

Many Miles To Go

*A Parable For Great Success In Business and
Personal Life*

By: Brian Tracy

Dedication

To Christina, a great adventurer of the heart and mind.
You have come so far and done so well, and you have so many
wonderful experiences ahead of you. I am so proud of you.

Don't Quit

When things go wrong, as they sometimes will,
When the road you're trudging seems all uphill,
When funds are low and the debts are high,
And you want to smile, but you have to sigh,
When care is pressing you down a bit,
Rest, if you must, but don't you quit.

Life is queer with its twists and turns,
As every one of us sometimes learns,
And many a failure turns about,
When he might have won had he stuck it out;
Don't give up though the pace seems slow,
You may succeed with another blow.

Success is failure turned inside out,
The silver tint of the clouds of doubt,
And you never can tell how close you are,
It may be near when it seems so far;
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit,
It's when things seem worst that you must not quit.
—Author Unknown

Foreword by Harvey Mackay

Caution: This Book Will Change Your Life

You are about to embark on an exciting journey of exploration into the depths of the most fascinating person you will ever know: yourself.

Life is a journey, and every part of life is a small journey, complete in itself. You begin with a destination, either clear or fuzzy, travel with the inevitable ups and downs, and you finally arrive at your destination, which may or may not be what you had in mind. Your experiences along the way, and how you react to them, are what make you who you are and determine who you will become.

Learn From Experience

The more experiences you have, and the more you learn from them, the faster you become all you are capable of becoming. The bad news is, we tend to learn more from the mistakes and detours than we do from the miles of smooth road. The good news is we can have Brian Tracy as our traveling companion.

You have extraordinary intelligence, talent, ability, and skill that you can develop and direct toward accomplishing exceptional things and making a real difference in the world. This book will show you how to tap into them.

Timeless Truths

I've known Brian Tracy for several years. He is one of the most respected speakers and consultants in America, and perhaps the world. (I ought to know; we've shared the platform on several

occasions, and I've sat in the first row taking notes.) His books, articles, audio and video programs, and seminars have been published in 31 countries, in 18 different languages. Brian has the unique ability to draw timeless truths and principles from his experiences, and then share them with others in such a clear and simple way that their lives and thinking are changed forever.

One Common Goal

Everyone wants to be successful. Everyone wants to be healthy and happy, do meaningful work, and achieve financial independence. Everyone wants to make a difference in the world, to be significant, to have a positive impact on those around him or her. Everyone wants to do something wonderful with his or her life.

Luckily for most of us, success is not a matter of background, intelligence, or native ability. It's not our family, friends, or contacts who enable us to do extraordinary things. Instead, it is our ability to get the very best out of ourselves under almost all conditions and circumstances. It is your ability, as Theodore Roosevelt said, to "Do what you can with what you have, right where you are."

The Success Formula

The great success formula has always been the same. First, decide exactly what you want and where you want to go. Second, set a deadline and make a plan to get there. (Remember, a goal is just a dream with a deadline.) Third, take action on your plan; do something everyday to move toward your goal. Finally, resolve in advance that you will persist until you succeed, that you will never, ever give up.

This formula has worked for almost everyone who has ever tried it. It is simple, but not easy. It will require the very most you can give and the best qualities you can develop. In developing and following this formula, you will evolve and grow to become an extraordinary person.

Learn From The Experts

One more thing: Learn from the experts. You will not live long enough to figure it all out for yourself. And what a waste it would be to try, when you can learn from others who have gone before. Ben Franklin once said, “Men can either buy their wisdom or they can borrow it from others. The great tragedy is that most men prefer to buy it, to pay full price in terms of time and treasure.”

Over and over, I have found that a single piece of information, a single idea at the right time, in the right situation, can make all the difference. I have also learned that the great truths are simple. They are not found in complex formulas that require a rocket scientist to interpret. The great truths are contained in basic ideas and principles that virtually anyone can understand and apply. Your greatest goal in life should be to acquire as many of them as possible and then use them to help you do the things you want to do and become the person you want to become.

Fasten Your Seat Belt

Before you start reading this book, fasten your seat belt; it's a real page-turner. As you join Brian and his friend, Geoff, on their journey, and face the challenges they face, you will find yourself learning about life at a more rapid rate than you may have thought

possible. You will see yourself and your own story in almost every page.

As Brian says, “Everyone has a Sahara to cross.” You and I move in and out of crises on a regular basis. The turbulence and turmoil of life are inevitable and unavoidable. The only part of the equation you control is how you respond. As Epictetus, the Roman philosopher, once said, “Circumstances do not make the man; they merely reveal him to himself.”

At the end of this book, you will be a different person, a better person, a wiser person. In fact, you may never be the same person again.

Bon voyage.

Introduction

Why Are Some People So Successful?

“I have learned that success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed.” (Booker T. Washington)

Have you ever wondered why some people are more successful than others? Why is it that some people enjoy better health, happier relationships, greater success in their careers, and achieve financial independence, if not great wealth—and others do not? What is it that enables some people to accomplish remarkable things and enjoy wonderful lives while so many others feel frustrated and disappointed?

These questions were important to me when I started out in life. I came from humble beginnings. My parents were good people, but they were often out of work. Growing up, we never seemed to have enough money for anything. Our family theme song was, “We can’t afford it!”

I didn’t graduate from high school. I didn’t quit or drop out, but I left high school in the half of the class that made the top half possible. At the commencement ceremony, instead of a diploma, I got a simple “Leaving Certificate.”

A Poor Start

My first full-time job was as a dishwasher in a small hotel. I started at 4 p.m. and often worked into the early hours of the morning.

When I lost that job, I got a job washing cars on a car lot. When I lost that job, I got a job with a janitorial service washing floors late into the night. I began to think that washing things was going to be in my future.

With a limited education, I seemed to have a limited future as well. I worked in a sawmill stacking lumber on the afternoon shift and then later, the graveyard shift, getting off at 7 a.m. I pumped gas and worked at odd jobs. I worked in the bush with a chainsaw, on a logging crew, sometimes 12 hours a day, enduring black flies, dust, diesel fuel, and 90-degree heat. I even dug wells for a while. That's where you start at ground level and work *down*. And when you succeed, you *fail*, because when you find water, they fire you. It was not a great incentive system.

Learning the Hard Way

I was homeless before it was respectable. I lived in my car in the winter and slept next to it in the summer. I worked in hotels and restaurants, washing pots and pans in the winter and working on ranches and farms in the summer. I worked in construction as a laborer and in factories putting nuts on bolts, hour after hour.

I worked on a ship, a Norwegian freighter in the North Atlantic, as a galley boy, the lowest man on the nautical totem pole. I worked and drifted from odd job to odd job for years, continually asking and wondering, "Why are some people more successful than others?"

Lessons Learned

My life is different now. I live in a beautiful house on a golf course in Southern California. I have a healthy, happy family and a

successful business with operations throughout the United States, Canada, and in a dozen foreign countries. And all this happened for me because I finally found the answers.

After years of searching, I met a wise and wealthy man who sat me down and told me the key to success. He also explained the reasons for failure and under-achievement in life. As he spoke, I immediately recognized the truth in what he said. And his discovery about success was quite simple, as all great truths seem to be.

What he told me was this: **“The key to success is for you to set one big, challenging goal and then to pay any price, overcome any obstacle and persist through any difficulty until you finally achieve it.”**

Program Yourself For Success

By achieving one important goal, you create a pattern, a template for success in your subconscious mind. Ever after you will be automatically directed and driven toward repeating that success in other things that you attempt. By overcoming adversity and achieving one great goal in any area, you will program yourself for success in other areas as well.

In other words, ***you learn to succeed by succeeding. The more you achieve, the more you can achieve.*** Each success, especially the first one, builds your confidence and belief that you will be successful next time.

Nothing Can Stop You

The fact is that you can accomplish almost any goal that you set for yourself if you persist long enough and work hard enough. The

only one who can stop you is yourself. And you learn to persist by *persisting* in the face of great adversity when everyone around you is quitting and every fiber of your being screams at you to quit as well.

When you subject certain chemicals to intense heat, the chemicals will crystallize and form a completely new substance, a new composition in which the crystallization process is irreversible. A lump of coal, for example, becomes a diamond under intense prolonged heat and pressure.

In the same way, you become a person of great strength by persevering in the crucible of intense difficulty until you finally succeed. Each time you force yourself to persevere, rather than giving up, your character “crystallizes” at a new, higher level. Eventually, you reach the point where you become *unstoppable*.

The Ultimate Aim Of Life

Aristotle, the Greek philosopher, said that the ultimate aim of life is the development of character. A person of character is one in whom the great virtues of courage, persistence, compassion, generosity, integrity, tenacity, and perseverance have crystallized and become permanent. Your life and thinking are now built around an unshakable set of principles that you will not compromise under any circumstances.

The development of character is not easy. It often takes an entire lifetime. This is why every extraordinary achievement in life seems to be a result of thousands of ordinary efforts, backed by courage and persistence, that no one ever sees or appreciates.

As the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow once wrote:

*Those heights by great men, won and kept,
Were not achieved by sudden flight;
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upwards in the night.*

Shape Your Own Character

When you complete a major task, overcome a great obstacle or achieve an important goal, you experience the emotions of exhilaration, joy, satisfaction, happiness, and personal pride. These experiences establish a pattern, or conditioned response, in your subconscious mind. Forever after, you will be motivated to do the same things that brought you success in the past so you can once more enjoy those same feelings.

You develop yourself into a superior person by practicing the qualities you most want to have whenever they are called for. You learn to be brave by being brave. You learn to persist by persisting. You learn to overcome by overcoming. The quality of character you develop is in direct proportion to the amount or intensity of these qualities demanded by the difficult situation, *multiplied* by the length of time that you demonstrate these qualities in the face of adversity.

Entrepreneurs and business people become successful as a direct result of trying and failing over and over again, and then picking themselves up and pressing on. Each time they refuse to be stopped by a setback or disappointment, they reinforce the qualities within themselves that enable them to persist even longer next time.

Eventually, they reach a state of mind where they become unstoppable. Failure for them is not an option. They become like

forces of nature, irresistible and unmovable. They reach the point *in their own minds* where they cannot conceive of any outcome except final victory. And this state of mind must be your goal as well.

Unlimited Potential

Here is some good news: you have within you, *right now*, everything you could ever need or want to be a great success in any area of your life that you consider to be important.

You have within you, right now, deep reserves of potential and ability that, properly harnessed and channeled, will enable you to accomplish extraordinary things with your life. The only real limits on what you can do, have, or be are self-imposed. They do not exist outside of you.

Once you make a clear, unequivocal decision to cast off all your mental limitations and throw your whole heart into the accomplishment of some great goal, your ultimate success is virtually guaranteed, as long as you don't stop.

Looking Back

But I am getting ahead of myself. We learn most of our important lessons in life from experience, by looking back at what happened to us. We evaluate those experiences and ideally, we extract ideas and insights from them that we can then apply to the future.

The turning point in my life came many years ago, although I did not recognize it at the time. Afterwards, however, I felt that I could accomplish just about anything, if I wanted it badly enough and was willing to work for it long enough and hard enough. And this is true for you as well.

I have spent many years traveling around the world, but the “crucible experience” of my life was my first big trip, my first great journey into the unknown. In a very positive way, I never recovered from it. The experiences that I had at that time, and the lessons that I learned, were burned into my brain and affected my outlook on life forever after. I have never been the same since the Sahara crossing.

The Never Ending Story

This story is about a trip. It is a story for people who travel and enjoy it, and for people who want to travel but never seize the opportunity. In reality, it is a story for anyone who sets out toward a distant goal and who enjoys the steps they take to get there as much as the arrival. The more inclined you are to look upon *life* as a journey, and *success* as a journey, the more likely it is that you will actually enjoy your life, and every step of the way.

My heartfelt desire is that you will not only understand this story about traveling but also feel, at least in part, like a member of the team, making progress from place to place, covering as much ground as possible, in order to achieve the goal. You will also see the parallels with your own journey through life, and some of the lessons you have learned from your own experience.

The True Traveler

Traveling, in its purest form—that is, separate from occupational, recreational, educational, and social excursions—has been described by the author John Steinbeck as the “urge to be someplace else,” but there is more to it than that.

True traveling is the desire to wake in the morning and see the mist on the road, knowing that the miles ahead will be brand new, consisting of people, places, and experiences completely unpredictable and unknowable. It is the feeling of detachment and freedom from the environment, while being at the same time so involved with it physically and emotionally that the body tingles with eagerness and anticipation. The overwhelming sensation of a true traveler is the joyous exhilaration that comes through motion, not once, but over and over again, creating a state of continual elation and, underneath, a contentment and peace bordering on paradise.

There are few true travelers, and of these, none are full time. Like malaria, the traveling “bug” enters the bloodstream, often through a tiny prick in the consciousness—a book, a song, a poem perhaps—and builds up in the body silently. Then one day the fever strikes with an intensity causing an incredible dissatisfaction with routine and normal living.

The cost of traveling is high. To be a true traveler means severing bonds, leaving behind friends, family and security, and casting one’s fate into the teeth of the unknown. Not many people dare to pay this price. Those who answer the “call of the road,” and are mentally suited to it, are among the happiest people on earth, and do not need to die to know what heaven is.

Those who do not dare to leave their security and social obligations behind always carry with them the vague feeling that they have missed something important. Throughout their lives, they will be troubled by recurring periods of uneasiness that they can't explain to themselves, or to anyone else. And they need not die to have a taste of hell.

The Traveling Life

The traveling life, though costly, is so enriching emotionally and intellectually that it does not, and cannot, last for long periods. A period of traveling usually leaves the traveler spent and fulfilled, quite prepared to accept the regularity of a quiet life in exchange for the demanding and exhausting uncertainty of the road.

The traveling life is essentially an individual one, best embarked upon alone, or with a close companion, with whom one is in complete accord—and this is asking a lot.

Any true traveler reading this account understands clearly what I'm trying to say. I was a young man when I came to these conclusions, but years of practical experience have only reconfirmed their essential truth.

If you feel the call, “the lure of little voices, all a’ begging you to go,” don’t fight it and don’t be afraid of it. Take hold of it with both hands and kick yourself free. Live it until you really get to know yourself—and then go back, if you can. It’s not an easy life, even if you do it right. It can be deadly difficult if you do it wrong. But, if you’re meant for it, it’s surely the greatest life on earth.

Seeking Adventure

My friends, Geoff and Bob, and I, left home seeking changes and challenges, to be endured at the time and bragged about later. When viewed by romantic souls, these hard times become glorious “adventures.” Over the miles, we learned a lot about traveling, a lot about Europe and Africa, a lot about living, and a lot about life. Each lesson we learned came from personal and often painful physical experience, and each benefit we gained came from the practical application of that lesson.

We grew up as ordinary children, in that we each thought of ourselves as rather *extraordinary*. We were young men with high moral ideals and romantic ideas about how people should behave and how things should be done, on the basis of what we’d read and been taught.

