking my fruit, cookies, and pot of tea back to my room. The next day, the JVA manager apologized profusely and I never had any problems ever again with food or cooks at that site. On the other hand, when I tried to explain the constraints and privations of camp life to my bosses in Chicago with this incident as an example, it was only met with hoots of laughter. No empathy, not fair.

#### **5. Coffee Shop, Amman Intercontinental**

As I said in the previous story, while working on the King Talal Project in Jordan, I was resident at the dam site but was permitted R&R in Amman every weekend. I preferred to take alternate weekends in Amman and because of this I could afford to stay at the Intercontinental Hotel instead of a lesser hotel that the project manager had recommended for geologists. Every other Thursday evening, I would arrive at the hotel, dusty, grubby, and in need of a cold beer and some fries to go with it. I usually marched straight into the Coffee Shop and sat down wherever convenient. After quenching my thirst, I would go to my room, shower, change, and return to the coffee shop later in the evening for a proper relaxed meal.

One day, I arrived at the Intercontinental in a foul mood, things had gone wrong on site, bad traffic on the road, and I was very thirsty. I sat myself down in the nearest seat and ordered a

beer. The waiter hesitated and I saw that the Maitre D was coming over. The latter politely explained that, given my attire, I should sit at the little table over there - by the kitchen door. I was in no mood to argue or to shift. I calmly asked him if he had a minute or two for me to tell him a story, one that perhaps he had heard a long time ago. Not wanting to create a scene, he said he could spare a few minutes. I pulled at his sleeve to indicate he should sit down and began to relate one of my favorite stories about Nasr-ed-din Hodja. The tales have been passed down by oral tradition for centuries and are examples of the humorous folklore found throughout the Middle East, especially in Turkey where I spent formative years of my childhood. The stories convey not only humor but wisdom and mother-wit particularly focused on the self-deprecating and humble Nasr-ed-din Hodja, the wise-fool.

*“Once upon a time, Nasr-ed-din Hodja had been working long and hard in his fields all day under the hot sun. It was time to call it a day and head home. As he started to trudge homeward, he suddenly remembered that on this very day his best friend Halil was holding a wedding feast. This cheered up the Hodja immensely, but he wondered if he should go home first or go straight to the feast. His stomach answered for him and his pace quickened as he headed towards Halil’s house. As he got closer, he started to imagine all the tasty foods and treats awaiting him, making him salivate with excitement.*

*Arriving at the front door to Halil’s house, he was all set to march straight in when two burly men caught him by the arms and tossed him back outside. Nasr-ed-din was shocked, but it was obvious the bouncers did not know who he was. He tried to explain but they replied that they were not to allow beggars, scroungers, or raggedly dressed people into the festivities. Nasr-ed-din thought, if he could get passed the cook, he could slip in through the back door and make his way into the party. Pushing through the crowd, he was part way in and managed to scoop up some food scraps from plates being returned to the kitchen. However, the cook saw him and threw him into the back yard.*

*Nasr-ed-din was very sad, no one had recognized him, even Halil had not seen him. The food had looked and smelled so good. He plodded towards his house where his wife was waiting for him. She reprimanded him for being such a silly old fool, imagine going straight from the fields to a wedding feast, he looked like a tramp, how was she going to live this one down, and so on. She did tell him however to get himself washed and cleaned up, comb his hair and beard and put on his best coat. This he did and once he had his smart coat around his shoulders, he felt altogether better and lighter in heart.*

*He marched with a jaunty step back to Halil’s festivities, where he was greeted at the front door by the same two bouncers who had thrown him out earlier. He was guided to sit right next to Halil who was overjoyed to have his friend Nasr-ed-din Hodja at his party. Men smiled and nodded to him. Fresh plates and trays of meat, stuffed vegetables, and mounds of pilav rice were brought from the kitchen, placed in front, and Nasr-ed-din was invited to tuck in. The Hodja picked up the choicest piece of meat, but instead of raising it to his lips, he opened his coat and placed it into a pocket.*

*“Eat, coat, eat!”, said the Hodja.*

*A couple of spoonfuls of moist pilav, some cheese, and pastries were stuffed into the large open sleeves of the coat.*

*“Eat, coat, eat!”, said the Hodja as he carefully put away each tidbit of food. Everyone stopped talking and eating in order to watch Nasr-ed-din feed his coat. Some were*

*thinking that perhaps he had been in the sun too long and he had lost his mind. Finally, Halil could not hold it any longer. "Tell me, Hodja Effendi, what do you mean by telling your coat to eat?"*

*"Why, it is obvious that my coat and clothes are more deserving of this delicious food than I am." The Hodja raised innocent-looking eyes to Halil. "When I arrived earlier in my old clothes, I was thrown out by the bouncers, no one recognized me, and even the cook turned me away. But when I returned wearing this coat, nothing seems too good for me. This shows that it is the coat which is more deserving than your simple old Hodja".*

*And so it is, too often we judge others by their appearance and not their character. As the saying goes in English - "Do not judge a book by its covers".*

The Maitre D burst out laughing, saying that he remembered his grandmother telling him stories just like the one I had related, except that they used the Arabic word for Hodja (Hoca, in Turkish). It reminded him of a way of life that no longer exists, when every family sat around listening to folk stories. He loved the moral of the story and said he would never forget it. That evening, my meal was on the house. Further, he never forgot me and always greeted me whenever I came to the hotel. I was also surprised that from then on, the Intercontinental always sent me cards signed by him on my birthday and at New Year. A few years later, I found that he had risen in rank to Manager in charge of catering. He then rose to General Manager of The Amman Intercontinental and eventually to General Manager of the Kuwait Intercontinental.

## 6. Indians and Redcoats

My first field assignment for Harza was on the feasibility study of the Brumley Gap Pumped Storage Project in Virginia. I was to work with another geologist, Masrouf Kizilbash (Kiz) originally from Pakistan. The assignment was family status. Kiz arrived with his charming wife, Yasmin, and their two young children, Lena (6) and Mo (3). My wife and I had not yet started a family. We set up our respective homes in the delightful town of Abingdon and we had a nice trailer office out in the field. Kiz and I each had our own project supplied Jeep and we set about preparing geologic maps and reports on sites of potential interest for development.

Almost every day, we would walk up into the hollows and coves of the mountains and introduce ourselves to the local inhabitants. I had worked in the area before joining Harza, so I was familiar with local customs and habits. Kiz had also worked on early phases of the Bath County Project and, although this was in a different part of Virginia, he had similar familiarity with country folks. We found that the people we met in the field were on the whole congenial and friendly. Like country people in most parts of the world, they were cautious, wary of strangers poking around in their neighborhoods, and ever vigilant - such as, "I was wondering what you was doing up on the mountain there last week." "I don't remember seeing you". "You would not have done, young man. I was watching you through the scope of my rifle". On many occasions, as their wariness broke down, their friendliness extended to hospitality and we would be invited to sip some lemonade on the porch - the lemonade transitioning to moonshine as we got to know one another better.

I think with many of the people we met, either in the field or our neighbors in town, the biggest fascination they had was the fact we were not "Damned Yankees". Many were delighted that I spoke with an English accent and therefore was a bona fide Redcoat. They could not place Kiz at first. Assuming that probably no one would know where Pakistan was,

Kiz said he was born in India. That was immediately translated as him being Indian, i.e. Native American, in fact probably Cherokee, and possibly even a survivor of the Trail of Tears.

