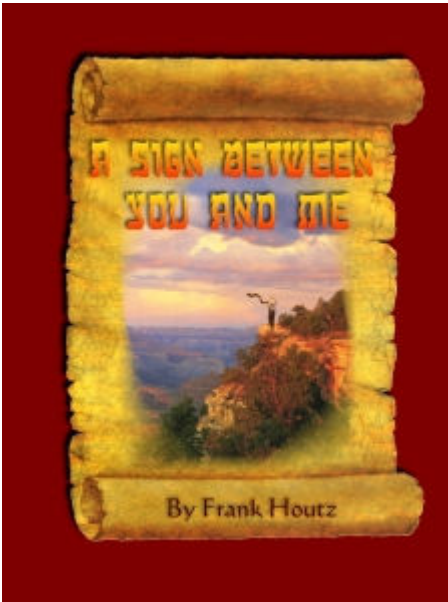


A Sign Between You and Me



"A few years ago I was traveling in the northern territories of Canada with a friend named Barry. We were on the Stewart Cassiar highway which started around Watson Lake, Yukon and passed Cassiar, British Columbia on its way to Stewart, Alaska. This road was gravel as were most northern Canadian highways at that time. There were few if any towns on this highway. Gas stations were placed about every 200 miles in order to keep traffic moving. You never waited for the next station even if the price was outrageous. We were fortunate enough to break down at about the 100 mile marker between two of these oases of civilization. Breakdowns such as these always lead to an adventure. Let us face it, anyone that drove this highway must have been looking for some kind of adventure or they were being paid quite well.

Upon surveying the situation we discovered that we were in need of a part that most likely would not be found anywhere short of Vancouver, BC or Fairbanks, Alaska. Knowing that each of these fine cities were around 1000 miles in opposite directions, we knew we were in for excitement. We chose to head south figuring our chances were better at

hitting civilization earlier.

We started walking, and after we had walked about a mile we found a road crew working on the highway. When a road is gravel and the ground is as soft as it is in the summer months in the north, a grader must continually smooth it out or the potholes will take over. One of the fellows was very friendly and quite curious as to why two men were walking down the road in this wilderness. But his curiosity did not look as though it would be much help, since we did not speak his language. You could tell he was asking questions, and you could tell he thought it was unusual for us to be there, but you could not tell what he was saying. After a few minutes at attempted communication we discovered that the language he spoke was English. He was originally from Newfoundland and spoke English with that strong Celtic flavor. We felt as if we were looking through the London fog to find our way. Once we discovered that we were all speaking the same language and that making signs helps in any language, we learned that his work was to be finished in a half an hour. Then he would take us to a place for help just a bit north of where we had broken down. Since we had come from that direction, and knew there was nothing for about a hundred miles, we were a little concerned. Yet we decided to trust the fellow and went back to our truck to wait for him to finish work.

A few minutes after we got back to the vehicle, he arrived in a jeep with four men in it. One of them instructed us to get on the rear bumper and hold on. We foolishly followed his advice, and stepped upon the rear bumper. There were not any hand holds, so we tried to grip the bumps left by the roof bows under the tightly stretched canvas top. That seemed to be satisfactory at the time so we gave the signal that we were ready and he started off.

We did not realize how stupid we were until the vehicle had smoothed out to a slow 50 plus mph. I say slow, because no one traveled on these roads at any known safe speed. Semi-trucks used this route for transporting fuel and food to the cities in the north. They also carried the asbestos out of the mines at Cassiar and distributed it to plants to be processed in the south. Drivers liked to make time on these roads. If you think that being passed by a semi doing 80 mph on an interstate is a thrill, you should experience it on a two lane gravel road in the north country. When you meet one, gravel goes everywhere.

Insurance does not cover glass breakage in this part of the world. A car without a broken windshield is either a southerner on the southern 25 miles of the road, or someone who had finally sprung for a new windshield because the old one was looking more like the moon's surface than a windshield. The reality of all this hit us at about the time we leveled our speed somewhere close to 50 mph.

I mentioned to Barry that if we met a semi going 80 mph headed south, and we were going 50 mph north, that meant the rocks could be traveling up to 130 mph south when they hit us. Since our heads were

above the rear of the roof, this concerned me greatly. Barry reacted to the good news with that carefree spirit of adventure. Realizing that we were both fools he began to laugh.

Barry's laugh is contagious. This is precisely what could make a bad situation worse. Two grown men, giggling like school girls, on the bumper of a Jeep going 50 mph toward a semi-truck going 80 mph in the other direction. Yes, that is right, I said, "toward a semi." The worse case scenario was in process. An eighteen-wheeler had just rounded the curve about a half a mile down the road and we were in a count down to catastrophe. If we did not fall off the back of this miniature rocket from laughing so hard, we would be hit by the shrapnel of the monster rocket headed in the other direction. The laughing was uncontrollable by this time, increased by the nervous realization that "something bad is about to happen to you."

I am sure the men in the Jeep, not understanding the dynamics of the situation going on over their heads, were none too sure about their own sanity for picking up these two hyenas. People who laugh hysterically can sometimes be very dangerous. Especially those who are trying to claw through the cloth top of your Jeep.

With the semi's imminent approach we buried our face in the cloth top, put our free hand on top of our head and prayed. Yes, I prayed with my head covered. The common interpretation of Paul's exegesis meant very little then. I unashamedly cried out to God, silently, with my head covered. I would have given a whole lot to have had it better covered. A helmet would have been nice, and I still would have prayed."

Story Continues in "A Sign Between You and Me."