For example, we considered reminders like, “Be strong,” “Be brave,” and “Keep smiling” to be fine and noble, applicable to any difficulty; that is, until we found ourselves sitting in the Sahara by an empty road in 120 degrees of bake-oven heat, with 2,000 miles between us and our destination. Just about then, we began to wonder about the merits of noble ideals. And the situation had not the slightest resemblance to an adventure.

Out of this and countless other experiences, many of them a good deal worse, came a gradual realization that ***a large gulf exists between the Pollyanna platitudes and reality.***

Three Ways to Read This Book

There are three ways that you can read this book. The first is to read the book as a travel adventure. In writing this narrative, spanning two years of the most impressionable time of my life, I have tried to be purely

objective, relying on our many unusual experiences to make the story worthwhile reading—assuming that a vivid account of three young men who set a goal 17,000 miles away, and then went about getting there, would be sufficiently interesting to justify the writing of it.

However, I also have laced the narrative with my own philosophical observations. As I neared the completion of this story, I discovered truths so universal that they can be removed entirely from the context, to stand alone as lessons applicable to any situation. So, this tale of traveling to and through Africa assumes an added dimension of timeless truths that can be applied to many other areas of life.

Second, this story can be read as an account of a *search for truth*. It begins with innocence, marked by questions and curiosity. When the search begins in earnest, many obstacles arise, most notably that of ignorance—of how to pursue the quest. The search takes us over vast stretches of barren terrain and across several borders. There are several times when knowledge and experience are concentrated into short bursts of enlightenment and understanding.

There is confusion and dishonesty. There are dangers and hardships. There is the necessity for courage and perseverance, for flexibility and ingenuity. There is the need for assistance from other people and the eventual realization that no one does it alone in the journey through life.

When the truth finally dawns, it is overwhelming and requires a violent rearrangement of previous beliefs, leaving us older and wiser, and with an understanding of what it really means to suffer.

A Gradual Transformation

The third way this story can be read is as a biography of a person going through a complete metamorphosis. There is the conception, the

prenatal preparations, and then the birth. There is a childhood, a troubled one, and long. There is adolescence, confused and uncertain, a young maturity, and a striving middle age, complete with disillusion and resolute plodding along a straight line. At last comes old age, and in this instance, an empty, exhausted arrival at the “other side.”

Whichever way you look at it—as a story about traveling, as a search for truth, or as a biography—one thing is clear. It is entirely true. And as we saw it, it was absolutely necessary and unavoidable. Geoff, Bob, and I did it, as many others have and will, and it doesn’t matter who you are—sooner or later, ***everyone has a Sahara to cross.***

“The world is so constructed, that if you wish to enjoy its pleasures, you must also endure its pains. Whether you like it or not, you cannot have one without the other.” (Swami Brahmananda)

SECTION 1:

THE VISION AND THE DREAM

“Dream lofty dreams, and as you dream, so shall you become. Your vision is your promise of what you shall one day be; your ideal is the prophecy of what you shall one day unveil.” (James Allen)

Every great achievement begins with a vision, a dream of something exciting or different, a feeling that inspires and motivates you to aim higher and beyond anything that you have ever achieved before.

What is your vision for your life? Imagine for a moment that you have no limitations on what you can be or do. Imagine that you have all the time and all the money, all the knowledge and experience, all the skills and resources, all the friends and contacts. If you could have anything in your life, what would it be?

Project forward five years and imagine that your life is now *perfect* in every way. What does it look like? What are you doing? Who is there with you? Who is no longer there? Describe your ideal future as if it was perfect in every respect.

Dream Big Dreams

Allow yourself to “dream big dreams.” Decide what’s right before you decide what’s possible. Imagine your future as ideal in every respect, and remember: Whatever others have done, within reason, you can probably do as well.

Once you’ve decided where you’re going, the only question you ask is “How do I get there?” How do you get from where you are

today to where you want to be? And remember, ***failure is not an option.***

“Man, alone, has the power to transform his thoughts into physical reality; man, alone, can dream and make his dreams come true.”

(Napoleon Hill)

Chapter 1

The Call of the Open Road

“The entrepreneur is essentially a visualizer and an actualizer. He can visualize something, and when he visualizes it, he sees exactly how to make it happen. (Robert L. Schwartz)

Some people are born to stay at home. Others are born to travel. It is not easy to distinguish them from each other, but I suppose the things we dream about and plan toward are good indications of our preferences.

When Geoff and I were 16, we were already talking about how quickly we would be on the road when our schooling was finished. One day I found a poem in the school library and ever after let it speak our aims and ambitions, and the attitude we would adopt toward our lives, and later, our traveling. Perhaps we already felt this way, but no one had ever summed it up quite as well as Robert W. Service in “The Lone Trail”:

*The trails of the world be countless, and most of the trails be tried;
You tread on the heels of the many, till you come where the ways
divide;
And one lies safe in the sunlight, and the other is dreary and wan,
But you look aslant at the Lone Trail, and the Lone Trail lures you
on.*

That was the general idea. The doing of something different, not necessarily for the sake of being different, but because we thought

the best way to express our individuality, and the only way we could really enjoy life, was to refuse to be satisfied with the commonplace. But to do that you have to pay a price, of sorts, as the poem goes on to say:

*Bid good-bye to sweetheart, bid good-bye to friend,
The Lone Trail, the Lone Trail follow to the end.
Tarry not and fear not, chosen of the true;
Lover of the Lone Trail, the Lone Trail waits for you.*

Of course, at 16, we really didn't know what the poet was talking about, but it sounded good, and whatever he meant, we agreed with it wholeheartedly.

The Open Road

The call of the road first sounded for us when we were 17, drawing us to the north woods for the summer to fight fires on various forestry crews. When we were 18, the call came from Southern California and Mexico with a craving to taste Tequila and see Hollywood. Within a year after leaving high school, we had worn out two cars each in the high country around Vancouver, and back into British Columbia. In the summer of 1962, the call came from the east, luring us over the Rocky Mountains to the prairies and beyond.

That fall, Geoff went off to the university, completing his second semester in May 1963. I was working the graveyard shift at a local sawmill at that time, quite contentedly, when he came by my apartment one morning and woke me up. He had come to say good-bye.

"Where are you going?" I asked sleepily.

“To Winnipeg,” he replied. “I’m going to work there for the summer.”

“Yeah, when are you going to settle down and start becoming a respectable citizen?”

“Next year, for sure.”

“Well, you can start being a good citizen right now by letting me go back to sleep. When are you leaving?”

“Now.”

“What?!”

“Right now. I’m on my way out of town.”

“Humph! You’d better write when you get an address. I might join you later this summer.”

“I’ll be expecting you. So long.”

With a honk and a happy wave, he steered out of the parking lot in his battered Pontiac and turned onto Georgia Street, heading for the trans-Canada highway leading eastward.

Wait For Me

It was the end of July before I caught up with him, rolling into Winnipeg after a sweep through British Columbia and Northern Alberta, coming down through Saskatchewan to Regina, and then east into Manitoba and the queen city of the province. Winnipeg was 1,600 miles from Vancouver and represented the farthest we’d been from home.

I found Geoff working a construction job at the airport. That night we decided that since we had already come this far, we might as well see Toronto, 1,600 miles farther, before we settled down. A week later, in response to a telegram, Tom Culbert, our best friend from

Vancouver, hitchhiked out to join us. Geoff quit his job. We pooled our finances, loaded our few clothes into my 1951 Chevy, and we were on our way.

Keep On Going

We had mapped out a route that would take us south and east under the Great Lakes via Chicago and up to Detroit, over the border and on to Toronto, then back. But as the miles rolled past under us, we became infected with the enchanting lure of the open road.

“We might never get another chance,” we told ourselves. Our route and destination began changing every day or two. We had very little money but we found that we could get by on one meal a day. To pay for gas, that was all we ate for the rest of the trip.

In the next month we drove through Minneapolis, Chicago, Cincinnati, and down into the southern United States to Miami, Florida, coming up the Atlantic seaboard through Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., New York, Montreal, Toronto, and then finally over the Great Lakes and back to Winnipeg.

Four weeks later, after a total of 17 states, six provinces, and 12,000 miles, we wearily arrived back in Vancouver, thoroughly glutted with faraway places and more than ready to settle down.

Settling Down

I had worked for the first year after leaving school and had concluded that higher education was something much to be desired if I didn't want to sweat for a living for the rest of my days. I enrolled in a series of courses a week later and got a job on the night shift of a sawmill to earn the funds I had neglected to set aside in the previous

year. Geoff found a similar job in a plywood mill and decided to concentrate on working for a year, planning to return to his education the following fall.

We had traveled on a starvation budget, sleeping in the old Chevy when it rained, in parks and fields when it didn't, eating very little in order to save what money we had for gasoline. Often we drove for two or three days at a stretch, living on cigarettes and nervous energy. We mistook the fatigue resulting from a month of this to be satiation with travel. The thought of giving up a life with a definite purpose and a future, to do it again, was out of the question. However, we made one concession.

City By The Bay

On Thanksgiving weekend in October 1963, when we had three days free of school and work, we fueled up the Chevy and drove 1,100 miles south to see San Francisco. It took 22 hours of steady motoring to get there, and after a rollicking, happy day and a half, it took 22 hours to get back. And we finally gave up fooling ourselves.

We were hooked on traveling. The complacency that had marked our attitude after our return from the east had turned sour. We spoke about it often and decided that we had exhausted North America as a place to tour. We had loved every minute of it, but now we wanted to see something different, something unusual, something with more challenge. But where?

The Next Destination

The obvious answer was Europe, the old world, the land of our forefathers. But everyone who traveled went to Europe. Many of

our friends had already been and returned, and many others were preparing to go. We wanted to do something different.

No, Europe was not the answer. Later perhaps, but not the first time we set foot off the North American continent. We discussed variations and alternatives for a long time, before we finally decided. Africa!

It filled all the requirements. Just to think of it—the Dark Continent. Black Africa, pygmies, Zulus, lions, elephants, savagery, splendor, tribal dances, exotic jungles, and adventure. Our imaginations leaped and bounded with a thousand different images and fantasies.

Of course, it never occurred to us to ask why it was that no one else was going to Africa. That was our first mistake. We would find that out ourselves at great price in the fullness of time.

I later learned that all great ventures begin with a dream, a fantasy, and usually require great risks, the willingness to ***“go boldly where no one has ever gone before.”***

Keep It Confidential

There seemed little point in discussing our decision with anyone. We had learned from past experience that nothing kills an idea so completely as endless discussion, idle chatter, and empty speculation. Besides, no one among our acquaintances knew anything about Africa and so we kept our plan to ourselves. This is a good rule at the beginning of any new venture.

In the weeks to follow, without more than an occasional chat on a possible route, the thought of Africa became the focal point of our lives. This ambition stood as an exciting pillar of assurance. No

matter how bored or disgruntled we became, we could always look inward and chuckle, “It won’t be for much longer; we’ll soon be on our way to Africa.”

What Is Your Personal Mission?

You have been put on this earth to do something wonderful with your life. What is it? What is that one thing that you are meant to do, that one great accomplishment that will benefit both yourself and others? One of the most important things you ever do is to ask and answer this question.

You have within you enormous untapped resources of talent and ability—just waiting to be harnessed and challenged toward some great good. You must refuse to “go to your grave with your music still in you.”

Be honest with yourself. Don’t fall into the trap of selling yourself short, of settling for less than you’re truly capable of. You were born for greatness. You are here to make a difference with your life in some way.

What do you really want? If you could be or do or have *anything* in life, what would it be? Allow yourself to dream, and then go to work to make your dreams come true.

“Have you built your castles in the air? Good! That’s where they should be built. Now, go to work and build foundations under them.”

(Henry David Thoreau)

Chapter 2

The Preparation

“When schemes are laid out in advance, it is surprising how often the circumstances will fit in with them.” (William Osler)

Because of my school and the need to put aside enough money for our trip, we set a tentative departure date for late August 1964. Then, early in the year, Geoff's sister, Pamela, announced her engagement and intention to marry on September 19. We then decided to attend the wedding and leave for Africa on September 20. That would give us ample time to pay off an accumulation of small debts and build a healthy bank account.

In April 1964, we brought our good friend, Bob MacDonald, into the planning. Up to that point, we had largely contented ourselves with glorious fantasies and romantic speculation. Bob was a big, robust fellow with an easy laugh and an outgoing personality with whom we played football and drank beer on the weekends. He wanted naturally to know what we had done toward preparing for our departure. It dawned on us that we had not done much beyond talking about it during the last three months. He made us realize that it was time we got down to business.

Preparing In Earnest

Our preparations went from fanciful chat to serious steps toward the great adventure. We formed a club, the *Bon Vivants*, and made the Dark Continent our first project. We began writing to every

travel bureau whose address we could unearth for information on Africa. In the following months we received a prodigious mass of information from on Africa, but unfortunately it largely consisted of brochures on luxury hotels, expensive cruises, guided tours, all-inclusive safaris, and jet and ocean liner fares—all far beyond our humble means. There were, however, some useful bits of information, and these we gleaned and set aside for future reference.

We began a series of inoculations to withstand the assaults of smallpox, tetanus, yellow fever, cholera, typhus, poliomyelitis, and black water fever. After three months of regular visits to the health center, we felt confident that we would never contract another disease. We even took an Industrial First Aid course from St John's Ambulance to be prepared in case of an accident. This knowledge later proved to be vital to us.

Show Me the Money

To finance our travels, we opened a bank account and started depositing \$5 per week each. In April we increased the sum to \$10 and subsequently raised the amount \$5 a month for the rest of the time we were in North Vancouver. For the three weeks before departure in September, the ante was \$35 a week, bringing the account to almost \$2,000 by the time we left. It seemed like a lot at the time, but once underway, the money didn't last very long. (In 2003 dollars, this would be about \$10,000.)

Later in life, I learned that every new venture ends up costing about twice as much as you thought and taking three times longer. These projections are especially true in starting any new business or

introducing any new product or service. They certainly proved true for traveling.

There Is A Party Here Tonight

During July and August, the Bon Vivants rented a furnished five-bedroom house in the neighborhood where we'd grown up and gone to school. It became the social center of our group. By mid-July, 11 of us were living there. In late August, we invited all our friends to a going-away party.

Over 200 people came, and the band played until the early hours of the morning. The whole house shook with music and laughter. The sun was high in the sky before the last guests departed.

The restoration of the house to its original condition, better in fact, took a week of hard work and cost over \$200. It was cheap at twice the price. Our adult lives had begun.

The Master Skill of Success

Your ability to set goals and make plans for their accomplishment is the “master skill” of success. This ability, developed through practice, will do more to assure your eventual success than anything else you ever learn.

The 10/90 rule says that, “The first 10 percent of time you spend planning and organizing will often account for 90 percent of the value of the entire process.”

Here is a powerful but simple method for setting and achieving goals that I have learned over the years:

First, decide exactly what you want. Clarity is the starting point of great success.

Second, write it down, in detail, and set a deadline. Set sub-deadlines if necessary.