Unfortunately, we had an unrelenting series of visitors from Chicago and possibly from elsewhere too. These were all branded as Damned Yankees of course. The chemistry between locals and outsiders was not good, and there were incidents when our visitors were seen off properties, or down the road, with shotguns, rifles, or handguns. No blood was shed but there was one rental car returned with mysterious bullet holes in a rear fender. Representatives from our client, although from Virginia, were not treated much better, since they came from Richmond, and were deemed hardly better than Damned Yankees.

We did as much field work as we could over about 9 months before an injunction was placed on the project and all work was halted. A Public Hearing was to be held in a school gymnasium and it was expected to be well attended. Kiz and I kept a low profile, but we were urged to come to the Public Hearing by neighbors and acquaintances from the coves and hollows - after all, we were now considered part of the community.

The evening of the Public Hearing came. I was nervous, especially since our boss in Chicago (Dick Acker) advised us not to attend, perhaps fearing a lynch mob outcome. Kiz was upbeat and said, "Why not?", so we both sat at the back of the meeting hall, near an exit. There were many long-winded speeches, mostly about Damned Yankees. Eventually a local community leader, stood up and summed up the community sentiment. He pointed out the inequities and injustices of projects like these that benefit fat cats and Damned Yankees in New York and Chicago. He described the gentle lifestyle of the region, how people have come to live here, and been welcomed into the community - pointing to Kiz and I seated at the back of the hall and asking us to stand up. "See there is Pete, he is a Red Coat and alright. According to his neighbor, Mr Frank Kennedy (a retired farmer and renowned gardener), they have one of the best vegetable gardens in Abingdon. Then there is Kiz, he is an Indian. Now as you know, we have done the Indian Nations terrible injustices. He and his family are more than welcome here." And so, to rousing applause, Kiz and I realized we had escaped the lynch mob but were possibly entering into another area with thin ice.

A few months later, the project was shut down indefinitely, and Kiz and I were headed off to work on the Maqarin Project in Jordan. It is funny to think that I worked with Kiz on my first job with Harza (Virginia, 1978) and one of my last projects with Stantec (Pakistan, 2018), with dozens of other jobs in between over a period of more than four decades. We are not only good friends, but we have learnt from one another so many things that you cannot find in a classroom, in a book, or on the internet.

## **7. Mrs Buzzard's Guesthouse**

The following are events that others told me, including Kiz, my comrade in arms described in the previous story. In the very early days of the Bath County Pumped Storage Project, in Virginia, a small group of geologists descended on the small community of Monterey in order to carry out initial geological investigations and studies. At that time there was only a general store and gas station but no motel to accommodate these visitors. However, a woman ran a sort of rooming house used for seasonal laborers, mostly in the logging industry. She was Mrs. Buzzard, a tough, no nonsense mountain woman - and by the way, you did not pronounce her name like the bird of prey; no, the emphasis was on the second syllable and it rhymed with "regard", "leotard", or "lard".



The guests, her 'boys', ate at a large table family style in her kitchen. There did not seem to be any complaints, and everyone polished off their plates with gratitude. Mrs. Buzzard, however, was a strict Baptist and would not tolerate any alcohol in her establishment, much to the disappointment of many of the crew. This meant, they would have to drive all the way to the nearest town that sold beer and liquor, perhaps Staunton or Warm Springs, and either consume it there or hide it in the truck where it would get warm during the day. One geologist with a thinking head on his shoulders, bought a few large bottles of apple juice, rinsed them out, and replaced the contents with whiskey. Mrs Buzzard was none the wiser and even praised the young man for drinking healthy apple juice instead of the devils' brew.

After about three weeks, a long weekend came around, Memorial Day. All of the crew decided to go home for the long weekend or spend it somewhere with more life. Kiz informed the landlady that he would like to remain, deciding it was not worth flying all the way back to Chicago just for two days and no real rest. Mrs B. was delighted and after the rest of the crew had left, said she would cook him up some special holiday meals. She started to rattle off the sorts of dishes she could prepare for him ...

"Baked ham with potatoes, ham and yams, ham and grits, glazed hams with pineapple, country ham casserole, ham and corn chowder, baked ham and cornbread dressing.....".

Kiz held up his hand to stop the flow of recipes. "Look Mrs. Buzzard, I don't know how to say this to you, but I cannot eat ham. It is made from pork and my religion forbids me eating meat from pigs."

Mrs. Buzzard was quite unperturbed. "What do you mean you cannot eat ham, my dear? You have been eating it quite happily every day for the last three weeks and not a word of complaint about this allergy or whatever it is you have. Now what type of ham do you want this weekend? I can even get you some Kentucky ham. Perhaps you'll like that. Now, for tonight, I was thinking country fried ham with red eye gravy".

Kiz, shrugged his shoulders, and gave up trying to explain. Perhaps he could wash it down with some apple juice. Over the years, this sort of thing happened to him on many occasions, not just in the US but in other places too such as China.

## **8. Panama - Machetes and Airport Security**

Incidents in this story took place comparatively recently, late 2001-early 2002. We were working for the Panama Canal Authority on several different contracts, some associated with expansion of the canal and lock system in order to increase capacity, and some to investigate potential sources of water and storage locations to supplement water needed to run the lock systems (also taking into account climate change issues). This particular job involved sending a small team into a remote area of Panama to run a brief reconnaissance study of a potential water storage site. Although, we had remote sensing imagery (air photos, satellite data, etc.) as well as basic hydrology, we needed boots on-the-ground confirmation of various aspects. The team comprised two staff engineers from the client, two geologists and a geotechnical engineer from Chicago (myself, Rori Green, and Jason Hedien), and various laborers to excavate test pits and collect soil samples.

The site area was, and still is, in a very remote forested location with no road access to the outside. It was theoretically feasible to get there by boat but that would have taken at least a week, first going along the Atlantic Coast and then navigating a river upstream several miles. Our plan was to bring in all equipment, supplies, food, and people by a series of helicopter trips. We would stay at a village, using the schoolhouse as our headquarters and for sleeping.

Everything went according to plan, with the advance party and the bulk of equipment going in a day or two before the engineers and geologists.

On the day of departure to the site, we piled into a couple of pickups along with the remainder of the gear and left for the heliport. On the way, we learnt that due to new security rules (TSA from the USA), access to the heliport was restricted and could only be via the main commercial public airport, either through a back gate (if it was still open) or through the airport departures entrance. It turned out the back gate was locked, and we were obliged to use the main airport entrance.

Once there we loaded up three or four baggage carts with our gear and headed towards the throngs of tourists and travelers surrounding the check-in desks. Luckily, our client companions found a couple of officials to guide us through, who although not actually checking us in, did inspect our passports to make it appear official. They then told us to go through the TSA inspection. They sternly told us to put everything onto the conveyor belt and have it go through the X-ray machine. We glanced at our gear, which in addition to our backpacks, included a chain-saw, four or five machetes, geologist's picks, an axe, lengths of rope, some chains, a hand auger, a couple of shovels, sundry tools, bushmans' knives, and a gallon of gasoline for the chain-saw. Because we were still hesitating, the officials again firmly instructed us to place everything onto the conveyor belt. Which we proceeded to do - and our tools and implements of destruction were duly inspected, verified, and allowed to pass. It was one of the most bizarre and surreal experiences of my life, taking a large knife and my pick off my belt and placing them next to my machete, then watching them go through the inspection machine. Yep - a knife, geologist pick and machete, all verified. Meanwhile, the area around us had gone dead quiet as other passengers gaped at us in utter astonishment.

Doing our best to suppress giggles, we loaded up our carts again and proceeded to Gate A1 which was at the far, far end of the terminal. We must have been quite a spectacle as we clinked and clanked along the walkway. Arriving at Gate A1, we found it was at ground level and the open door guarded by a nervous looking young man with a walkie-talkie set. He told us our chopper was on its way. Sure enough, within a couple of minutes our ride landed, we loaded up our gear, and then we were off.