Third, determine the additional knowledge, skills, and abilities you will need to achieve your goal—and how you will acquire them.

Fourth, determine the obstacles and difficulties you will have to overcome to reach your goal, and organize them in order of size and importance.

Fifth, determine the people, groups, and organizations whose help you will require, and decide what you will have to do for them to earn their assistance.

Sixth, make a detailed plan, broken down by activity and organized by priority and sequence. What is most important? What must be done first? What must be done before something else is done?

Seventh, take action on your plan immediately. Do something every day to move toward your goal. Get going and keep going.

At each stage of your life, whenever you are confronted with the need to make new choices, to set new goals, set down and think them through using these seven steps. Always think on paper, and be willing to revise your plans when you get new information. Keep working on your plans until they are complete. Then, execute them boldly.

“Our goals can only be reached through a vehicle of a plan, in which we must fervently believe, and upon which we must vigorously act. There is no other route to success.” (Stephen A. Brennen)

SECTION 2:

STARTING OUT—JUST DO IT!

“Create a definite plan for carrying out your desire and begin at once, whether you are ready or not, to put your plan into action.” (Napoleon Hill)

“A journey of a thousand leagues begins with a single step,” wrote Confucius. A thousand dreams die unborn every day because the dreamer lacks the courage to take the first step, in faith, with no guarantees of success.

The great difference between high achievement and failure in life is contained in your willingness to launch in the direction of your goal, even when your information is still incomplete.

There are no guarantees in life, and we know that if every question must be answered, if every obstacle must first be overcome—then nothing will ever get done.

Decide what you want, write it down, make a plan, and then—take action. ***“Leap and the net will appear!”***

“Our grand business is not to see what lies dimly at a distance but to do what lies clearly at hand.” (Thomas Carlyle)

Chapter 3

The First Step: Vancouver to Montreal

On a Sunday evening at 10 p.m., three weeks later, in a cold drizzling rain, we bid our families and friends our last good-byes, severing the final ties with our youth and 20 years of life. I turned the old 1948 Chevy eastward, and we left Vancouver behind us in the night. It was September 20, 1964.

I learned later that every successful enterprise, great or small, begins with a leap of faith, a driving into the dark, into the unknown. Nature is kind to us in that she never lets us see too far ahead. If we really knew all the difficulties, disappointments, temporary failures, and heartaches we would experience, most of us would not start out at all. This applies to new businesses, careers, marriage, having children—and almost every other human endeavor.

Off To See The World

That was the beginning. It was rather anticlimactic after a year of planning and looking forward to the big moment. For a long time, we were understandably silent, each wrapped up in his own thoughts as we drove into the night. We were off to see the world.

We drove all night, stopping for gas or coffee occasionally (the Chevy burned a quart of oil every 50 miles), but more or less driving steadily north, then east across the Rocky Mountains. The magnificent unspoiled beauty of Rogers Pass was behind us the next morning when the sun rose through the clouds over Banff, Alberta, where we stopped for breakfast. We arrived in Calgary early in the afternoon and checked into the YMCA for the night.

On our way across the country, we stopped in Regina and stayed with friends for two days. We checked into a motel in Winnipeg for two more nights, and then turned south into the States toward the Great Lakes. The weather was bad—nothing but howling winds and icy rains most of the way.

Sudden Emergency

The tank-like Chevy that we had bought for the trip was riding very low on its springs and using an alarming quantity of gas and oil, but by and large, the car held together quite well. We only had one emergency, and that was on our way to Chicago through Iowa. The brakes failed altogether.

Bob first discovered this problem as we drove about 50 miles an hour in the rain, late at night, and on a curve. He yelled, “The brakes are gone!”

“Pump them up! Pump them up!” we shouted.

“I’ve been pumping them for the last hour! There’s nothing left to pump!”

He geared down to second and shut off the engine, bringing the car to a jerky halt a quarter of a mile later. The brake cylinder was dry, and we were 85 miles from the next large town. The highway was dark and empty, and the cold wind howled across the silent cornfields on both sides.

Pressing On

Since there was no traffic on the road, we decided to drive the car carefully until we found an open service station where we could

buy some brake fluid. It was 11:30 at night when I got behind the wheel.

It seemed like the entire state was asleep. Town after quiet town slipped past the rain-spattered Chevy as we crept along, peering down the darkened side streets looking for the lights of a service station. Finally, about two hours later, we came to the outskirts of Dubuque, a large town with considerable traffic, even at that hour.

After helplessly coasting through two red lights with no garage in sight, we became more cautious, driving in first gear, approaching intersections as furtively as thieves.

Then, coming down a slight grade, we arrived at a busy cross street. A steady stream of traffic passed ahead of us, and a red light faced us. The Chevy was already in first gear with the engine cut, but we could see we wouldn't stop in time to avoid coasting right into the traffic.

When In Doubt, Improvise

At just about the same moment, we all had the same idea and leaped out of all four doors into the street. Throwing every bit of weight we could muster, feet skidding along the wet pavement, we gradually brought the beast to a halt. Six feet in front of us, an express bus roared through the intersection, whipping us with windy spray. Laughing delightedly at our newfound *brakes*, we congratulated each other and climbed back inside.

Twice more this course of action became necessary before we found an all-night service station and refilled the thirsty brake cylinder. From the looks on the faces of passing motorists, we deduced that this

sort of thing wasn't done too often in Dubuque, Iowa. But we had no further difficulties with the vehicle after that.

Keep On Going

For the next two days we drove steadily, not stopping to sleep at all. After half a day in Chicago, we drove out and followed Lake Michigan through Gary, Indiana, and on up the expressway to Detroit. There we crossed back into Canada, continuing through Windsor to Toronto, and another night at the YMCA. The following evening, we rumbled into Montreal, 3,200 miles from Vancouver, and the end of the first leg of our long trip to Africa.

Before starting this adventure, we had made several long trips without sleeping, driving non-stop to save time. Sometimes we traded off when one of us began falling asleep. This experience, to which we gave little thought at the time, of driving for two or three days without sleep, even when we were so tired we began to hallucinate, would serve us well in the months ahead. It may have saved our lives.

Right On Target

We had made Montreal our first objective, to be accomplished within 10 days and with a minimum of expense. It took us nine days and cost just \$200 for everything, including gasoline and oil (and brake fluid!), food, motels and YMCAs, and beer. The weather was bad but our spirits were high, and we rolled into Montreal singing, all four of us in the front seat. It was a grand beginning.

From Montreal, our next objective was London, England—the cheapest way possible. For three days, we tramped the waterfront seeking a Europe-bound ship needing crewmembers. However, with

winter in the air, there were few ships in the inland port, and they had no vacancies for unskilled seamen. It soon became obvious that we weren't going to get a job that would save us the cost of the fare.

After discussing it for awhile, we agreed that not only was it too late in the year to find a job on a boat, but also it was too late to start for Africa, even if we did manage to get to Europe. We decided to work somewhere for the winter and set off in the spring. The question was, where?

The First Real Lessons

For you to accomplish any big goal, you will have to learn certain lessons and gain new knowledge and experience. From the moment you actually launch a new venture, you will begin to learn at an accelerated rate.

As it happens, we only learn when it costs us money or emotion, or both. There seems to be no other way. We have to pay for anything worthwhile. And we never get our lessons on the cheap.

The key to maximizing the value that an experience holds for you is to look into any setback or obstacle for the valuable lesson or benefit that it contains. Why has this happened? What can you learn that will make you smarter next time? If you look for the good, for the valuable lesson, you always seem to find something.

To take and keep full control over your mind and emotions, here is a great mental exercise. No matter what goes wrong, focus on the future rather than the past. Think about what you are trying to accomplish and where you want to go. Learn from the past and then let it go.

To improve your ability to think and react effectively, think about the solution rather than the problem. Think about what concrete action you can take right now rather than what happened or who is to blame. Keep asking, “What’s the solution? What’s the next step? What do we do now?”

Chapter 4

The First Crisis

This situation in Montreal, there being no jobs for us to work our way to Europe as we had planned for so long, triggered the first crisis on our trip. One of the guys, who had only come along for the adventure, decided to quit and hitchhike home. The other two, my fellow Bon Vivants, Geoff and Bob, decided to stop looking for a job on a ship and instead use their limited funds to purchase passage on a freighter headed for England.

I was really upset with this decision, especially since they had obviously discussed and decided upon it separate from me. I argued with them and tried to talk them out of it. I told them that ***quitting is a habit***. If they quit now, the first time we met resistance and disappointment, they would always quit. They would establish a

pattern for failure rather than a pattern for success. It was a matter of principle that we not give up at the first sign of resistance to our plans.

Parting Of The Ways

But their minds were made up. They were impatient to get to Europe and they weren't interested in finding another way. We went to the bank, withdrew all the money we had so carefully accumulated over the previous year and split it three ways. They used fully half of their money to book passage on a freighter that took a small number of paying passengers. They left the next day. Our partnership was officially dissolved, just two weeks after starting out.

I later learned that ***partnerships are the worst of all forms of business relationships***. They start off with high hopes and usually end with dashed expectations, ruined friendships, and mutual recriminations. Always one of the partners is more dedicated and works harder, while the others contribute less and less while demanding an equal share of whatever profits result.

Reevaluating The Situation

I decided that it was too late in the year to go to Africa anyway and resolved to stay in Montreal for the winter. I got a job as a construction laborer in an office high rise, carrying construction materials for the carpenters and joiners all day long. Later, I worked as a factory worker on a production line, screwing nuts onto bolts hour after hour.

Because of my limited means and savings, I rented a tiny one-room apartment with a foldout bed and a small kitchen. The

temperature that winter fell to 35 degrees below zero, and life seemed very bleak indeed.

Here I was, 20 years old, 3,200 miles from my family, with no intention of going back home. I had failed in high school, fooling around and working as a dishwasher in a small hotel rather than studying. I was uneducated, unskilled, and regularly unemployed. And I wanted to go to Africa. This was not a great start in life.

My Great Revelation

I still remember that fateful night, sitting at my little kitchen table, alone, with the cold winter wind howling outside. It suddenly dawned on me that ***everything and anything I ever accomplished in life was up to me. I was completely responsible.*** No one was ever going to do anything for me. If I did not take charge of my life and make changes, nothing was ever going to change. I would remain an underpaid laborer, pinching pennies and worrying about money for the rest of my life.

It was an incredible revelation! I determined right there and then that my future would be different from my past. I wrote out a series of goals for myself and resolved to take action on them. That night, that realization, was the turning point in my life.

The very next day, I bought a book and began to study French, preparing for my travels in France and Africa. I started taking karate lessons three times per week. I began reading every book I could get on every subject that interested me. I began my lifelong commitment to personal development and personal success. I was responsible.

Back On The Road Again

Five months later, at the end of February, I packed all my belongings in an old trunk and shipped them to Halifax, the biggest port on the Atlantic coast. I then spent several chilly days on the road hitchhiking my way across the Maritime Provinces to Halifax and once more checked into the local YMCA.

My goal was to get a job on a ship, work my way to England, join my friends again and set off once more for Africa. I got up early that cold winter morning and began scouring the waterfront, visiting every ship from one end of the harbor to the other and asking if they needed a crewman for the crossing England.

By the end of the day, after hours of plodding from dock to dock, I had gone to every ship on the waterfront, and had been turned down every time. There was not a single ship that was going to England that needed anyone for the voyage. Tired and dejected, I trudged up the long hill back to the warmth of the YMCA, wondering what I would do now.

A Lucky Break

Then, something remarkable happened. Just as I reached the front of the YMCA, I turned and looked back one last time toward the waterfront. From that vantage point, I saw two ships load cargo at a dock somewhat apart from the other ships in the harbor. I hadn't seen them before. But they were the only two ships that I hadn't visited looking for a job.

By this time, it was late in the afternoon. I was tired and hungry. I stood on the sidewalk and looked longingly at the welcoming warmth and beckoning comfort of the YMCA. Then I

forced myself to turn away and trudge down the long hill to the two ships and give it one more try.

The first ship was going down the east coast of the U.S., but the second ship, the Norwegian freighter Nordpohl, was going to Manchester, England, and yes, they had an opening for a galley boy for the crossing. The job was mine, if I could be on board and ready to depart by 8 p.m. that night, just two hours away!

I was ecstatic! I had a job. My last shot had paid off. My goal, my dream of working my way across the Atlantic on a ship, was realized. Could I be ready to depart in two hours? You bet!

The Persistence Test

I learned a vital, even *life changing* lesson from this experience. I learned and never forgot that ***often your greatest success, your great breakthrough, your lucky break comes one step beyond where you are ready to quit, to throw in the towel.*** It is almost as though nature places a final “persistence test” in your path just to test you, to see how badly you really want it. As the poem says:

*And you never can tell how close you are,
It may be near when it seems so far.
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit,
It's when things seem worst that you must not quit.*

I hurried down to the train depot to retrieve my trunk, went back to the YMCA to collect my things, and at 8 p.m., right on schedule, I was on board the Nordpohl as the ship cast its lines and

headed out into the Atlantic. I stood on the bow of the ship as the city of Halifax disappeared into the night. I was really off to see the world!

It's Testing Time!

Life is a continuous succession of problems, large and small. Like the waves of the ocean, they never stop coming. The only thing about problems you can control is how you respond to them, positive or negative, helpful or hurtful. Do you treat them as stumbling blocks or stepping stones?

Most people quit at the first crisis. They collapse, like tents with the center poles removed. They give up and retreat back to their comfort zones, at lower levels of challenge and accomplishment. Eventually, this tendency to quit becomes a conditioned response to trouble, a habit that is hard to break.

But this is not for you! You should view every problem, setback or crisis as a “test,” sent to teach you something you need to know to be more successful in the future. You should look within it for the valuable lesson it contains. It is always there.

Resolve *in advance* that no matter what happens, you will never give up. You will bounce rather than break. You will keep on keeping on until you eventually succeed.

Chapter 5

Setting Off Once More

“Life is a series of steps. Things are done gradually. Once in a while there is a giant step, but most of the time we are taking small, seemingly insignificant steps on the stairway of life.” (Ralph Ransom)

The Atlantic crossing took six weeks, including a stop to take on cargo in St. John, New Brunswick. For most of the five weeks at sea, we were in a storm of hundred foot swells, sweeping, icy rains and non-stop work feeding the crew and swabbing the galley. The crew was a rough mixture of multiple nationalities and languages, not your typical college graduates. The time at sea with these men was a great introduction to what I was to experience later on my journey.

At the end of March 1965, I signed off in Manchester, got my pay, collected my belongings and took a train up to Coventry in the English Midlands to one more join up with Geoff and Bob. It had been a long, cold winter for me in Montreal after we decided to go our separate ways.

Quitting Becomes A Habit

They had taken a ship to Amsterdam in the first week of October and had arrived in England four weeks later. A few days later, they had set off for Africa by themselves, taking the ferry from Dover to Calais and trying to hitchhike across France. But French drivers don't stop for hitchhikers. After several hours of standing by the side of the road waving their thumbs, just as I had predicted some months ago in Montreal, they quit again.