## 9. Laos - Airport Security

Speaking of airport security, let me tell a story about an experience in Laos. Vientiane's Wattay International Airport serving the capital Vientiane was only opened in 1999 and it has been renovated and expanded since then. It is a first-class facility now. However, on my first visits to Laos in the late 1980's and early 1990's, the airport in Vientiane was quite primitive and decrepit. It was on the edge of an old military airfield and the passenger facilities and terminal were rudimentary in the extreme. Cows wandered across the sole runway and children played on the taxiways and apron in front of the terminal. Security, in the current sense or meaning, was non-existent. Passenger arrival forms had recently been introduced and these were duly filled out by passengers. However, there was no one collecting the completed forms or even a box to put them in. I learned that seasoned travelers never bothered with the forms.

However, the most intriguing sight that caught my eye on one of my initial visits was the security device through which all arriving passengers were meant to walk. It looked like a rather shoddily built doorframe nailed onto some wooden planks so that it would stay upright. Obviously homemade, or constructed by a novice down in the market, it was presumably

meant to resemble a magnetometer (also known as metal detector) that one can see now in every airport or any high security building. The entire contraption was placed on a shoddy piece of non-descript carpet. Some electric lights were rigged up on the wood frame, two on each upright and four across the top. One could follow the wiring under the carpet, then up to a nearby desk, and to a switch prominently placed by an officer's elbow. This contraption was such a hoax, I could not believe it. A few days later, I needed to go to the airport to check some ticketing. The arrivals, departures, customs, and ticketing were all located in the same large room separated by some colored rope and furniture and therefore one could quite easily wonder from one area to another with little to no hindrance. After dealing with my ticketing questions, I casually sauntered over to the 'pseudo-magnetometer' device where a couple of uniformed individuals were smoking cigarettes. I pointed at the device and asked politely "What is this for?". One of the young men replied "Security". "Yes of course. But the lights?", I prodded further. The other man went over to the desk and, beaming broadly, flipped the switch that turned on all the lights. Both men now had wide smiles so typical of Lao. No hoax, just an inside joke.

In a recent email Carlos Jaramillo reminded me, that airport security before 2001 was very lax indeed in many places, even in the US. He pointed out that Jim Witnik brought several ornate machetes from El Salvador all the way to Chicago just passing them through the X-ray machines both in San Salvador and then again in Miami.

### 10. Ways to Catch Fish

Having visited and lived in many different countries in the world, I have observed all kinds of ways in which people subsist off the land, to catch birds, fish, or other wild animals in order to put food (protein) on the table for themselves and their families. Three countries come to mind where I have observed innovative methods to catch fish.

**Laos.** During the Vietnam War, from 1964 to 1973, millions of tons of ordnance including cluster bombs were dropped on Laos. About one third of the heavy ordnance and cluster bombs did not explode. As a result, large areas of the country are severely contaminated by unexploded ordnance (UXO). When I was working in Laos, I was keenly aware of this and we employed measures to minimize hazards to ourselves and those working with us. I was acutely reminded of the hazards of UXO when I would see farmers and children who had been maimed by accidental explosions. I remember coming to one area for my work and hearing at least half a dozen explosions in my first week, sometimes two or three in one day. Each time, I would cringe and shudder at the thought of what might have just happened. For many reasons I had to find out what was going on. Luckily, I had an assistant who came from the area and who explained that the blasts were part of a village fishing operation that harvest fish from ponds and sometimes from the nearby river. Yes, they do use explosives from UXO, but they do not collect this themselves. The local people used to gather UXO themselves for sale of scrap metal and of any detonators or explosive they could salvage. However, they learned from too many accidents that it was just not worth the risk. Now they buy the detonators and packets of explosives from a source in the local government (this demanded more questions - but that's another long story)

One day, I was invited to observe the fishing operation at one of the large ponds outside the village. I was told that each pond (many of which were craters left by 500-lb bombs) was stocked with fish that were harvested when they got to marketable size. They said that using a blast combined with nets was more efficient than using nets alone. A blast was set off in the water and, once the water had settled back down, a throng of men, women, and children waded into the water to net and scoop up floating fish that had been stunned. Within 30

minutes all the fish had been loaded into baskets and put onto tuk-tuks and were sent off to market. The whole thing appeared incredible yet credible.

**Guyana.** On an early expedition to the Amaila Falls Project in Guyana, I had opportunities to learn some interesting information on how to survive in the jungle. I am not talking about how to collect insects, worms, and grubs, but honest-to-goodness real food like 1-2 kg fish fresh from the river. The crew we recruited and brought to the site, were mostly laborers from Georgetown who were oblivious of how to do anything in the field. We also had a camp master, a cook, and a store-master. I requested a couple of people who were familiar with the river and conditions around the project site and was introduced to a couple of Amer-Indian men who spoke English as well as the men from Georgetown. Their names were Henry and Albert. They were a wealth of information on the nature, fauna, and flora of the jungle and river-edge. Naturally, they did not know the names in English of trees, plants, or animals but they could relate other useful information - such as wood from this tree makes good handles for axes or hammers, the saw-dust from this tree is poisonous so do not get it in your food, this trail is from the 'big water rat' (capybara). They showed me the spoor of 'tigers' (black panther) and 'wild cows' (tapirs) and introduced me to catching fish from the river.

One day, while I was finishing setting up a gaging station, Henry and Albert, sat on the riverbank staring into a quiet pool of water. When I came over to them, they asked if I would like to have fish for lunch. I was of course delighted but concerned how we were to get the fish. They told me no problem, just watch. I noticed they had been chewing some leaves they had gathered and were again staring intently into the pool below them. One after the other, they spat green wads of saliva and finely chewed up leaves into the water. After two or three minutes, a few small fish rose to the surface, flopping gently, and then floating belly up. A bit later some larger fish came to the surface. Henry and Albert scooped these up immediately. They explained that juice from the leaves they chewed was like a poison to the fish, though this toxin had no effect on humans, and that little fish were the first and most affected while the larger fish were affected least of all. Albert quickly prepared a fire and within a quarter of an hour we were eating delicious grilled fish.

Henry and Albert said this was not really a reliable method of fishing for many reasons - the special plant does not grow everywhere, you could not tell how many fish would rise to the surface, if any, and you would not know ahead of time if they you were going to get good fish to eat or not. For this reason, they often preferred catching fish by bow and arrows or by spearing. They said this was better for getting larger fish but took much more time before one could have dinner.

**Honduras.** While working on one of the larger rivers in Honduras, Rio Patuca, I came across a unique way of getting your fish for breakfast that I had never seen before - and all you need is a machete.

I was part of an expedition sent to perform reconnaissance and preliminary investigation of a potential hydro project. We joined the river at a point about four hours' drive from the capital, Tegucigalpa, and loaded all our gear into *pipantes*, a type of long dugout canoe, equipped with powerful outboard motors. The plan was to navigate downstream to the proposed site. This took about three days and nights, camping on the riverbank at night. There were moments of excitement when we had to negotiate whitewater rapids or have to semi-portage (i.e. to remove all weight from the canoes and carry this beyond the rapids). Our man in Honduras, had planned this expedition perfectly, including all the food we would need for the travel downstream and our five-day stay at the proposed dam site. Our final exit

from the Rio Patuca was a long day's hike and mule ride to a road where trucks awaited us to take us back to Tegucigalpa.

Typically, when I am camping, I wake up early, at or before sunrise. On this trip, I noticed every morning that I was the second person up and it was always the same young man loitering around the river's edge. He was always dangling a machete in one hand, which is fairly commonplace and not unusual in Central America where it seems that almost every male over the age of ten carries a machete. In my rudimentary Spanish, I greeted him every morning and eventually asked what he was doing. He said he was fishing for breakfast. In response to my blank expression, he explained his technique.

Apparently certain fish species, in particular the larger, predator fish, would during the night come to the slower-flowing shallows at the edge of the river. He said that they kind of slept here but were always ready to flee to deep water if danger threatened. He laughed when I said didn't think that fish slept. He then described how to catch the fish, pointing out that if you spied a fish in the shallows, you must move very slowly and very quietly so as not to startle the fish. To move silently over gravel was particularly difficult compared to traversing sand. Once positioned within arm's length of the target, you need to slowly raise the machete above your head and then, after a moment's pause, bring it down sharply onto the back of the head of the fish and immediately flick the machete and fish back away from the river. He demonstrated a couple of successful catches after three or four failed attempts due to skittish escapees. My tutor said that once the day light gets bright enough to differentiate colors easily, the fish become too wary or have already migrated to deeper water. The procedure reminded me of how relatives in Scotland and Cumbria described to me how they illegally caught salmon and trout by creeping up on their prize early in the morning and slowly cupping their hands under the fish until it was feasible to flick it up and out of the water onto dry land.

This was almost more exciting than the day's geologic fieldwork. Every morning, I got up and went down to the river's edge with a machete and wacked away for twenty minutes or so, or at least until other people emerged from their tents. I did not want observers to see me inexplicably slashing away at the water with a machete. Needless to say, I spent an equal amount of time every day sharpening my dented and abused machete. I eventually did manage to spear successfully a couple of fish before the end of our trip, though the fish were a bit mangled up due to multiple swipes with the machete.

### **11. Memories of Doc Willis**

No collection of Harza work stories could possibly be complete without mentioning Doc Willis, Vice President and Chief Geologist at Harza for many years. Clifford L. Willis was originally from Kansas, a quiet, soft-spoken man whose apparent gentle demeanor was only a deception since he had a commanding presence at meetings, strong convictions, and was certainly no pushover when it came to debates on technical issues. This perhaps made him rather unpopular in some circles within the company, but on the whole his methodical and conservative approach to decision-making probably was a valuable asset to Harza. I for one appreciated much that I learned from him.

As with many other Harza employees, Doc Willis had a few idiosyncrasies, one of which was his renowned reluctance to pick up the check or tab whether it was for drinks, coffee and snacks, or at the end of a large meal. He simply ignored the check, even if it was placed right in front of him, leaving it to someone else to take care of. I will tell of two examples of this

behavior, one from personal experience and another as it was told to me by others who had witnessed the event.

My very first field assignment with Harza was a field investigation job near Abingdon in southwestern Virginia. After a few months of study had elapsed, a large contingent of Harza staff visited the project to review progress, and so on. Since they had spent several hours in the field, I invited the team back to my house for drinks. This was a dry county and we would not be able to order drinks later at a restaurant. Everything went well, including Doc and my wife discovering they were both from Kansas, and behaving as though they were long lost relatives. We had dinner at the Martha Washington Hotel, a very respectable ante-bellum establishment. The party must have been twelve or more people and the staff seated us at an enormous circular table. Doc insisted on my wife sitting to his right and me to his left.

As the meal came to an end, the inevitable check appeared and it was naturally handed to the senior, white-haired gentleman, seated between me and my wife. With a reflex reaction, he immediately started to pass it to his right (no can do, wife of new employee, and a Kansas friend), then to his left (also no go, young new employee - also, too far to reach across the table). Some chuckles and giggles were beginning to emerge from the rest of the table as people observed Doc's predicament. He raised a hand to quieten the table and reached into his jacket to pull out his leather wallet. He said "I know what you are all thinking, but I have the necessary resources with me. I have some Traveler's Cheques here that I have been saving for such an occasion". He extracted some well-flattened but truly antique Travelers Cheques, looking as old as the Martha Washington Hotel. The hotel staff had never seen such things before and none of the assembled engineers had ever seen such old specimens. They probably dated back to one of Doc's early trips to the Middle East or Pakistan, in the 1960s. The Hotel was not going to accept them and probably most banks would not have done so either. In the end, I think Dick Meagher (Brumley Gap Project Manager) paid the bill and Doc left the hotel smiling and vindicated.

Here's another story about Doc Willis and his ability to escape paying the check. This was well before I joined the company, so the details may be a bit sketchy, but the gist is supposedly true, told to me by someone present at the time. Harza had been working on the Mayfield and Mossyrock projects for Tacoma City and Light, and Doc Willis was with a small group of Harza engineers in Tacoma. They had just finished breakfast and were to go off to a meeting with the client. But first, time to pay the check and all eyes were on Doc. Someone said that it really was about time he paid and handed him the check. Doc looked at it and fumbled in his pocket for his wallet but at that moment the room started to shake, furniture and light-fittings swayed, some glasses and plates fell and broke, and for a minute or so, chaos seemed to reign. It was the Puget Sound Earthquake, April 29, 1965, 8:29am. After the shaking had stopped and people had verified that no one was hurt, Doc was seen to be still holding the check. He told the assembled group - "See what happens, when you ask me to pay the bill".

Design engineers and managers tended to dread design reviews involving Doc Willis. He was known for being quite conservative and for scrawling across a page or drawing in big red letters "Not Acceptable", often with no further explanation. One time on the Mayfield Project where there had been much concern about slope stability and permanence of the spillway solution, a senior staff meeting had been called to review the latest iteration of many design revisions. Everyone was nervous about how Doc Willis would react to the latest version. One of the lead engineers decided to cut to the chase and asked Doc outright, "Doc, do you think that with the latest revisions the spillway will last, or will it fail?". Doc stared off into the distance, as though looking into the future, and eventually stated, "No, it will not last, it will

definitely fail”. Audible groans, and heads hung low. Then some young bright spark at the back of the room asked, “But Doc, when do you think it will fail?”. Heads turned to the young person who asked such an impertinent question. Doc thought a bit, then slowly said “Ten ..... fifteen,” further groans from the design team. Doc continued “.....maybe twenty ..... thousand years from now”. This contains an important lesson I learned over the years - if you ask a question, be it in the design office or in a legal situation, make sure that the question is well thought out, specific, and not open-ended.

## 12. Memories of Ed Moore

Ed Moore was another person at Harza who I greatly admired and from whom I learnt so much over the years. At first, I was a bit intimidated by his reputation for impatience and explosive temper, but I soon got over this realizing that, in his own way, he wanted our work to the very best it could be and thus had a low tolerance for work that exhibited avoidable stupidity, laziness, or dishonesty. He really cared. He would readily accept an engineer coming to him and admit they did not know how to tackle a given problem; in fact, he would genuinely say “Would you like me to show you how?”. However, Ed would take exception to any individual who knowingly worked dangerously beyond their area of expertise or knowledge. He would fly off the handle if he found out that someone had lied or fudged information. Generally, however, I found Ed to be not only friendly and easygoing but truly pleased and even anxious to share his knowledge with others. He had a great sense of humor and would readily break into enthusiastic laughter. His boundless energy, gusto, and enthusiasm with which he tackled tasks were not only impressive but an inspiration.

With Ed Moore, I had the opportunity to work on some landmark projects around the world including the Indravati Project in India, the Sanchung Pumped Storage in Korea, and the Tianhuanping Pumped Storage Project in China. During our long hours together traveling, we conversed at length on all sorts of topics learning about his early adult life as a Marine serving in Korea, then about various assignments he had been on with Harza.