They didn't know, as most people don't, that ***quitting is an insidious habit that grows so slowly one is unaware of its enticements until it is so deeply ingrained that it cuts off all hope of success and great achievement.***

Discouraged, they took the ferry back to England and then made their way up to Coventry to visit friends of Geoff's family. They ended up staying there through the winter, working as lifeguards at the public swimming pool.

Spring, Glorious Spring

Now spring was in the air. The country was lovely and green, as the travel posters show, and early flowers brightened the tiny thatched villages along the course of the railway. There was a magic sparkle in the air that one could feel dancing along the skin, bringing with it restlessness and an urge to be out doing things. As the train rumbled across the English countryside toward Coventry, I was thinking how strange it was that we would plan and anticipate for over a year, set off boldly, and then do almost nothing for six months.

I suppose it was the launch that had been the important thing, that first step, that cutting loose and casting off, leaving the familiar ways far behind. All around us in Vancouver, friends and acquaintances from school and work were getting married and settling into careers. A pattern of day-to-day living was forming; the grip of adulthood and maturity was tightening.

But we had broken the pattern, like colts shaking off the traces and running free, kicking up our heels, secure in knowing that when we tired of the open pasture we could always return to the security and stability of the lives we had left behind us.

It didn't really matter if we stopped somewhere for the winter; we were free, unfettered by responsibility and the necessity to account for our present and future. Surely in a year or two we would have to return like prodigal sons, and earn our places in our well-ordered society. But we couldn't be satisfied with one place until we'd grown tired of looking at the others, and that wouldn't be for a long time.

Begin With No Guarantees

I learned later that the most important thing to do with a new goal is to launch, to begin with no guarantee of success. Once you start off toward an unknown destination, everything will change anyway. New avenues and opportunities open up for you—openings that you could not have seen had you not been in forward motion. The best rule is always, “Leap and the net will appear!”

The taxi dropped me at the Stoke Hill Guild House late that afternoon. I soon found the narrow, cement-floored room of my two friends. It was locked, and since they were not to be found on the grounds among the other working people coming from jobs in the mills and factories of Coventry, I climbed in the window and made myself comfortable. As the sun went down, I drifted off to sleep peacefully. It had been a long trip.

Three hours later, they crashed in singing, startling me awake with their drunken rendition of “She loves you, yeah, yeah, yeah.” Bob was halfway into bed with his cute girlfriend when he saw me sitting there, blinking at the sudden light and noise. His face broke into a mile-wide grin, and we embraced with a joyous whoop. Geoff was right behind him, and for five minutes we laughed, asked questions,

and tried to catch up on five months in one bubbling outburst. It was like old home week.

Catching Up

After we had calmed down a bit, I told them about my life at sea, and the bully on the ship who had turned out not to be so tough after all. Bob got out his suitcase and showed me the picture of himself from the newspaper, after he had won the third-place ribbon in the “Mr. Coventry” bodybuilding contest that January. Suddenly there came a harsh rap on the door.

It was a pair of English Bobbies investigating a report that an Austin van had smashed through a barrier in a nearby automatic parking lot. The license number was suspiciously identical to that of the van driven by Geoff and Bob. It turned out that they hadn’t had a shilling for the automatic gate release and in their inebriated state had said, “What the hell!” and driven right through it. After long arguments, denials, and promises to pay in the morning, the police departed, and we all had a good laugh.

The planning and discussion were wisely put off until the morning when clearer heads would prevail.

Saying Goodbyes

Once again we were on our way to Africa. The boys had a lot of good-byes to say after five months in Coventry, and we had a lot of beers together to catch up on. But three days later, everything was wrapped up, the van was sold, and we caught the morning train for London. Most of our luggage, including the big trunk I had brought

from Montreal, was sent to Potter's Bar, a hamlet north of London, where we hoped to leave it with my aunt.

Russell Square, an area known for its inexpensive bed and breakfast hotels, was a 20-minute walk from Euston Station, where we arrived at noon. Taking turns lugging the two overstuffed suitcases, we inquired until we found a hotel with a vacancy for three and a landlady with some imagination with regard to price. After a little haggling, she agreed to give us a reduction if one of us would sleep on the floor in the room with one double bed. That was no hardship for three stout lads on their way to Africa.

Reevaluating and Regrouping

Your ability to think, to apply your mind to your situation, is the greatest power you have. When the situation around you is constantly changing and your knowledge is incomplete, the more often you stop the clock to assess and reassess your situation, the better decisions you will make.

Whenever you experience resistance or temporary failure, ask yourself "What are my assumptions? What am I assuming to be true that might not be true at all? How could I test them? What changes will I have to make if my assumptions are wrong?"

Try to keep your ego out of it. Focus on what's right rather than who's right. Be prepared to admit that you could be dead wrong about your current course of action. The person who discovers he or she is on the wrong road and turns back quickly, is the one who makes the most progress.

“It’s not easy but you have to be willing to make mistakes. And the earlier you make those mistakes, the better.” (Jane Cahill Pfeiffer)

Chapter 6

Getting Down to Business

“An intelligent plan is the first step to success. The man who plans knows where he is going, knows what progress he is making and has a pretty good idea when he will arrive.” (Basil S. Walsh)

We had left the actual planning of a route and mode of transportation to and through Africa until we were a little closer to the objective. One lesson in our previous traveling had repeated itself time and time again: ***Be clear about the goal but be flexible about the process of achieving it.*** Sure, you must set reasonable goals as ultimate aims, and work toward achieving those goals, but you shouldn't decide upon the intermediate steps too closely. ***Each step toward an objective modifies and influences, to a greater or lesser degree, the following steps.*** The greater the number of unknowns there are in the situation, the more flexibility you need to deal with the eventualities that arise. In our situation, since we were almost totally ignorant of the road ahead, we had avoided making specific plans.

Keep An Open Mind

Later in life, I learned that your willingness to continually re-evaluate your plans, especially when you experience resistance, disappointment or temporary failure, can be critical to your long-term success. The willingness to question your best-laid plans, to consider the possibility that you could be wrong or misinformed, is the mark of a superior mind.

This attitude of accepting change and adapting to difficulties gave us a certain resilience and buoyancy that made it almost impossible for us to become downhearted or discouraged at the unexpected twists and turns of fate. We would simply bounce back and try something new.

Our first objective had been to leave Vancouver with as much money as possible. The second had been to cross Canada to Montreal, spending as little money as possible. The third objective had been to reach London with a minimum of expense. Our fourth objective was to reach the crown colony of Gibraltar, on the very doorstep of the African continent. There we would decide on our fifth objective.

Our One Page Map

The next day, we sat down in a small teashop with an atlas. It contained a one-page map of Africa that included Europe as well. With this single page to go on, we worked out a tentative route for our journey. We would cross France and Spain to Gibraltar, sail across the straits to Morocco, cross the Atlas Mountains into the Sahara, and cross the desert to Senegal.

From there we would follow the hump of Africa around and into Lagos, Nigeria, the modern capital of British influence in West Africa. Once in Lagos, we could decide whether to head directly south or cross through central Africa and then south through Kenya and Tanzania. Our ultimate goal was Johannesburg, South Africa. It seemed quite straightforward.

The Lure of Self-Delusion

We knew that the decision would be dictated by conditions beyond our control, but we had no idea just how extensive would be the difference between what we had innocently planned and the reality.

We made the dreadful error of superimposing our experiences in North America onto our travel plans in Africa. We assumed that “roads were roads” and that the lines on the little map were as drivable as roads in North America. We thought that we could travel from one place to another to anywhere without hindrance. I later learned that ***unexamined assumptions lie at the root of most problems in life.***

Our route planned, we then discussed what mode of conveyance we would use. There were several methods available. Bob had found that the cheapest way to travel from London to Johannesburg was by plane—it would cost just \$300 each, which was all we had. We considered flying to South Africa and returning to Europe by land via Cairo, but disregarded the idea as being too expensive. We also rejected the idea of going by ship for the same reason. We therefore decided that we would travel from London to Johannesburg by land—all the way.

Unexamined Assumptions

Since our little map clearly showed roads through Africa, it was evident that many people had already driven across the continent. We reasoned, falsely, that there couldn't be much challenge in following the footsteps of countless others. However, with our limited funds, a vehicle would be too expensive. Besides, we wanted to make the trip

in a way that would bring us some fame and glory. It would also have to be relatively inexpensive. What about bicycles?

Bicycles, we reasoned, were cheap to buy, repair, and operate. Because of our limited speed, and the necessity of living off the land, we would gain a greater understanding of the countries we passed through. An added benefit was that we would become physically hardened by pedaling all day and sleeping out each night. And we'd never heard of anyone making such a trip on a bicycle. There was no way of telling how much acclaim we could receive. We might even set a record or win a prize. Unanimously we agreed that bicycles were the answer.

Taking Action Immediately

That decided, there were two places we could buy bicycles, there in London, or in Gibraltar, after hitchhiking across France and Spain. The main argument for Gibraltar was that, after all, Africa was our objective, and we should get there with a minimum of delay. On the other hand, we needed a period of time to train ourselves for the trip across Africa. We therefore decided, with our limited knowledge, we would become accustomed to traveling on bicycles in the civilized countries of France and Spain. That decision made, we set out to buy bicycles in London that very day.

This was another decision that probably saved us from our own innocence and ignorance. We were forced to use our wits by our limited resources. Just as in starting a new business, ***bootstrapping your way up on your profits from sales is usually better than starting with too much money***. By starting with limited means, you are forced to fall back on your natural intelligence and ingenuity when

you experience the inevitable disappointments that accompany any attempt to do anything new or different. As a result, you quickly develop the resilience and tenacity that you must have to succeed later. Buying bicycles did this for us.

The Common Pool

When we arrived in London, our combined savings totaled just over \$1,000. From the start, we pooled the entire amount into what we called “the company.” From that point onward, every purchase and expense was paid out of this cash pool. Having a common objective, we subordinated personal desires and pettiness to the common good. We agreed to be, “One for all, and all for one!”

Anything we bought or did was agreed upon unanimously. Anything any of us had, we all had, right down to underwear and razor blades. In the days and miles ahead, we would have many heated discussions and disagreements, but personal ownership never entered into them. After a while we no longer talked in terms of “I” and “me,” but rather “we” and “the Bon Vivants.”

We bought three used bicycles, three rucksacks, a kettle, a tiny stove, a frying pan, some cutlery, a few dishes, and a little brown teapot. From our belongings, we chose a few clothes that fit us all; a pair each of tennis shoes and jeans, socks, T-shirts, underwear, and three warm sweaters. A shaving kit, three towels, three books, and a radio completed the outfitting. Dressed in woolen caps and high-collared plastic rain jackets, we felt well attired for our crossing of Europe. And so, dividing the load evenly, we tied it onto our bicycles and pedaled out of London towards Potter’s Bar to visit my aunt.

Ready To Go

At the time, Geoff was 20 years old and weighed a solid 180 pounds. Bob was a little taller and a little heavier, also solid at 184 pounds, spread over his rawboned frame. I was 21 and weighed 185 pounds, the heaviest and the oldest. I should have known better than to choose bicycles. But in those days, we were hopelessly optimistic.

We were bursting with energy and eagerness, puffed up with ambition and high ideal, strong and happy and joyous at being at last on our way to Africa, the ultimate in high adventure. In those first carefree days, there was nowhere we couldn't go and nothing we couldn't do. We were indomitable, supermen, world-beaters on our way to Africa.

Potter's Bar

We had sent the things we couldn't take with us to the rail depot in Potter's Bar where my Aunt Barbara lived. We were hoping that she would have a place for us to store the things and perhaps somewhere we could sleep the night. We were in luck on both accounts. Although she was unsure at first which of us three strapping lads was her nephew, she not having seen me since I was 13, she readily threw open her little garage to us and offered us a place to sleep the night. After bringing the trunk and the suitcases from the depot and storing them away, we sat down to explain our plans and intentions to "conquer Africa." Although we were tired from our 20-mile ride from London, we talked until midnight before going to bed in her little guest room.

Promising faithfully to return no later than October for a longer visit, we waved good-bye the next morning and rode toward Dover and France.

Flexibility Is the Key

The most important quality you can develop to assure great success in times of change and turbulence is the quality of flexibility.

Be open to new information. Be willing to accept feedback and self-correct. Be willing to admit that you could be wrong, that there could be a better way.

A famous military axiom says, “No strategy survives first contact with the enemy.”

No plan, no matter how detailed, survives first contact with reality. Your job is to be clear about your goal, and flexible about the process of attaining it.

“Many a one has succeeded only because he has failed after repeated efforts. If he had never met defeat, he would never have known any great victory.” (Orison Swett Marden)

SECTION 3:

THE REAL JOURNEY BEGINS AT LAST

“To win without risk is to triumph without glory.” (Pierre Corneille)

Shakespeare wrote, “What’s past is merely prelude.” One of Murphy’s Laws is, “Before you do anything, you have to do something else first.” What we know for sure, at each stage of our lives, is that what’s coming is more important than what has gone before.

Laurence Durrell, the author, once wrote, “I do not write for people who have never asked themselves, ‘When does real life begin?’”

This life is not a rehearsal for something else. Successful, happy people live intensely in the moment, in the “now” of life and reality. They have learned to combine a long-term vision with a short-term focus. They are dreamers with their feet firmly planted in the reality of the current situation.

To achieve something you’ve never achieved before, you must do something you’ve never done before. You must become someone you’ve never been before. As Goethe said, “To have more, we must first be more.”

The great majority of people want their success and happiness on the cheap, without paying full price for it, in advance, as nature demands. This continual striving after something for nothing, of achievement without expense, leads to frustration, failure, and impoverishment of spirit.

The good news is that nature is exceedingly generous. If you are willing to put something in before you get something out, to pay the price, you will eventually enjoy rewards out of all proportion to your efforts.

More than that, you’ll become a person of character and competence, of pride and self-respect. You’ll become the kind of

person you always dreamed you would become, the kind that others look up to and admire.

“If we did all the things we are capable of doing, we would literally astound ourselves.” (Thomas Edison)

Chapter 7

Setting Out

“The power which resides in man is new in nature, and none but he knows what that is which he can do, nor does he know until he has tried.” (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

The distance by land from London to Gibraltar is approximately 1,600 miles by the shortest route. Allowing for our inexperience with traveling long distances by bicycle, we optimistically reckoned that we could average 80 miles a day. That would put us in Gibraltar by the end of April. However, there were several variables we failed to take into consideration—the first and worst being the hills located directly in our line of travel.

We covered 30 miles on the first day of that terrible trip to Gibraltar, collapsing in an irrigation ditch south of London, exhausted and famished, just before sundown. Our legs were rubbery with fatigue, and we smelled of sweat and exhaust fumes, our hair dried like straw and our faces streaked with dirt and grime. The day had been a battle from the first flat tire, but we had won, and surely, we thought, tomorrow would be a good deal easier.