**Indravati Project, India.** When we were together on initial phases of the Upper Indravati Project, I was assigned to travel with Ed out to the project site. We found out it would take “about a day” to drive by car from Bhubaneswar (the state capital where our office was located) to the project site. Personnel going to the field were to be taken in old Ambassadors, once considered the standard and about the only car found on roads in India at that time. Two people could sit comfortably in the back seat but there was little room for much else. Ed and I set out on our trip to the project site and fortunately, we had the foresight to bring several bottles of water, fruit and sandwiches, and pillows borrowed from our hotel. The journey took about 12 hours, though the driver could have shaved at least two hours off the trip if he had not stopped the car every now and then and at the top of every hill - allegedly “to let the engine rest”. We were among the first Harza folks to make this trip and so we set the standard. The time taken by subsequent travelers ranged from 8 hours (record) to just over 24 hours (the engine fell out of that car and had to be reinstalled in the middle of the road by flashlight). Ed and I had plenty of time to chit-chat and after running through normal topics of conversation, told stories, then got to singing whatever came into our heads (including a twenty five-minute rendition of the Beatles “Yellow Submarine”). We were so glad of the pillows to alleviate the car’s poor suspension and lack of padding in the rear seat.

One of our first tasks on site was a general inspection of the type and extent of damage to the project caused by the immense flood that had brought construction to a halt. While we were negotiating a trail leading up one side of the above-ground penstock route, we were passed by a small group of sari-clad young women carrying empty baskets. We were informed

by a client engineer with us that a good percentage of the laborers on the site were women, hauling head-baskets full of broken rock, soil, or even concrete. Ed thought this was totally unfair, especially since the women were not equipped with any footwear or safety gear, pointing out that they were only wearing flip-flop sandals at best and a couple were barefoot. Our path took us over jagged broken concrete and tangles of sharp-pointed reinforcing steel. In one particularly narrow place, we saw a puddle of bright red liquid, trailing towards another small pool of red with horrid-looking splatters on near-by rocks. Ed was aghast, thinking that one or other of the troop of young women who had passed us had been gravely injured. We tried to reason with Ed but, arguing that he had seen this sort of thing in the Korean War, he had his mind made up to hurry as quickly as possible to help the injured person. In less than a minute we caught up with the women and Ed quickly scanned them to see who had the terrible wound. The women looked at us with bemusement and one after another calmly spat out small torrents of bright red juice. They had been chewing on paan, a preparation combining betel leaf with various other ingredients. It is widely consumed throughout the Indian subcontinent and is chewed for its effects as a stimulant and way of reducing hunger. Ed quickly said that we had better get a move on and stop wasting time, but I am sure from then on he noticed splodges and squirts of paan juice all over the site, on buildings, and in stair-wells.

On another day, Ed was in a very bad mood having suffered a miserable night with 'Delhi belly' and discovering that a deputy senior engineer had for some reason falsified certain construction reports, possibly to cover-up an earlier error. The person had denied this and had told us a series of blatant untruths. This infuriated Ed and, after confirming that the person would be in his office, we set off in our Ambassador car to pay him a visit. Upon arriving at the engineer's office, we found the doors locked and no sign of anyone nearby. Ed was furious, kicked the office door, and stormed back to the car. He got into the front seat and slammed the door shut. The client rep and I jumped into the back. But, just as our car was about to pull away, we caught a glimpse of the offending engineer peeking out through a window. Ed saw him too and immediately burst into a rage, trying to claw his way out of the car but finding that the inside door handle did not work, and screaming out how he was going to deal with that 'rat-faced, son-of-a-bitch'. I yelled at the driver to "Go, Go, Go!" and tried to hold Ed back down in his seat as he tried to climb out the window and now shouting about how he was going to kill "the lying SOB". At last the car lurched forward and Ed was jerked back into his seat. After a few minutes, the storm passed, Ed calmed down, apologized and then thanked us, saying that perhaps he might have killed the SOB.

**Sanchung Pumped Storage Project.** Thanks to the wonderful business development efforts of BK Lee, Harza succeeded in getting a series of excellent assignments working on hydro and hydro pumped storage projects for Korea Electric Power (KEPCO), including the Kangneung, Muju, Sanchung, Yecheon, and Yanyang Projects. I was requested to accompany Ed Moore and BK Lee on our first visit to Korea for the Sanchung Pumped Storage Project. We were to be a subcontractor to the design engineer, a role that lasted from investigations, through design, and all the way through construction to commissioning. However, our first job was to travel to the city nearest the project, spend the night, and the next day tour the site.

BK informed us that the first night would involve a dinner with senior representatives from the client and design engineer. Ed warned me this could involve a lot of drinking and sure enough, during the meal a couple of people had imbibed too much and fell backwards off their chairs. The whole group then went on to a bar where more drinks were consumed. After that, another bar, and finally a karaoke lounge. The group was now down to six people, one person from KEPCO, two from the design engineer, Ed, BK, and me. Ed and BK distinguished



themselves with their karaoke solos, while Ed and I attempted to sing “Yellow Submarine” again but by this time everyone was too drunk to care how bad we were. Somehow, we made it back to the hotel, the Three Harza Musketeers, still standing and walking. However, the moment we were out of sight of our Korean hosts, Ed turned to me and said, “For God’s sake, help get me to my room, I’m done”.

Early the next morning, BK Lee got us up very early, promising us a very special breakfast - the last thing my stomach was asking for. By taxi, he took us to a hole-in-the-wall dive next to a fish market that specialized in breakfast soups. BK instructed us to consume our soups down to the last drop. Although my stomach initially wanted to rebel, I was surprised that within half an hour I felt fine. A most efficacious and unique Korean magic potion. By the time, we arrived at the job site, Ed and I were ready for a brisk hike around the prospective works. Typical of his style and gusto, Ed was chomping at the bit and ready to lead the way. Afterwards, BK Lee congratulated us, saying that we had successfully helped consummate the contract, and that the clients were impressed with our fortitude and determination to make the project a success - I guess this was code for us successfully surviving a Korean macho tradition (i.e. consummation of a business contract Korean-style involving a lot of alcohol and bar-hopping), and that we did not blot our copy books, or embarrass the company. I went on to enjoy other overseas trips with Ed Moore, including to China where we worked on early phases and design investigations for the Tianhuanping Pumped Storage Project.

### 13. Theme Motel

On one of my trips to Korea, probably in the mid 1990’s, I was asked by the client to participate in a short field visit to a prospective project site. The trip was to involve a very lengthy first day, an overnight stay at a nearby town, and then return to Seoul in the morning. I cannot remember much about the field visit, at least there was nothing particularly noteworthy from a technical point of view, though it was valuable to have confirmed preliminary information by a boots-on-the-ground site inspection. My hosts were very considerate and attentive in making sure I was happy with the trip - stopping at small towns and villages along the way for snacks, refreshments and even a quick visit to an old temple. By nightfall, we entered a largish town, found a nice restaurant for a tasty ‘bulgogi’ meal, and then made our way to the motel/hotel that the group had decided upon. During check-in, there seemed to be something titillating about the choice of motel because there was a lot of hilarity among my Korean colleagues, especially when it came to room selection.

By the time I got to my room, I was too tired to do anything other than shower and go straight to bed. However, I was struck by the strange and exotic décor of room, including a huge circular bed with a vast mirror above it on the ceiling, two massive television sets, and a very vibrant yet bizarre color scheme. Next to the bed were some pamphlets about the establishment - mostly in Korean, but also in Japanese and one in English. So, I learned that we were in the “Theme Motel”, where you could select a room kitted out to match your fantasy for the night - “Tropical Island”, “Jungle Adventure”, “Africa Safari”, “Russian Rumble”, “Thai Together”, and so on. From the pamphlet, I learned “Your experience can be enhanced by selecting from hundreds of different videos that can be played on giant screens next to your bed. If needed, you can call the lobby and have them send up various appliances or toys to improve your enjoyment”. I also found out that I was in the “Japanese Room” - however, there was obviously in addition an underlying X-rated theme.