Cautiously, worried about being arrested for trespassing, we built a lean-to with our ground sheet and camouflaged it with twigs and grass, hiding our bicycles in the bushes nearby.

We managed to work an element of drama into everything we did, proceeding as though there was a plot afoot to thwart our adventure. We assumed that people would look at us when we went

into stores to buy food, and say under their breaths to their friends, “I wonder where those young men with the air of mystery are going?”

It is more likely, though, that they said something like, “Bums! Every year, more and more bums on the road. What’s the country coming to?”

After a supper of bread and cheese, followed by Geoff’s tea made over a smoky fire, we sat wearily for a few minutes and then, by common assent, crawled into the bags and slept. Tomorrow would surely be better.

Back On The Road

In the morning, we woke stiff and cold, dirty and hungry. It took two hours of pedaling to work the pain out of our thighs and shoulders. Geoff said something like, “Muscle ache means muscle development,” in an attempt at encouragement. Bob and I refused to speak to him for the next 10 miles.

And the hunger! Until you’ve sweated yourself sick with pain and lack of nourishment on a bicycle, you don’t know what hunger is! We stopped in the evenings trembling with weakness and woke in the mornings from the knife twisted into our empty bellies. Once we stopped at a cafe for breakfast and ate the entire menu twice. After that, we couldn’t trust ourselves in places selling hot food, forcing the buying of supplies for supper and breakfast at small grocery stores. The all-consuming hunger was a constant companion, never far away. It was another factor we had not taken into consideration when we chose bicycles.

Dover To Calais

Three days after saying good-bye to Aunt Barbara, we rode into Dover and along the White Cliffs to the ferry terminal. During the crossing to Calais, we thumbed through our French-English dictionary, looking up and writing down words we thought we would need. And we were soon to need a lot of words.

We soon learned that the travel book tenet “Everyone speaks English” was wrong. Not even the members of the crew on the ferry spoke any English. We rode from the extreme north of France to the extreme south and never met a single French person who spoke English. I guess they hadn’t read the same travel books!

We realized that a working knowledge of French was not just an asset; it was a necessity. Fortunately, I had begun studying French in earnest back in Montreal in October. My understanding and eventual fluency in the language as we drove deeper into Africa proved to be a valuable asset. It probably saved out lives later on, but I’m getting ahead of myself.

You Can Learn What You Need To Learn

Later in life, I later learned that the biggest mental block to learning a new language, or any acquiring a new skill, is the fear of looking or sounding foolish during the time between unfamiliarity and mastery. A rule that has served me all my life is this: ***Whatever is worth doing well is worth doing poorly at first, and often it’s worth doing poorly several times.***

The power is always on the side of the person with superior knowledge and skills. The law of Requisite Variety says that, “In any group of people, the individual having the highest integrated level of

knowledge and skill will tend to rise to dominate and lead all other individuals in that group.” Your job is to become that person.

The good news is that ***you can learn anything you need to learn to achieve any goal you set for yourself.*** Your personal boundaries are determined more by inner limitations than by outer circumstances. The only real limits on your potential are the ones you impose on yourself by your own thinking. When you change your thinking, you change your life.

New Situations Require New Attitudes

Frustrated expectations lie at the root of most unhappiness. To survive and thrive in new situations, you must keep your mind open and always be willing to question your expectations. Are they realistic, based on new information?

The good news is that you are extremely adaptable to change and circumstance. You can learn to cope with any situation, if you decide to.

One of the most helpful exercises you can do is to separate “facts” from “problems.” A fact is just like the weather. It cannot be changed. You don’t waste a minute of energy or emotion railing against “facts.” Instead you accept them, adjust to them, and then get on with your life.

A “problem,” however, is different from a fact. A problem is a situation that you can do something about. It is amenable to a solution.

The key to happiness, success, and personal effectiveness is for you to focus on the *solutions* to the problems in your life. It is to think about the future, to think about what you want and where you are

going. Success comes from focusing on those things that you can do something about.

And remember, you can learn anything you need to learn to achieve any goal you set for yourself, even getting across France and Spain to Gibraltar.

“Nobody succeeds beyond his or her wildest expectations unless he or she begins with some wild expectations.” (Ralph Charell)

Chapter 8

Our Tour de France

April in France can be very lovely, I am sure. Through the sweat and rain of those arduous days, I glimpsed many indications of a wonderful potential. The promise of summer was everywhere in the rolling green hills, the early buttercups along the grassy shoulders, the swallows singing, flying in from the south. However, the gusting winds and intermittent rains that swept across the open road, drenching and sending their piercing chills through our thin jeans and down our uncovered necks, were a reminder that winter was not long past and summer was not yet here.

The Roads All Run Uphill

The roads don't follow the lay of the land because the hills are not high, and it was obviously more practical to build them straight from town to town, over hills and plains with very few curves to offset their directness. A motorist in northern France can thus make very good time between towns and over long distances. And the roads are, of course, built for motorists.

On a bicycle it is a different bucket of sweat altogether. The law of averages says that for every amount of uphill there must be an equal and opposite amount of downhill, but somehow it didn't seem to work out that way on the roads we traveled. The time we lost on the ascent, we should have recovered on the descent. But more often than not, the downhill rides were into the wind. And, if the descent was gradual, it would be as difficult pedaling downhill as it was pedaling on a level stretch.

I learned later in life that, in any new venture, the roads are all uphill, and the wind is always in your face. Murphy's Laws apply with a vengeance: *"Anything that can go wrong will go wrong. Of all the things that can go wrong, the worst possible thing will go wrong at the worst possible time and cost the greatest amount of money."* Murphy was our constant companion.

Keep On Going

As we approached the uphill stretches (and there were so many of them), we'd pedal furiously in third gear, then second, then first, the thrusts coming slower and slower, the muscles along the tops of our thighs burning, our breaths coming in painful gasps. Our forward momentum would cease and the bikes would come to a halt. We would then jump off and push the bikes the rest of the way up the hill, finally arriving at the top pouring with sweat.

Often we were strung out over a mile, and we used the hilltops as places to stop until the third man came up. Then we'd remount the bikes and attack the next hill, hour after hour, doggedly trying to make a reasonable average of kilometers covered for each day.

Exhausted as we were each night, we slept long and soundly in forests and fields along the road, despite the rain and discomfort. Around 10 a.m. we would break camp and get back on our bicycles, stiff but rested, and always in good spirits. This refreshed feeling and the good spirits would last until the third hill, after which it once more became determined slogging and unending miles of hard work. The stiffness abated by noon, only to come seeping back shortly after, staying with us for the duration of the day's ride.

The Battle Against The Road

The wet, windswept road became an enemy to be conquered. The diminishing distances between us and the towns ahead became our measures of victory and achievement. We had by now realized that bicycles were not the ideal solution to our transportation problems, but we had named our poison and neither the road nor the bicycles were going to defeat us. We were the Bon Vivants, we were undefeatable, and we were going to Africa.

If those cold, windy, pain-wracked days were some of the worst of our lives, they were some of the best, too. When we stopped in the late afternoon to camp, usually in a small clump of trees not far off the road, the first thing we did was to build a fire. The second thing we did was to open the bottle of wine purchased in the last town. The fire would warm our faces and dry our clothes, and the wine took care of the rest.

By the time supper was cooked, the magic warmth of the wine would tingle its happy way into our tired brains and back down again, flowing through our bodies like music, erasing the day in its soothing passage. With the dinner eaten and the fire crackling and dancing, a joyous feeling and a peaceful content would settle over our camp. We'd laugh and loaf and dream and feel truly sorry for anyone who could never feel as wonderfully happy and as genuinely fulfilled as we were, out on the open road, and on our way to Africa.

Later, I learned that ***there is often a fine line between the best of times and the worst of times, between pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow.*** As Chesterton once wrote, "An adventure is merely an inconvenience, rightly considered." Of course, it often takes a lot of

imagination to see difficult situation as an adventure, but that 's what imagination is for.

Making A Virtue of Necessity

We couldn't afford to stay in hotels, and after a few nights of camping, we had no interest in being anywhere but in the element we had chosen—that of cool crisp nights and happy hours, of laughter unto tears, of unspeakable joy. Never had we been so cheerful and easy to laugh, never had we eaten so well and enjoyed it so much, never had our nights been so restful and so much appreciated. The camping in the evenings almost made us forget the conditions of the day that made it so treasured.

But then came the mornings, and breakfast, and another day of stinging sweat and aching backs. I guess the intensity of the pleasure of the wine-soaked evenings by the little fires was only made possible by the grueling labor and pain of the long days that preceded them.

Rough And Ready Looking

We must have looked a bit unusual as we bicycled our way along the roads, across the farm country, through tiny villages, our faces unshaven, machetes jutting out of our bulging rucksacks. Often people came to their windows and doors to follow us silently with their eyes, watching our passing until we were far down the road, before returning to what they had been doing.

When we stopped to buy food in the larger towns, we were often asked where we were from and where we were going, and when they learned that our destination was Africa, they would say that Africa was very far, or very hot, or very dangerous, but they always

seemed to approve. No matter *why* we were going there, people liked the idea that we were going somewhere else, as if the going it self was an answer to something.

I learned later that people will often encourage you in a risky venture as long as it means nothing to them. If you invited them to come along, it would be a different thing. In life and in business, the acid test of their approval or commitment is to invite them to participate or invest their own money. That's when you learn how deep their feelings are.

The Direct Route

Our route was planned as the shortest distance between London and Gibraltar, since even a few miles of difference in one route, as opposed to another, meant extra hours of toil. We rode south to Boulogne, then to Abbeville, and on through Beauvais to Chartres on the fifth day of pedaling.

After cashing a traveler's check in a small bank in Chartres, we sat down on the curb outside to assess our position. It was not encouraging. The wind, rain, hunger, muscular aches, and pains had all combined to keep our speed so low that we were only averaging 40 miles a day. From the original \$1,000, we had only \$750 left, and we still had a long way to go to Gibraltar.

The bicycles and equipment had cost a lot, but what was gobbling our funds was the price of food. Although we were limiting ourselves to only two large meals per day, those meals had to be enormous and nutritious. Meat, eggs, cheese, bread, milk and vegetables for three ravenous fellows was inordinately expensive in France, even though we were buying carefully. At our rate of speed,

we couldn't possibly finish the first part of our trip in less than another four weeks, and by that time we'd be very low on cash.

The Tipping Point

What really upset us was a genial motorcyclist, an American, who stopped to chat with us. It turned out that he had left London that morning and covered the same ground in eight hours that we had covered in five days. We smiled through our tears.

I learned later that a person who is properly equipped and who knows what he is doing can cover greater distance faster and easier than the most determined but inexperienced person can cover under the same circumstance. This is why businesses started by experienced entrepreneurs have a 90 percent success rate, while businesses started by inexperienced people fail 90 percent of the time. There is simply no replacement for having done it before, for knowledge and experience.

We finally calculated that it would be cheaper to take a train than to continue on bicycles. Once into the south of France, we hoped the wind would be gone and the weather would be considerably more pleasant for bicycling. We would make better time and enjoy the traveling, something we were having a rather tough time doing in the rain.

The Orleans Challenge

To save money and justify taking a train instead of sticking it out in the rain, we made ourselves a deal. It was then noon; if we could be in Orleans, 71 kilometers further south, in time to catch the

10:25 southbound train from Paris that night, we would have earned the train ride and there would be nothing on our consciences.

“How’s that for an idea, fellows?”

“What?”

“Oh, come on now, it’s not that far.”

“Yes, I know. I’m just as tired as you are.”

“It’s a matter of pride, that’s why.”

Eventually, we all agreed that it was a fine idea and headed out for Orleans. We had already bicycled 20 kilometers that day, and the rain hadn’t let up for a second. If we made it on time, we deserved to travel a while by train.

All afternoon we punished ourselves, pedaling into the icy wind, knuckles white on the handlebars from the cold, eyes narrowed against the lash of the fine spray, chests burning with the exertion, and legs screaming silently from the pain that gradually spread up into the back and shoulders and worked its way down the arms into the wrists.

Our jeans were soaked through. We were chilled to the bone. But there was no way to justify a stop and no place to stop, if we could justify it. The hours marched by with the milestones jeering at our creeping pace. Forty kilometers from Orleans, and we were on our last legs. Thirty kilometers to go, and we no longer dared to stop at the top of the hills for fear our exhausted bodies would refuse to continue. We would reach the end of the upgrades and just keep on trudging with the bicycles until we had enough breath to throw our legs over and take up the silent count of pedal strokes once more.

Twenty kilometers to go, and we knew there was no stopping us. Ignoring the incessant honking of passing motorists as the bikes wandered into the road, ignoring the hollow twisting knots of hunger

in the gut, ignoring everything but the road directly in front of the wheel, like silent, relentless robots we forced the hateful pedals down.

The Good Samaritan

Just after dusk, a yellow Citroen passed us, beeping its horn as it sped by, then slowing and stopping on the road ahead. As we rode our bedraggled way past the car, a well-dressed man got out and motioned for us to stop.

Unable to get off our bikes, we straddled them weakly and waited to hear his troubles. He was very gracious and led us to understand that he lived in Orleans, and would take our gear in with him to make our loads a little lighter.

We were too exhausted to argue or be suspicious. We just nodded in mute agreement and dropped the bicycles unceremoniously in the street in our fumbling haste to throw our backpacks into the opened trunk. There was no discussion about honest intentions or ulterior motives. We thanked him and stood watching as his car disappeared into the night. Stuffing the address into his pocket, Geoff picked up his bike and climbed on wordlessly. We followed suit and began the silent cadence once more.

When you're at wits end, your load no longer bearable, amazingly some bit of relief will come to your aid. The burden remains, but at least you can continue. "Act boldly, and unseen forces will come to your aid."

Lights And Music

Because of our ravening hunger and mind-numbing fatigue, the last 10 kilometers of the day were lost in a haze of signs and arrows

pointing toward “Orleans-Centre Ville.” Every muscle in our bodies felt as though it were being held in place with a hot spike. The rain had stopped, and the moisture on the road and electric wires caught the lights from oncoming cars, sparkling clear against the blackness of the fields. It was like riding through an alley of flashing pain and stunning motion until the road suddenly widened into four lanes and poured out into the square in the center of town.

The main street through the square was ablaze with lights and music, honking horns and the flashing headlights reflecting against the rain-damp roads and the row of gaily lit restaurants lining the boulevard. Glasses tinkled and laughter echoed from table to table, the white-uniformed waiters gliding in and out with overfilled trays, the jukeboxes blaring into the crowds surging along the broad sidewalks. We stopped at the corner of the street where the entire panorama of light and excitement began and stretched for several blocks. Stolidly we stared with glazed eyes, taking it all in happily. It was 5:30. We had made it to Orleans on time, but we felt like the survivors of a massacre.

An Invitation To Dine

At that moment, one of the sons who had been in the back seat of the man in the Citroen rode up on his bicycle, babbling in French and enthusiastically motioning us to follow him. We were halfway off our bikes and headed in the direction of the nearest cafe, numb with exhaustion and giddy from hunger, and the suggestion that we delay eating to retrieve our equipment was greeted with scowls. The boy, however, insisted, assuring us that it wasn't far and suggesting that food was involved. Like robots, we heaved our stiffening limbs back

onto the bikes and pedaled away from the city lights onto a dark side street.