The toilet was interesting, standing on a small dais it had a prominent position in the bathroom, but was colored the most hideous pink. Sitting down on the soft padded seat, I noted how comfortable it was, but was confused by the two large panels of buttons, dials,

and lights, one on each side of the pedestal - rather like something one would see in the control room of a powerstation or in an aircraft cockpit. I assumed that one of the twenty or so controls was to operate the flushing mechanism, but which one? All the instructions were in Japanese or indecipherable signage. I thought - "What the heck. Let's press one of these buttons and see what happens". I was totally unprepared for what did happen. Two jets of ice-cold water shot forth under very high-pressure, focused painfully on my rear anatomy and with unrelenting vigor. This made me stand straight up, like a jack-in-the-box, unfortunately clipping the back of my head on a glass shelf placed inexplicably right above the toilet. As I quickly turned around to catch the shelf from crashing onto the floor, it somehow clipped me on the forehead. After checking that I had not sustained any lasting damage from the water jets, I looked in the mirror and saw that I was bleeding profusely from a cut on the back of my head and had a nick on my forehead. I eventually staunched the bleeding but left the hotel's towels a mess.

After my experience with the toilet, I was more cautious stepping into the shower, especially since the glass enclosure was festooned with jets and nozzles of various sizes and shapes and set at heights ranging from knee-high to overhead. It was equipped with a dozen faucets and levers to control the flow, temperature, and location of the water flow. Trying to be more circumspect about trial and error, I tested a couple of the faucets and successfully received a blast of needle jets that could have cut me into pieces had I not been prepared to leap out of the shower. Who on earth would want such a painful, if not permanently damaging experience? I eventually found a way of obtaining a reasonable flow of warm water, focused in an acceptable direction, and without causing further damage or bloodshed.

Really looking forward to getting to bed, I forgot caution, and flung myself onto the bed and nearly succeeded in dislocating my shoulder. The bed was rock hard, and the pillows seemed as though they had been stuffed with twigs and straw. I quickly made a pillow out of my parka and reached to turn out the light - but was faced with half a dozen switches. The first switch I tried, set the bed in motion, revolving slowly under the overhead mirrors. The next switch reversed the motion, the third got the bed to start vibrating, another set pastel-colored mood lights to slowly blink on and off. At last, I found a switch that turned off all the lights.

The next morning, when I met our group in the lobby, I was asked if I had had a good night. I noted a few silly juvenile smirks but ignored these. I said that the bathroom left something to be desired, pointing to the wound on the back of my head and the nick on my forehead. I mentioned that the bed and pillow were distinctly uncomfortable (wanting to say that they probably are too hard even for a prisoner on death row). My hosts were very apologetic, saying that the hotel management insisted the Japanese Room was their best room. I told them to never mind but for the remainder of the ride back to Seoul I struggled to fathom out the basis for naming my bedroom the Japanese Room.

#### **14. Sharing of Food and Drink Al Fresco**

I have spent almost a life-time traveling into distant parts of the world and mingling with people of diverse cultures, races, religions, educational or social backgrounds. Looking back on this experience, one of the most lasting impressions has been left by the people I met, especially in remote rural areas. On the whole, kindness, courtesy, gentleness, generosity, and hospitality sum up the qualities I found in those I met. Naturally, there have been exceptions and also occasions when such qualities took time to be shown. No doubt countless other travelers have had similar impressions, including the belief that simple country folk everywhere, no matter what part of the world (religion, race, etc.), all share common hopes and fears about their lives and the future outcomes for their children and kinfolk. The

qualities that I identified are what binds communities together and allows them to socialize peacefully with neighbors and strangers alike. Examples of where I have observed this include some memorable occasions when I have met up with some local people outdoors in the middle of nowhere and we shared something to eat and something to drink.

**Armenia.** I spent one USAID-funded assignment in Armenia, based in Yerevan but investigating over a broad region various options to help reduce the country's dependence on electric power from two aging and dangerous Chernobyl-style nuclear reactors. I focused on study of the undeveloped hydroelectric potential and was introduced to officials at the national hydroelectric institute, a virtually moth-balled organization that had not done any business since the collapse of the Soviet Union. I managed to find some old-timers who had information on a couple of sites of potential interest and we arranged a field trip to visit these. Two days later, we gathered early and five of us squeezed into an old Trabant. My Armenian colleagues included a planning engineer, a hydrologist, a hydropower design engineer, and a geologist. They all looked pretty old to me, perhaps in their seventies, but it was difficult to tell since they each had enormous white beards. It was about a 2 hour-drive to the principal site of interest and during that time hardly a word was spoken. I did not know if it was a language barrier (even though one of them spoke reasonably good English), if they were basically shy, hungover, or what, but it was difficult to get any conversation rolling beyond a few short sentences. When we drove through the area devastated by the 1988 Spitak earthquake, I thought it would spark some sort of discussion from the geologist and engineers but to no avail. When we arrived at the site, the sullen crew all piled out, lit cigarettes, and wandered aimlessly around as they gathered their bearings. At that point, it was explained to me all technical reports, design drawings, and maps related to power projects, even those in planning stage, had been removed and taken away by the Russians. Therefore, they were depending on their memories and any personal notes they had retained.

After a few hours of debatable value in the field, we got back into the old Trabant and headed back towards Yerevan. However, on top of the pass marking about the halfway point, the group decided to stop to give the car a rest. Someone spread out a large colorful blanket on the grass and this seemed to signal a change in group behavior because another person unwrapped a large loaf of bread, somebody else fished out some salami and dried meat, a large chunk of cheese materialized from someone's pocket, and the geologist removed a large bottle of vodka from his backpack along with half a dozen small cups. In a matter of minutes, the sullen, lugubrious bunch were all smiles, laughing, and chatting away as they tucked into the bread, cheese, and charcuterie.

I felt awful, partly for having harbored negative thoughts about the group and also for realizing that I had nothing to offer on this picnic - except whatever emergency rations I might have at the bottom of my backpack. Digging deep into my pack, I discovered six granola bars, some packets of nuts, and a can of chocolate-covered raisins. I nervously laid out my meagre offerings and apologized for not having supplied anything more substantial. My colleagues however were delighted and said these would make the perfect dessert and accompaniment. They were amazed at my foresight to have brought such items on the field trip. "Now you are one of us", one of them said as we sat down on the blanket and enjoyed the warm rays of the sun, and a splendid view in front of us. But it was the sharing of our simple food that made it most memorable, along with the frank and open conversation about our respective lives and families.

So, after finishing all the bread, cheese, meats, dessert, and vodka, we piled back into the old car and took off to Yerevan. It was an entirely transformed crew now, joking, laughing, and eventually singing as we swung into the courtyard of where I was staying. The next day and for a few days thereafter, I had brief visits from one or other of that field crew bring me scraps of paper, hand-written notes, and copies of technically useful materials they had found in their remaining files. The ice had not only broken but it resulted in a flow of valuable information that might never have otherwise seen daylight.