We rode two more blocks to a featureless three-story house in a tightly constructed row of similar buildings whose front doors opened onto the narrow sidewalk. At the boy's eager knock, the door was opened, and the bespectacled gentleman who had relieved us of our gear three hours before ushered us inside.

In sharp contrast to the dull facade, the entrance hall was lined with mirrors, the walls of the parlor and dining room done in white fresco depicting spring landscapes, cherubim and angels. The furniture was of black walnut, richly polished and situated elegantly around a high fireplace. Above the burnished walnut table in the dining room, a crystal chandelier dangled on a silver chain. And the most memorable part of the whole scene was the fragrant aromas floating in from the kitchen beyond the dining room.

French Hospitality

Monsieur Allard was a pleasant businessman, well mannered, and sure that we would like a little something to eat after our ride. While his wife was busy in the kitchen, he invited us to seat our emaciated selves around the long table and tell him and his sons about our trip.

Pasting "hands across the seamanship" smiles on our grubby, unshaven faces, we laboriously used what words of French we knew, and let them deduce the meaning. All we could think of was the food. Every distant sound from the kitchen was a clarion call of forthcoming joy.

The movement finally stopped in the kitchen, and the door swung open as Madame Allard swept into the dining room with a

cheery smile. As we caught our breaths in anticipation, she leaned over and set a large bowl of soup in the middle of the table. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

Our first nourishment in 11 hours and 91 kilometers consisted of a medium-sized tureen of thin celery soup, and a two-inch diameter loaf of French bread sliced into bite-size chunks. Any one of us could have devoured the lot, but it was for all of us, including the family of four.

Watching Our Manners

The younger son carefully distributed the soup plates and Madame Allard elegantly ladled out a dipper full into each bowl. Through gritted teeth and phony smiles, we made an effort not to slurp the soup down our fronts as we hurriedly spooned it into our screaming innards, resisting the impulse to pick up the bowl in both hands and gobble the thin contents.

Our ill-concealed hopes were in vain; the soup was not an entrée. It was the alpha and the omega. After waiting long enough to ascertain that there was to be nothing more, we politely said our good-byes and edged toward the door, shouldering our packs and grinning insincerely. As the door closed behind us, the grins disappeared in a hasty scramble for our bikes.

Food, Glorious Food

Battle stations! Into the main street and up to the first bistro we skidded, leading the confused waiter to the table and explaining in desperate French what we wanted. We ordered and ate everything he had. Half an hour later the table was littered with empty plates, and

we were out of critical condition. With a little sleep, our chances for recovery seemed quite good.

The beefsteak and potatoes had stopped the hollow ache in our stomachs and rekindled a little energy, which we directed into drinking a bottle of “vin ordinaire” and watching the passing parade on the busy sidewalk. The wine soon smothered the spark of energy from the food, and the long day began to catch up with us. We began nodding and mumbling, conversation dropping to broken, meaningless sentences. It was time to catch our train.

The Shuttle Train

We paid the bill and dragged ourselves across the square to the Orleans main train station. We bought second-class train tickets to Toulouse in the south, checked the bikes with the baggage department, and then took our positions on the empty platform where our train was supposed to appear.

It was right on time. Knowing nothing about the French railways, and thinking only of sleeping, we clambered into the last car and shut ourselves into the end compartment. It only had simple benches, but that made no difference to three stout lads who had been sleeping beside the road for the last few days.

Since few other passengers boarded the train, we hoped to sleep through the night while traveling. When the train started out of the station, our car was still empty. We congratulated ourselves on our luck and stretched out on the padded seats to sleep.

About 11 minutes after leaving the station, the train jerked to a halt, stirring Geoff and me from our half-slumbering positions on opposite benches of the narrow compartment. Irritably we raised our

heads above the level of the window and peered out. Across the platform, about 10 yards away, we saw a long, brightly lit passenger train, full of milling, laughing people crowding in and out of busy compartments.

“I’m glad we’re not on that train,” Geoff mumbled, and withdrew his head. The snoring emitting from the next compartment indicated that Bob was beyond giving an opinion. I also withdrew my head and lay down to sleep once again.

A Language Problem

Seconds later, the door to the next compartment opened and a gruff French voice demanded something of the sleeping Bob. He woke and mumbled incomprehensibly. Thinking that it must be someone wanting to see our tickets, I took them in, followed closely by Geoff.

The bulky, blue-uniformed, whiskered conductor seemed to be of the opinion that Bob should not be on this train, and when we entered, blinking at the brighter light, he included us in his protests. He was babbling furiously in French, gesticulating toward the door and the platform, and we could understand nothing more than that he was interrupting our sleep with his chatter.

I showed him the tickets for Toulouse to placate him, but he merely punched them and handed them back, still talking and suggesting vociferously that we were not in the right compartment. He insisted that we get off the train. Just as loudly, we told him that we were staying. After a last burst of French, he stepped onto the platform and strode away indignantly.

“What was all that about?”

“Don’t know. Don’t care either. He was probably trying to get us onto another car, so he’d have this for someone who tips better.”

“Well, he can drop dead. We’re here and we’re staying.”

“Geez, I’m beat. Wake me up when we get to Toulouse.”

The Wrong Train

We switched off the lights and lay back to sleep on our respective benches. Outside, we could hear the other train pulling away and clacking off into the night. Seconds later, our train also began to move—backward in the same direction from which we’d come.

“It’s going back,” said Geoff, without raising his head.

“No it’s not. It’s just transferring to another line for the trip to Toulouse.”

After a brief silence, Geoff raised his head to look out the window, staring intently.

“We’re passing the same refinery that we passed coming out,” he said, as a matter of interest.

“Can’t be. Must be some other refinery. There are probably lots of refineries around Orleans.”

“There’s the bus terminal, too,” he said. “We must be going back.”

“Maybe they’ve forgotten our bicycles. Yeah, that must be it. They’ve forgotten our bicycles.”

Three minutes later, the train pulled back into the huge, brightly lit dome of the Orleans main station, coming to a halt exactly where we had boarded it. We lay silently in the dark, listening to the voices on the platform outside, half asleep and uncaring. Five minutes later the train again moved out of the station into the darkness of the rail yards.

“That must have been it,” said Geoff drowsily. “We seem to be on our way again. Funny they should forget a bicycle.”

Again we dozed as the train clattered along under the bridges, past the bus terminal, past the refinery, and out into the suburbs, jerking to a halt 11 minutes later at the same platform as before. Only this time there was no other train, no conductor, no one at all. Just the rain and the night and the lonely lights of the deserted transfer station.

Eight minutes later exactly we sat up when the train started back in the same direction as before, and watched dopily out the window at the passing landmarks: past the refinery, past the bus terminal, under the bridges, and across the rail yards to the main station. The truth, the bitter truth, dawned on us.

We were on a shuttle train! The other train had been the southbound passenger train from Paris on the way to Toulouse. The little conductor had been trying to tell us that we must change trains.

Our Night In Orleans

This time, when we got back to the main station, I went and asked what was going on. Our suspicions were confirmed. We had missed out train. We learned that the next train headed south didn't come through until the next morning at 7:30. It was raining again, it was late, and we were very, very tired. There was only one solution. After a brief conference, we decided to sleep right where we were on the shuttle train.

All night the computer controlled electric train rumbled out of the station to the little platform in the suburbs, stopped for eight minutes, and then rumbled back to Orleans. Meanwhile, we slept fitfully to the rocking motion in the darkened compartment.

Occasionally, when the train would stop at the station, one of us would climb out and go into the men's washroom on the adjacent platform. Minutes later, he would come out, give a sleepy nod to the curious members of the terminal staff working through the night, and reboard before the train rolled out of the station once more. As the night wore on, they began to expect us. They would always be watching when someone got off, which amused them no end. It seemed that sort of thing wasn't done too often in Orleans.

The lesson I learned from this situation, which was definitely “an inconvenience rightly considered,” is that ***sometimes the very best thing you can do when things go wrong for you is—nothing.*** Just accept the situation as it is and bide your time. Often it will correct itself without your doing anything.

Off To Toulouse

The next morning, Sunday, somewhat refreshed after a moderately comfortable night, and right on schedule, we boarded the southbound train to Toulouse and once more continued on our trip to Gibraltar. The train wasn't crowded, and we easily found an almost empty compartment where we could sit and watch the hills go by. We shaved and washed in the cramped toilets, and arrived in Limoges that afternoon.

The weather was better already, the day sparkling clear, the sky dotted with puffy white cumulus clouds sweeping by on a pale blue carpet. We had one hour to wait in Limoges for the connection to Toulouse. It was a good chance to look at a few buildings, as well as find a place to eat. We joined families strolling on the quiet boulevards, reveling in the warm spring sunshine as we made our way

into town. The streets were deserted, the stores were shut tight for the weekend, and there didn't seem to be a place to eat anywhere.

Lunch In Limoges

Half a mile of undernourished searching into the city, after a gradual ascent of several blocks, we came into a colorful square built around a fountain. Spreading from the base of the fountain in the shape of a star were five little gardens swollen with red and yellow flowers, the points of the stars aimed at restaurants facing onto the square. And from the aromas wafting into the clear air, we figured they were open for business.

“What are we waiting for?”

“Who's waiting?”

“Which one looks the cheapest?”

“That one.”

“Well, what are we waiting for?”

“Who's waiting?”

We sat down and ordered a four-course lunch. We made it clear to the waiter that we were in a hurry, since our train pulled out in 30 minutes, and the next one wasn't until the following morning. The waiter nodded vigorously with a smile of perfect agreement when we explained that we must be back to the terminal by 2 p.m. Fingers flipping with a show of efficiency, he glided away to the big kitchen in the rear.

A Train to Catch

After five minutes, I got up and went to the door of the kitchen. The waiter was sitting at a table reading a newspaper. He looked up, mildly interested at my entrance.

“We must catch a train in 30 minutes,” I told him, and then repeated the same message two or three ways so he would be sure to understand. “Bring the food to the table all at once, please. We are in a hurry.”

“Oui, oui, Monsieur,” he said. “It is coming immediately, if you will go and sit and wait.”

With a burst of professionalism, he followed me back to the table with a large tureen of thin vegetable soup. Ceremoniously, as though it was the solution for everything, he set it in the center of the table and wandered nonchalantly to the mirrored bar, where he began chatting with the bartender.

By this time, we had less than 20 minutes before we would be stuck in Limoges for the night. Tersely, we called him back to the table and told him to bring all the food, NOW.

With a look of surprise that we should want another course when we were still slurping the soup, he hurried into the kitchen and hurried back, this time with a large salad bowl. Rolling his eyes as though we had just sworn in church, he walked over to the window and sat down, staring into the square aimlessly.

“More! More!” we shouted, “Bring more! Bring it all!”

Grossly offended, the waiter again came to the table. This time I held up the menu and then my watch. “If we don’t have it all in another two minutes, we’ll have to leave to catch our train—and we’re not paying,” I told him.

He'd never heard anything so blasphemous in his whole life. But, he hurried off to the kitchen and came back with the next course.

The minutes were running out, and we still wanted more, and faster. We dashed through the second half of the meal, eating with both hands, paid the bill, and streaked into the street. Far away a train whistle sounded high and clear.

Sprinting Through Limoges

We sprinted across the square and down the cobbled street, cutting across a newly planted lawn. Gasping and perspiring on our full stomachs, we dove through hedges and galloped along sidewalks, causing women pushing baby strollers to leap aside. Finishing with a quarter-mile run down the center of the city park, bloated and puffing, we tore across the parking lot and bolted through the wide swinging doors of the train station. People turned to stare in curious incredulity as we dodged and sidestepped our way down the busy hall, swung through the turnstile, and plunged down three levels of stairs to the platform below.

The train had just started to move. We peeled off like jet fighters, spacing ourselves. Scooping up our waiting rucksacks as we ran, we sprinted straight for the last car. I was the first inside; Bob dove in after me as the train gained speed. Geoff was now in a full sprint down the platform. We shouted at him to run faster. With a final burst of speed, he grabbed my outstretched hand and tossed his pack to Bob, who literally dragged him onboard just as the train sped out of the station.

Completely spent, we lay on the floor, gasping for a full five minutes before anyone spoke. Then Bob sagely observed, “We almost missed the train.”

Yes, that seemed to be a safe assumption. Were there any more clever children like him at home? Perhaps they’d be good enough to stay there.

We found an empty compartment and rode comfortably the remainder of the way to Toulouse.

It turns out that most people you meet in life, like the waiter, are not particularly ambitious, for a variety of reasons. I also learned that no one places the same value on your time as you do. Only about 2 percent of people have a “sense of urgency,” and they end up at the top of every competitive organization. Just making a firm personal commitment to “do it now,” to operate in “real time,” can give you the winning edge in almost any competitive situation, because so few people do it.

The South of France

“It’s easy to fight when everything’s right,” said the poet Robert W. Service, and this was certainly how we felt when we came off that train in Toulouse. It was late afternoon and the sky was glistening with golden rays of warmth. The clouds were far behind us in the Loire Valley, and the road ran toward the south under a sky we knew was *Mediterranean*. We could almost smell the orange blossoms and salt spray from the railroad station.

Like young tigers, we leaped on our bicycles and pedaled out of town, following the signs to Carcassone and the sea, full of confidence, enthusiasm, youth, and joy in the birds and flowers and

the glorious world of excitement and adventure. Feelings of delight and exhilaration tingled through our hardening limbs, lightening our wind-burned faces with laughter and happiness, our hearts brimming with song and springtime.

The knowledge that we were conquerors, and unstoppable, leaped and danced in our tumbling brains, warming us with pride and hope and defiance. What did we care for the elements, for the rain and the cold? We were lovers in a field of flowers, eager to pluck the waving blossoms of beckoning experience, to hurl defiance at everything and anything that stood in the way of our trip to Africa. We were unquenchable drinkers at the fountain of dreams and romance, insatiable eaters at the table of rugged living and challenge. It was a long way to Tipperary, but in our imaginations and hearts, we were on the highroad, and halfway back already.

The Joys of Youth

In those fancy-free days, we almost welcomed the wind and the rain, seeing in them an opportunity to flaunt our strength and persistence. There in France, far from home and love and security, we were explorers and discoverers, poets and lovers, Bon Vivants and vagabonds supreme. With each drop of sweat and each painful gasp, we were taking part in the battle of youth against age, the conflict between the lure of the easy chair and the lone trail.

We felt genuinely sorry for people speeding past in their cars, saddened that they couldn't share our labors and revel in the satisfaction of tired bodies and kinship with the hard life. We were giving the best we had in stamina and determination, heeding the call

of distant places, striking the words “quit” and “defeat” from our vocabularies.

We were three idealistic young men, seeing drama and romance in commonplace occurrences, looking for and finding the mysterious in everything new or unusual. We thought of ourselves as exceptional people for having taken up the gauntlet of Africa when other people our age were contenting themselves with bumming around Europe.

We wanted something much more than that, but we didn’t have the slightest idea what it was. We thought it was Africa, and so that vast unknown land mass became our Shangri La, and the bicycles our penance and pilgrimage. We felt unstoppable.

Sunday Night By The Road

We rode another two hours that afternoon, to a little place called Montgiscard, where we searched for a place to buy our evening meal and breakfast. But we had miscalculated again; it was Sunday night, and nothing was open.

As a last resort, we halted at a wayside café to ask if they would sell us a few provisions. The owner was a large motherly woman who took one look at our bicycles and us and *adopted* us without another word. She took us into her warm, homey kitchen and loaded us with bread, eggs, milk, onions, and tomatoes. At her friendly insistence, we made our camp under some trees on the hill above the café, cooking the egg-and-onion omelet over a smoky fire set in the roots of a spreading oak tree.

A Clean, Well Lit Place

The night temperature fell sharp and chilly after supper, with a cold breeze running under the groundsheet we had rigged up as an open tent.

It wasn't long before the warmth and music floating up from the café below drew us like a magnet off the muddy hill.

Business in the café was good that Sunday night, and the atmosphere was even better. Most of the light came from the bright bar in one corner and the jukebox next to it. Mama was bustling back and forth from the kitchen to her guests at the bar. She was a bundle of happy efficiency, enjoying her role as hostess like a queen at a coronation. She greeted us and introduced us to the crowd cheerily, then led us to a table and presented us with a bottle of wine. Joining the mostly older crowd, farm folk from the area, in the restaurant, we felt caught up in the music and good spirits of the establishment. The gaiety and laughter in the busy room had us feeling like members of a homecoming party.

We drank Mama's bottle of wine, and one more, before making our way back up the hill. That night we slept through the rain that soaked our fireplace and half our gear. We could have slept through a blizzard.

Monday morning dawned clear and windy, the wind coming out of the north for the first time. With breakfast and a fond goodbye to our friends at the café, we were back on the road, making exceptional time. The wind was often so strong at our backs that we had no need to pedal. All that day we rode like fools, effortlessly, the tires singing on the pavement. Into the rolling hills and vineyards, through Castelnaudery, then Carcassone, then down to the Mediterranean at Narbonne, joyously we flew ahead of the crisp gusts of wind.

At Narbonne, we bought our daily groceries and continued along the coast toward Spain until we found an old Roman watchtower and set up camp inside for the night.

That was the best day we had ever had on bicycles, covering 140 kilometers without the exhaustion that had marked days when we had only traveled 60 or 70 from morning to night. I'm glad we had that day, not only because we deserved it, but also because it showed us, just once, how pleasurable traveling on a bicycle can be. We needed that one glorious day to temper the memory of the hard days past and to boost us in the days ahead.

There Are No Free Lessons

Nature is a just employer, but she demands full measure of payment for every reward. The trials and tribulations of our bicycling trip across France forced us to dig deep into ourselves for untapped reserves of energy and patience.

The good news is that your biggest problem or difficulty today has been sent to you at this moment to teach you something you need to know to be happier and more successful in the future.

It is when you are experiencing the greatest pain and strain that you are often preparing for the greatest joys and pleasures. Develop an "attitude of gratitude," no matter what happens. Count your blessings. Look for the good in every situation, and surprise, surprise! You'll always find it.

"The truth is that all of us attain the greatest success and happiness possible in this life whenever we use our native capacities to their greatest extent." (Smiley Blanton)

Chapter 9

The Spanish Railways

“We all have possibilities we don’t know about. We can do things we don’t even dream we can do.” (Dale Carnegie)

The next day, although the wind had changed again, we rode all day toward Spain with the shining Mediterranean on our left. We entered the foothills of the Pyrenees and camped the night just beyond the small town of Perpignan. On Wednesday morning, we got another passport stamp at the Spanish border station of Le Perthus and began the long haul to Barcelona.

In life, everything is cycles and trends, upward and downward, better and then worse, progressing and regressing. Nothing ever continues indefinitely in the same way. It’s usually a matter of two steps forward, one step back, and sometimes *more* than one step back. That’s why you have to be infinitely flexible, and the best way to predict the future is sometimes to create it.

Barcelona Days

“Africa begins at the Pyrenees” was said a long time ago, probably by someone who’d been to both and liked neither. One thing we could attest to by the time we rode into the soot-blackened outskirts of Barcelona three days later, teeth rattling from the broken pavement was that the bad roads begin at the Pyrenees. If anyone ever gets up a protest march against cobblestones, save me a banner to carry!

A check at Poste Restaunte, the **General Delivery** of Europe and the rest of the world, freed us from any obligation to answer letters, since those who knew we were going through there had either run out of ink, or thought we wouldn't make it. We contented ourselves with finding a cheap place to stay for the weekend.

Living On A Limited Budget

For 42 pesetas each, per night, we found a small pension whose owners were not overly concerned with encouraging the tourist trade. Our quarters consisted of a converted closet with two sagging beds shoved together, one water spigot with a tin bowl for washing and shaving, and a large window opening onto a roof overlooking an impoverished neighborhood.

For five pesetas and a half-hour wait, we could get enough hot water out of the old electric tank in the distant bathroom to brush our teeth, if we were inclined toward that sort of thing. However, all our clothes had become caked and filthy after 10 days of sleeping in them every night, and sweating in them during the day, so we took advantage of the *deluxe* facilities to wash them.

The wash was accompanied by the wails and protestations of the derelict from the desk, who repeatedly threatened to call the police if we didn't leave immediately and wash our clothes somewhere else. He finally gave up and went away.

Cleanliness Is Next To Godliness

The flies that seemed to cluster on us when we stopped in the streets, or even slowed, indicated that a little bathing wouldn't hurt us either. After we'd scraped off some of the dirt and sweat with carbolic

soap, our room, when we were in it, stopped smelling as though a rat had died in the woodwork.

We had arrived in the morning and were feeling quite like men of the world in our clean dry clothes that afternoon. We felt it only fair that since the Spaniards had built this city on our path to Africa, we should go out and give it the once over, especially since it was Good Friday, a very important holiday in Catholic Spain.

The streets had been quiet all day but were now coming to life. Long rows and clusters of chairs were being set up on the main boulevards and sidewalks. People dressed in their Sunday finery were pouring into the large streets from the many smaller ones leading away from the center of town. The stores were closed, except those dealing in soft drinks and pastry, and the pious looks on the faces of the solemn Spaniards left no doubt but that they took their religious holidays seriously.

Gradually the multitudes of chairs filled and overflowed with the multitudes of Spaniards, the streets becoming packed and swarming around them. We felt like outsiders, partly because we weren't overly moved by the occasion, and largely because of the scowls that the better-dressed natives were giving us. Our jeans and T-shirts did not lend much to the holiness of the occasion.

Chaperones Everywhere

We concentrated more on catching the eyes of the Spanish damsels, receiving more than one blush or smile in return. But we could not meet them, or even get close to them, as they all seemed to be surrounded by parents and jealous brothers. When they sat

beautifully in their spring dresses, the family group extended its tentacles of protection to the front, and sides of the lovely creatures.

When they walked, it was invariably with Mama and Papa on either arm, and often a brother or cousin bringing up the rear. It was a bit discouraging for us to walk around Spain's second largest city, steeped in lascivious thoughts but unable to do more than lust. Alas, that was part of the cross we had to bear to become world-beaters.

Exploring The City

Early the next morning, we got our bicycles and rode through the quiet streets, to the outskirts along the waterfront. No packs this time. This was to be a pleasure tour of the low spots, and some of them were pretty low. Once away from the main streets, we got into slum areas consisting of clumps of shanties held together with chicken wire, built from cardboard and tin sheets.

I remember thinking to myself that these were probably the worst living conditions that I had ever seen. It was good for us to experience this. It broadened our education. Little did I know what awaited us in Africa.

The Agony Of The Spanish Roads

On Easter morning we pedaled off toward Valencia and right into the teeth of the wind once more. It was another day of counting pumps, burning thighs and eyes full of fine grit from the sand between the cobbles; another day of sweat and gritted teeth. The pack straps dug into our shoulders with the constant joggling and rattling of the rough road, our stomachs knotted from hunger, our hands on the

lowered handle bars became stiff and cramped. All the rigors and tribulations of bicycling set in once more.

We kept at it. One day. Two days. Three days. The wind became the enemy and this enemy was vicious. It never let up. It lurked at every bend in the road, attacking us up and down every hill, slashing our faces with sand. It gave us no peace and no quarter; at night it took almost an hour to cook our egg-and-onion omelets as the little fires struggled to stay alive. The wind shook us wrathfully awake every morning, drove at us all day, and howled angrily to keep us awake throughout the night.

We grew to hate the wind, and the road and the bicycles that were part of the ceaseless ordeal. Outside Tarragona the wind became so strong that maximum effort was required just to keep from being blown over in a standstill. After four days we were barely a two-hour drive out of Barcelona, and at last the wind won.

Accepting The Inevitable

It was after a breakfast of eggs (the cheapest protein) and onions (the only vegetable available that early in the year) omelet (the easiest to prepare) in a rocky creek bed with the wind whistling up the rocks from the road below that we finally decided to reevaluate our situation once more.

“We’re like fools banging our heads against a brick wall,” said Geoff, “because it feels so good when we stop. I say we should stop now!”

“If I never ride another bicycle in my life, it’ll be too soon,” agreed Bob, resolutely.

“But think how tough we’re getting with this life.”

“Yeah, well I’m tough enough already.”

“Yes, but it’s a matter of pride.”

“What do you mean?”

“If we quit now, think how much tougher it’ll be to carry on when it gets tough in the future.”

“Who’s thinking about the future?”

“Well, I’m thinking about the future.”

“Let’s try it for another three days.”

“The hell with it!”

“What about two days?”

“Oh, come on, at least one day more.”

“Hey, fellows, you’re not even listening. Let’s discuss this.”

“What’s that? Vinaroz. The next town? Now slow down for just one second!”

“Where are you two going? Hold on a minute. Let’s not rush off without thinking this over.”

“Yes, but we haven’t thought it over enough.”

“Let’s take a vote! Aw, for cripes sakes, wait for me!” And with that dialogue ended, off we went to the nearby train station.

Sometimes in business and in life you have to try, try again and then try something else. In most cases, ***“Difficulties come not to obstruct, but to instruct.”*** You must always be prepared to accept, adjust and respond differently.

The Train From Vinaroz

Vinaroz was a typical Spanish town: streets lined with box-like clay and brick houses, except in the center, where the larger buildings rose two or three stories. Other than a mangy goat nibbling at a bit of

dusty grass, the depot by the tracks at the end of town seemed deserted.

We rode across the unpaved yard to the old frame building and stomped around inside, calling hopefully, until an old man wearing the remains of a blue overcoat stuck his head through one of the barred ticket windows. Grudgingly, he growled the prices at us and then sold us third-class tickets to Valencia before going back to sleep. We had two hours to wait and set off to find something to eat, our universal remedy for all ailments, including riding, walking, sitting, and delays caused by Spanish trains.

After eating an overpriced something in a sidewalk greasy spoon, we passed the next hour soaking up a little local culture before pedaling back early enough not to miss the train. We were not the only ones who were early.

Traveling Companions

In the previously empty yard in front of the tracks was gathered a multitude that Moses would have been proud to lead. There were old men in peasant clothing, unshaved and sweat stained, accompanied by old women dressed in the ubiquitous black of mourning, popular throughout Spain. There were tired-looking husbands and wives, tending bundles of family possessions and underfed children. There were young men and ancient farmers in the crowd, the yard cluttered with goats, chickens, dogs, mattresses, babies, baskets, vegetables, and old bicycles. Now, there were also three scruffy-looking gringos to make the party complete.

Everyone sat in the hot, dry sun of mid-afternoon and looked tiredly at everyone else, as though waiting for a hearse to pass. A few heads turned to look at us when we rode up, and after assuring

themselves that we didn't bite, returned to staring resignedly at the dust. We gave our bicycles over to the bandit at the baggage counter and took our place with the others.

Moses arrived, in the form of a coal-blackened, greasy-looking engineer, running the old steam engine that dragged the converted cattle cars into Vinaroz 15 minutes late. His inspirational powers were astonishing. All trace of lazy Spanish peasant dissolved in a mad, squalling, chaotic rush to get aboard. We hurled ourselves into the thick of it, yelling and pushing with the best of them, scrambling for places for our packs and sleeping bags in the narrow compartments. The corridors quickly filled with humanity, just as the old engine gave one shrill toot and grunted its way out of the station toward Valencia.

Third Class Trains

The trip took almost seven hours and ranks as a milestone in our experience. I think everyone should go to Spain, if for no other reason than to ride on a third-class train. It is a singular event in the evolution of transportation that will some day be only a memory. When the Spanish railways increase their freight-handling capabilities and make it obsolete, you'll have to go to India for the same sensation.

It took almost an hour to retrieve our bikes, buy tickets for San Roque (the nearest Spanish station to Gibraltar), recheck our bikes with the next baggage department, and finally get out of the station into the clear night and bright lights of downtown Valencia.

Always Ask A Cop

Using two phrases from our Spanish phrase book, “Tenemos mucho hambre” (we are very hungry) and “no mucho dinero” (not much money), we flagged down the first policeman we saw.

He looked at our unshaven faces, then down at our dirty sweaters, jeans and ragged tennis shoes, then back up and nodded in understanding, with a big smile. Motioning for us to follow him, he led us through the busy streets, past several cafés and into a narrow lane where he drew us up at a small, clean, crowded café.

“Aquí no cuesta mucho dinero,” (“it doesn’t cost much here”) he smiled and hurried off the way we’d come.

The food was good, the people pleasant, and best of all, the price was less than half of what they were charging at places near the station. When in doubt, ask a cop. If they don’t know personally, they know someone who does, and they rarely lead you astray. In a civilized country, the most omniscient person in any given neighborhood is the cop working the street. It was a lesson we learned early in our traveling and never forgot.

The Night Train

We were back at the depot early to board our train, where we would be riding for the night. It was different from the one we’d come in on from Vinaroz in that it had padding on the benches and doors on the compartments. Since we were among the first passengers aboard, we quickly found an empty compartment. We foolishly thought that since it was late at night, perhaps we’d have it to ourselves and could sleep the night. At 10:48, the train crept out of the station, and our compartment was still empty. Aha! Good bit of luck. Good night, amigos.

Traveling Companions

But 15 minutes later the train ground to a halt, heralding a rush of passengers from the suburban station, three of whom pushed loudly into our compartment. Much disgruntled, we sat up and made space, unable to stretch out our legs any more.

The train had just started moving again, it seemed, when again it stopped to allow another rush of Spaniards to storm aboard, three more of whom jammed into our compartment. This process continued, despite our threats and protests, until there were 12 of us, packed shoulder to shoulder in the small compartment. The space between the benches was so narrow that we sat with knees overlapping alternatively.