**Morocco.** On a trip to Morocco in the late 1980's, I spent a day in the mountains between Meknes and Fez doing reconnaissance of a potential arch dam site. Late in the day, as the sun was starting to go down, we reached the end of a trail on a ridge crest that afforded a splendid view of the entire region. My driver and I got out of the car to stretch our legs and to admire the beautiful landscape tinged in pinks, lavender, and purple and the sky colored gold, orange, pink, and grey. Because of dust in the atmosphere, light from the setting sun was scattered, diffused, and split into a wide spectrum of colors and patterns. As we sat down to watch this marvel of nature, a shepherd slowly walked up the hill, greeted us, and sat down with us to watch the spectacle. He had a young boy with him, perhaps his son of 7 or 8 years. The shepherd gave the young lad some brief instructions and the boy tore off down the hill and we continued to marvel at the changing scene in front us. I don't know how long it was before the boy returned followed by an older girl of perhaps 12 years. Both were carefully carrying trays. The shepherd insisted we share with them freshly made tea and pastries made from almond, walnuts and honey. I was totally blown away by this out-of-the-blue act of hospitality shown to complete strangers. The shepherd explained it was his pleasure and duty to share his tea with us and we remained chatting about our respective families until the sun finally set and it had become dark.

**Mindanao, Philippines.** I travelled to the Philippines for several jobs and managed to see many of the islands. On one trip, I was to reconnoiter a prospective site on the Pulangi River in Mindanao. I was to be accompanied by a representative from the National Power Corporation (Napacor, or NPC) and, although the area was in control of rebel groups, I was assured through local contacts that security would be satisfactory. Given all the media attention regarding rebel operations in this part of Mindanao, I was not feeling entirely comfortable. Reaching the site was rather interesting, first flying from Manila to Cagayan de Oro, a town on the north coast of Mindanao where we spent the night. Early the next morning we went by truck to a location on the Pulangi River where two zodiac boats picked us up along with a security detail - four national army personnel who were heavily armed with M16s and sundry other weapons. After motoring downstream several kilometers, my NPC colleague said we were going to pull over to the riverbank and drop off the soldiers. I was totally confused but he said not to worry. After letting off the soldiers, we roared off to the opposite bank and picked up four new armed guards, who although scruffier than the first bunch, seemed to be equally well-armed with M16s and AKMs. However, they were not wearing regular uniforms, just T-shirts and jeans from the local market. They also loaded into the boats some bulky duffel bags, some cardboard cartons, and a case of beer. As we set off again at a faster clip, my NPC colleague explained that this new security detail was provided by the rebel forces since we were now in rebel-controlled territory. Great - what sort of pickle have I got into now?

The leader of the security squad was serious looking, dressed just as Hollywood would have a rebel leader to be, down to the red bandana around this forehead. I learned His name was Danny (nom de guerre or real name, I don't know). However, he was quite talkative and provided me with a running commentary on various landmarks and things that he thought I

might be interested in - like “This is where we shot down a government float plane; you can sometimes see the wreckage when the water is lower”. He pointed out locations where the Canadian company Acres had investigated for development of the Pulangi V project, saying that there was serious opposition to that project due to claims that it would submerge the burial site of a revered ancestor of indigenous people in Mindanao. Putting me on a spot, Danny asked me if we were intending to proceed with that same scheme. It was a case of “yes” and “no”, I replied; we were examining the possibility of a lower dam or relocating it further downstream such that the burial site would not be threatened. This seemed to please him, as a big grin spread over his face, and he high-fived me.

We landed at a site where we would camp for the night and, while the camp site was being prepared, I spent the remainder of the day reconnoitering areas that I needed to report on. I returned to the camp site before it started to get dark and began to look for a place for my hammock and mosquito net but could not find suitable trees for the hammock. It was beginning to look like I would have to set up my pup tent and sleep on the ground, when two of the rebel security detail asked if they could help, saying that we should expect a thunderstorm during the night. Within half an hour they had fashioned out of sticks, bamboo, and palm fronds a nice level platform, roughly 50 cm off the ground and about the size of a twin bed, but quite large enough to accommodate my tent and keep it off the ground and free from any flooding. They were not finished yet for within another 30 minutes they had fabricated a palm-frond roof to keep the worst of the rainstorm off my tent. It was perfect and became the first surprise of the night.

Delicious odors were starting to waft from the area designated for cooking. So, I wandered over to see if they were preparing the ramen noodle soup and other packaged items, which I thought we had planned for the evening meal. No, they were not. Apparently, the guards had noticed some wild pig in the neighborhood and had slaughtered one while I was out doing my geologic reconnaissance. It was now roasting on the fire - forget about ramen noodles. The feast we ate that night, which included roast pig, squash, greens, and rice, was the second surprise of the night. The total number in the party probably was about ten, but we pretty well finished off everything, including the case of beer and a bottle of Tanduay rum that materialized out of someone’s duffel bag. Sometime during the course of the evening, and in typical Filipino manner, several of the group broke into song. Someone even started up a small battery-operated karaoke device, but it seemed a bit superfluous considering the excellent voices and repertoires of the group.

I slept well that night in my tent within its own little Tiny House, barely noticing the passing thunderstorm, and not bothered by bad dreams about hostile guerillas. We quickly packed up camp in the morning and began the journey upstream towards where we had left the vehicles. Along the way, I chatted more with Danny, having found him to be a completely easy going and affable person. I even ventured to ask if his rebel group was affiliated in any way with the infamous Abu Sayyaf. He vehemently denied any connection, saying that they only represented the indigenous peoples of the region, their rights, and heritage. He guffawed with laughter when I said, “And I assume then you are not Muslim considering the amount of pork and alcohol consumed last night”. When we dropped off Danny and his security detail, I felt as though we were all long-time friends. On the last leg of our river trip, my NPC colleague filled me in on further details that I needed to know. Danny and his group came from local villages in the area and had been waging a ferocious resistance to any development in the region that did not include local participation and accord. They had been adamantly opposed to the Pulangi V project but had a more favorable impression of the scheme that we had been proposing. Most interesting of all, I learned that it was Danny who had planned the roast pig and banquet, and who had ordered construction of my pleasant campsite accommodation. This was a truly memorable meal and night out in the jungle, possible only

because of the remarkably friendly and hospitable people of the area - and Filipinos in general.

**Wadi Shalala, Jordan.** My first assignment on the Maqarin Project in Jordan was in 1979 and lasted much longer than anticipated - I was originally informed it was to be only about 6 weeks but ended up being more than 6 months. One of my jobs was to prepare detailed geologic maps not only of the dam site area, but also reconnaissance level maps of the entire reservoir area - a considerable spread of more than 30 sq. km. Except in the immediate dam site area and a few farmers trails, there was hardly any vehicular access. This was largely due to the fact that the Yarmouk River, where the dam was to be located, was and still is the international boundary between Jordan and Syria. The mapping had to be achieved by foot with limited help from 1950's vintage aerial photographs.

Unfortunately, the work had to be done in summer and autumn during wickedly hot weather. I had to plan out every day carefully to minimize time spent outdoors in the hottest periods of the day. Typically, I would plan a morning field session from sunrise until just after midday. I would then rest indoors and perhaps take a siesta until about 3 or 4 pm, and then go out for another shorter field session from 4 until sunset. I insisted on having a field assistant, a buddy, for obvious safety reasons. However, it was difficult to find people who were willing to do this physically demanding job. I usually managed to find a spare person from the survey labor crew but there were times when there was no one available, in which case I would plan my work closer to the campsite, a road, or a military outpost along the border. I would make sure that I was properly hydrated before going out every day and would carry with me to the field a couple of liters of water and a thermos of black lemon tea. I found that sipping the hot, slightly sweetened, lemon tea was a great pick-me-up whenever I took a rest in some shade.

One day when I was without a companion, I was working at the mouth of Wadi Shalala, a tributary to the Yarmouk River running south to north. I was resting in the shade of an olive tree enjoying my tea, when a Jordanian soldier came up to me and in a somewhat gruff manner asked what I was doing. He was young and looked rather nervous, probably spooked at seeing a foreigner (possibly from Israel?). I was prepared for this and handed him my Jordan Valley Authority (JVA) identity card. This satisfied him and I asked him to sit and have some tea (I had a spare cup for this eventuality). He sat down and lit up a cigarette. He was pleasantly surprised at the tea and suddenly became quite talkative and friendly - him speaking English learnt in grade school and me trying my best pidgin Arabic. Soon, we heard a whistle calling him back to his main guard post, he quickly stubbed out his cigarette and thanked me profusely for the tea and conversation.

The next day, I met the same young soldier again in about the same area. This time he greeted me with a big grin on this face, welcomed me (*ahlan wa-sahlan*) and invited me to sit. He had already prepared a small pile of kindling but had not yet lit the fire until I arrived. He had a small tea-kettle and soon had tea brewed for us. To accompany the tea, I extracted from my pack a small packet of cookies. His obvious pleasure in hosting me probably counted more than anything else, though guard duty can be exceedingly boring and any distraction might be readily appreciated. The young man said that the next day he would be relocated to another area along the border, perhaps in a totally different region.

I learned from our client at the campsite that the army rotates in a new group of border guards every few weeks. The prime reason being to minimize the potential for fraternizing between military personnel and local people who could be involved in contraband operations across the Jordan-Syria border. An even more serious concern was the potential flow of small armaments: the notorious Black September group had used this very route, along Wadi Shalala, to transport arms into Jordan.

Over the course of several months, I had the pleasure of sharing a fresh pot of tea, or some hot lemon tea from my thermos, with many different people in the field. Sometimes they were young border guards and sometimes they were farmers who were tending crops near the river or pomegranate orchards further up Wadi Shalala. Each time, I witnessed the genuine joy and lightening of the spirit that this simple communion brought. This act of sharing a basic commodity is almost archetypal in humankind and has existed for millennia - I hope it is not being lost with the influx of modern social media. Despite my broken Arabic and their limited (or non-existent) English, we always managed to communicate amicably and count our blessings as we sipped our tea. Oh, what pleasing memories these are.

**Himachal Pradesh, India.** The journey from New Delhi up to Shimla in the Himalaya foothills was made that much easier and more pleasant by traveling by train. This was arranged by Commander Gujaral, our man in New Delhi at that time and who was accompanying me on this assignment. Harza had entered into an agreement the Himachal Pradesh State Electricity Board (SEB) to investigate three potential hydroelectric projects in the state and, if any were deemed feasible, to develop EPC documents for detailed design and construction. Our job on this trip was to visit Dhamwari Sunda, located in the Lower Himalayas and the first of the projects to be studied. I was also required to call on the SEB offices in Shimla for courtesy reasons and to obtain any additional documentation not already received.

By the end of day three, we were ready to depart for the site, a cross country trek which would involve slow and bumpy travel in 4-wheel SUVs for most of the day. Accommodation was at a guesthouse provided by the SEB. The site we needed to see was about 15 km away up in the mountains along a trail accessible 4-WD for only about 5 km and the rest by foot. Our plan was to set off early in the morning, bringing food and water with us, and return to the guesthouse by night fall. No one in our group, including SEB staff, had been to the village near the site, so we were not planning on spending the night.

I took an immediate liking to Commander Gujaral, finding him a congenial and easy-to-talk-to person. He had taken early retirement from the Indian Navy, was Sikh, and very-well educated. He was tall, probably over 6'4" (without his turban), causing me to struggle to match his stride along the rocky path, and making me realize I was going to get a good work out that day. He said this was the first time he had been to this region and had no knowledge of the local people but was comforted to learn that two of the SEB staff with us knew some of the local folks personally. Upon arriving at the village, the group split up - the Commander, myself and two others took off towards the proposed dam site, while the others wandered over to the cluster of wood and stone buildings to meet the inhabitants of Dhamwari Sunda.

We spent about four hours reconnoitering the site and then made a beeline toward the village across lush pastures filled with tall blooming plants, chest to head high. Within a few meters, I realized we were in a luxuriant field of marijuana which, under the strong high-altitude sun, had released a strong odor and a particularly sticky residue that adhered to our arms, faces, clothes, and boots. "Well", I thought, "the things I do for Harza". Upon reaching the settlement, we were greeted by a cheerful and friendly group who informed us that the rest of our party had already started down the road - but before we also departed, we were invited to sit and rest for a while at the house of the village headman. Actually, that sounded like a good idea and we sat on the balcony of his house, remarking at the splendid views of the valley and rising mountains behind. A few minutes later, our host re-appeared with a dirty-looking billy-can that he claimed held a sample of this year's wine - sort of his 'Beaujolais nouveau', so to speak. The can was passed around to each of us and we were obliged to sip the ghastly-looking fluid. The Commander declined to partake, on religious grounds he claimed, and passed the container on to me but under his breath he said, "Be careful, there are things floating in that brew". I did my best to use my moustache, beard,

and teeth to filter out the worst, but still had to spit out some nasty bits. It had a very vague resemblance to home-brewed wine, so I asked what it was made from. "Apricots", I was told, and the bits floating in the brown liquid were in fact the remnants of the fruit after the first fermentation. Because of my interest in the headman's vintage (or because of my impertinence), I was obliged to take another hit from the billy-can.

Luckily, before we had to drink more of the brew, we were fed a dish of delicious braised lamb that had only a hint of spice compared to the typical Indian heavy use of curry, chilli, and other mixed spices. This was accompanied with dhal, braised vegetables, and fresh chapatis. All of this was truly delectable and quite unexpected. We were all set to leave, when we learned we had now been invited to the village headman's brother's house. I had my eye on the angle of the sun and was concerned about walking to the car in the dark. However, out of political necessity, we had to repeat the whole affair at the house next door - starting with the awful homebrew again and ending up with another meal. By this time, we were feeling much at ease with our gracious hosts and I remarked to the Commander how hospitable and generous these village folks were, even though they were obviously so very poor. He too was touched. I started to wonder if perhaps our sense of relaxation, loss of anxiety, and general exhilaration at the day's outcome had anything to do with the marijuana fields, the strange brew in the billy-cans, or the magical location of the village nestled against a backdrop of 6,000 m peaks.

Without seeming too rude and ungrateful, we made hasty farewells, and walked as fast as we could down the trail. The last part before we reached the car, was virtually in pitch darkness and luckily the driver had turned on his headlights to provide a guiding light along the canyon. Later in the evening at the guesthouse, the Commander and I went over the day's events. We were both a bit anxious about the hygiene of the wine and food taken at the village, however to supplement the medications I had in my backpack, the Commander withdrew from his briefcase a bottle of Scotch which he said he took for medicinal purposes, sometimes every evening. He and I continued to be struck by the genuine hospitality and friendliness shown by those villagers. As far as he knew, he thought this was not that common; often the remote tribal people can be quite hostile to strangers. I visited that village again a year or two later and encountered similar hospitality, so I was assured that it was not a one-off experience.

[Postscript - After this visit, we returned immediately to New Delhi just in time for me to catch an evening flight back to Chicago, via Frankfurt. Sometime during the long flight, I thought about my marijuana-soiled field clothes, boots, and backpack which had been merely scrunched up and tossed into a Harza black suitcase. I wondered if it would be picked up at Chicago customs. Fortunately, it was not detected, or perhaps the officers had become merely accustomed to my Harza suitcases returning from far-away places and containing little more than dirty laundry]