“I haven’t even got enough room to scratch,” said Bob. “Do you think any of them are going to get off in the night?”

“It won’t make much difference if they do,” I said. “Just look at that corridor.”

The passageway outside was already filling up with Spaniards unable to find places to sit, and it was going to get worse before it got better.

“We’re lucky to have a place at all,” muttered Geoff. “But it’s going to be a long night.”

What Can’t Be Cured Must Be Endured

The other passengers accepted the conditions with resignation, half of them already on their way to sleep. Soon we were all dozing in the muggy compartment, to the symphony of the typewriter-like

clacking coming from the rails below as the train swayed and lurched its way through the night.

When one of us would get up in the night, to struggle down the crowded corridor to the foul-smelling cubicle at the end of the car, he would have to warn the other two before he left. Then they would stand guard, firmly, to halt the rush for the vacant seat, thereby initiating a lot of vigorous argument, they babbling in Spanish and we in English, until the third returned and regained his place.

It soon became extremely hot and stuffy in the airless compartment, the window tightly shut and the corridor full of smoke and sweat from the press of bodies. The air became so thick we could almost chew it before choking it down. Slowly the hours passed as the train chugged its way overland toward the high country around Cordoba, with us sitting slumped and swaying with the rocking motion throughout the night.

The Trains In Spain

All the next day we rode across Spain, changing trains three times, traveling with two English girls part of the way, ending up that night in a whistle stop called Rodriquez. The next train heading our direction wasn't leaving until late the following morning.

You only learn what really works by trying things that don't work. Keep questioning, evaluating. Ask, "Could there be a better way?" Sometimes what you need is a break, a chance to stop, to stand back, and to reconsider.

In Rodriquez, as usual, we once again retrieved our bicycles and began our endless quest for food. Once we had something to eat, we pedaled out of town to camp on the outskirts.

The next morning, we rode in from the eucalyptus grove where we'd slept the night in time to catch the southbound cattle car to El Golea, where once more we had to change trains. The platform superintendent in El Golea informed us that our tickets would have to be upgraded to second class, at an additional charge, if we didn't want to wait until the next afternoon for the third-class train, which we didn't.

Battle With the Bureaucrat

The conductor of the second-class train refused to have our bicycles in his baggage car, saying that they must go on the third-class train the following day. His reasons for this, we soon gathered, were that bicycles were a trifle demeaning for a man of his status to deal with.

We protested vigorously and argued heatedly, not letting up and leaving our bicycles behind. After 15 minutes of this, he finally relented, muttering and swearing at us under his breath. The bicycles were loaded into the small baggage car, and we continued on our way. I felt sure that this would be the silliest incident I would ever experience in dealing with public officials and petty bureaucrats. In retrospect, it doesn't even receive honorable mention.

Traveling In Luxury

The second-class train consisted of only one self-contained car, with the engine in the forward section and baggage compartment in the rear. The padded passenger section occupied the center three-quarters of the car.

San Roque was two hours down the line, two comfortable hours in the modern airy coach, made even more enjoyable by comparison with what we had been through for the past 48 hours since leaving Vinaroz.

We sat across from two American women who had flown from Vancouver to Madrid two days before, which set us thinking of our departure in the rain seven months back. We'd come a long way, we felt, in these months, by car, foot, thumb, bicycle and now train—not to mention 2,000 miles by ship and a few by ferry. And yet we were only two flying days away from home on a little train in Spain.

It's amazing what you can do with a little money—and what you must do when you have very little money to accomplish the same end. But there are things that money can't buy. Some things have to be paid for in a different type of currency—things, for instance, like memories.

First Aid To The Rescue

As we clambered out of our seats upon our arrival in San Roque, grabbing our rucksacks from the overhead racks, Bob's machete slid out of its sheath and dropped onto the man below. The man bellowed in pain, holding up his hand dripping with blood from a shallow two-inch cut, a mere scratch actually. Three or four passengers hurried forward excitedly, as Bob stood helplessly, holding the offending machete like an apprehended axe murderer.

"Get out the first aid kit, Bob. It's in your pack, isn't it?"

I gave the distressed, bleeding Spaniard a confident smile, and clapped his handkerchief from his breast pocket over the cut, then led him to the door of the car, out of eyesight of the other passengers.

Geoff had joined Bob on the platform, and the little bundle of bandages and antiseptic was ready for use in seconds.

With an efficiency that would have gladdened the heart of our first aid instructor, we cleaned, dressed, bandaged, and taped the shallow cut tight under a roll of white gauze strips. With a final pat, we boosted the confused gentleman back into the car just as it started moving, closing the door behind him. We stood there smiling professionally until the little train was out of sight.

A small crowd of about 20 people had gathered to view this scene, standing back a few feet, silently, as if to “give the patient room to breath.” We had the definite feeling that that sort of thing wasn’t done too often in San Roque.

The Last Leg To Gibraltar

Bob refastened his pack and slipped it on, joining us where we waited with the bicycles. The last eight kilometers to Gibraltar were over a dusty farm road that wound through a range of low hills before becoming paved and descending to the border post of La Linea and “The Rock,” the end of the first leg of our trip to Johannesburg.

The Purpose of Pain

Nature sends us pain of all kinds—physical, emotional, and financial—to tell us to stop doing certain things and perhaps to start doing something else that is more in keeping with what we really want. Look into every problem or pain for something good, something helpful. Become an “inverse paranoid,” a person who is convinced that a great conspiracy exists—and it is aimed at making you successful and happy.

Whenever God wants to send you a gift, he wraps it up in a problem. The bigger the gift, the bigger the problem it comes wrapped up in. Nature also sends you peace, pleasure and happiness to tell you what you should do more of. So, look into your greatest difficulty for the gift that it contains. It's always there.

"I have always believed, and I still believe, that whatever good or bad fortune may come our way, we can always give it meaning and transform it into something of value." (Hermann Hesse)

Chapter 10

Gibraltar Days

“For gold is tried in the fire and acceptable men in the furnace of adversity.” (Sirach)

A person rarely has the chance to witness such deliberate, childish, stupid, and yet official pigheadedness as that which we experienced for three hours at the Spanish border post leading into Gibraltar.

The Spanish government, in the wake of receding British influence, was making a determined effort to establish a claim to the Rock and force the British to give it up. One of their schemes in the plan of protracted aggravation was the limiting of tourist traffic across the border into the colony, accomplished by insisting on hold-ups and searches that lasted for hours.

Political Pigheadedness

If the Spanish police had taken lessons, they couldn't have been more irritating. One American family in front of us had to wait for three hours, and then unload their station wagon completely onto tables for inspection. Without even looking, the police ordered everything re-packed into the car, only to come out in half an hour to demand it all be unloaded again. We arrived at 2 p.m. when the family had already been there for four hours, and they passed into Gibraltar just ahead of us at 5 p.m. How a government could resort to that form of pettiness was beyond our limited comprehension.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the customs bay, hundreds of Spanish workers entered and departed in a steady stream, with no questions asked. We waited in line for three hours, patiently, before they condescended to put a chalk mark on our unopened packs and allow us through.

The blue-uniformed British officials, one kilometer further, simply assured themselves that we were not potential welfare applicants, and then stamped us through. This experience left me with definite opinions concerning who should control the colony.

Destination Achieved

It was April 20, 1965 and we had achieved our objective, Gibraltar, from London, in 17 days, at a cost of \$460. Our remaining assets consisted of \$540, three very worn bicycles, three rucksacks, and about \$20 worth of camping gear, not including our sleeping bags and clothes. We could see Africa looming out of the haze on the Moroccan coast, just 20 miles away across the straits. We had completed the third stage in our journey.

“Hey! Brother world-beaters! The water’s great! Come on, you can’t sleep forever!”

I was back from an early swim in the crystal-blue water lapping the beach in Sandy Cove, our new home. Geoff and Bob were buried in their bags, and I could have been talking to myself for all the reaction I was getting.

At last a voice mumbled out of the depths of one of the misshapen quilted lumps on the sand.

“Geoff? Geoff, buddy?”

“Yeah?” came the guarded reply.

“Do you hear anything, Geoff?”

“Yeah. I hate to admit it, but I think I do.”

“What is it? What does it sound like?”

“I think someone’s strangling a cat.”

“Well, tell them to go down the beach and strangle it. About a half-mile down the beach!”

At that, I grabbed the two sleeping bags and hefted them up, dumping their occupants onto the warm sand, blinking at the morning sunshine.

“Let’s drown him,” growled Bob.

“Let’s castrate him first, then drown him,” said Geoff.

We splashed and dove, yelling and laughing in the crisp salt water, teaming up and jumping on the odd man, then jumping on the teammate and being dunked in return. For 10 minutes we cavorted in the tingling surf before dragging ourselves ashore and making our way back to the sleeping bags.

Reviewing The Situation

Drying off in the warm morning sun, we discussed our next move, as we had started doing the evening before, after being directed to this beach and making camp. The situation was altered beyond recognition from our tentative planning in Vancouver and London. All our thinking had to be considerably revised.

There was no question about the bicycles. They had to go, and the sooner the better. We could barely stand to look at them, as they had caused us so much heartache and strain—strain we could still feel in our legs after almost three weeks of hard riding.

We had to get back onto four wheels. We realized now that it had been foolish to start out on bicycles in the first place, and it would be doubly foolish to continue with them now. We needed a vehicle.

In Search of a Land Rover

We had arrived in Gibraltar with 180 English pounds, about \$500, full of ambition and ideals, with no idea of what was ahead in Africa. We were yet to see a reliable map of the continent, and beyond Algeria and Morocco, we had very little idea of the geography.

On the one-page map in our atlas, the Sahara Desert and the tropical belt were indicated by yellow and green colors. Strewn throughout this area were several countries, which we would cross when we came to them. Nothing to worry about there, we thought. That brought us back to the vehicle. What would it be?

A Land Rover was our first answer. In the little reading we had done about overland traveling, we had noted the name “Land Rover” in almost every article. We had even considered buying one while we were still in Vancouver, but had decided against it as being too expensive for our limited budget. Now we found that we couldn’t afford not to have one, not if we were going to cross the Sahara, and the rest of Africa. We hid our gear in the rocks at one end of the little beach and bicycled into town to take care of first things first—securing a Land Rover.

When In Doubt, Ask For Directions

We knew there were Land Rovers in Gibraltar, but we didn’t know where, so we flagged down the first one we saw and asked the driver. The Land Rovers in Gibraltar were mostly military vehicles, we

were told, except those bought by civilians at auctions for private use. The last army auction had been five weeks before, and the next one wouldn't be until July; we would have to find one for sale by a civilian. We thanked him and pedaled into town to find a policeman.

Always ask a cop—you can't go wrong. The first bobby we spoke to gave us the name and address of a man who had sold his Land Rover the week before. We looked him up and asked him if he could help us, or even sell us his vehicle. He declined our offer but gave us a few pointers for buying a Land Rover in Gibraltar. He then referred us to another man, a Mr. Earnest Harten, at the Roots Group Garage in the center of the little town at the base of the rock.

A Used Car Salesman

Mr. Harten was a thin, balding fellow with that confident attitude of people who deal in used cars—that attitude which seems to say, “Whether you buy it or not makes little difference to me, but you'll never find a better deal.” However, his friendly attitude dispelled many of the doubts we had about buying a used car in a foreign country (colony).

He listened to our requirements and our heart-rending story and then assured us that he might know someone with a Land Rover for sale. He told us to return that afternoon.

In the next three hours we looked at two light trucks, a couple of cars, and two Land Rovers, one almost new priced at 300 pounds, and the other almost ready for the scrap heap, at 90 pounds.

We had never bought a Land Rover before, but we were far from babes when it came to buying used cars. Between Geoff and me, we'd bought, driven, and ruined about eight cars. We had one rule

that we relied on: if the body is good, the running gear will also be good, and vice versa. Simple, but true, and we'd never gone wrong with it.

We Find What We're Looking For

When we returned that afternoon, Mr. Harten greeted us with a smile and led us to the vehicle. It was not impressive—windows dirty, canvas top, paint flaking off. We walked around it critically.

“Does it run?”

“I'll start it up, if you like. There we go. How's that?”

“Sounds all right.”

We went over it from one end to the other, checking the water, oil, and undercarriage, and then took it for a drive. The steering was good, and the brakes caught readily enough. The only complaint was the clutch. Mr. Harten assured us that the clutch would last another 5,000 miles.

We then took the Land Rover for a short test drive, parked it in the same place, and walked back to Root's Garage with Mr. Harten. He wanted 120 pounds, nothing less. That was two-thirds of all the money we had in the world. We told him we'd let him know within a day or two.

“Now we are in a fix,” said Bob. “If we buy the Rover and insure it, we'll be too broke to go anywhere in it.”

Facing A Dilemma

Immersed in thought, we rode back to our camp on the beach, each of us trying to think of a solution. It was a strange problem, in that we were not broke, and yet we had run out of money. We'd come too far to go back, yet we couldn't go on. Behind us was Europe

and before us was Africa, but all we could see was Africa. One solution was right at hand, though, and we discussed it briefly.

I learned later in life that ***the hallmark of all successful people is that they are intensely solution-oriented and future-oriented***. They constantly seek for ways to achieve their goals or to solve their problems. They think in terms of where they are going rather than where they've been.

If we decided against buying the Land Rover, we could sell our bicycles, load everything on our backs, and set off hitchhiking. With the money we had, we could either get back to England or start into Africa. But we couldn't do both. We were stuck.

Pride and Self Reliance

"But let's be honest," we said. "We started out to achieve something, and we aren't going to achieve anything by becoming bums who wave their thumbs as if the world owes us a ride."

In our travels, we had met many bums, often with more money than the people from whom they were begging rides and accepting free meals, and we had no intention of becoming one of them.

We had met fellows who bragged about having \$500 in traveler's checks in their pockets and \$3,000 in banks at home, but they were saving on transportation by hitchhiking so they would have more money to spend on liquor and entertainment when they arrived in the big cities. We felt there was a hole in any reasoning that went against the principle of a person's responsibility to pay his or her own way.

Naturally, there are sometimes unexpected circumstances that cast one on the whims of fate, but these are backward steps, which have to be made up before one is even again. No one has the right to base his or her actions solely on charity, to begin a course of action on the assumption that someone else will foot the bill, or the opposite, not to undertake a thing just because there is no one to stand as a backstop.

Independence Above All

One reason we had decided on bicycles in London was that they would give us a certain independence, a sort of freedom to ourselves not enjoyed by those who feel that they have no need to provide their own transportation. We had not traveled like kings, but neither had we expected to travel first class. At least we were three independent beings, taking nothing from the country we traveled through and asking nothing. We weren't rich, but we weren't slaves to the unpredictability of the oncoming traffic either. Although going back was a grim alternative, hitchhiking, except in an emergency or in desperation, was one shade worse.

The desire or attempt to get something for nothing in any area of life is destructive to the soul and spirit of an individual. The decision to pay one's own way on the other hand, to pay in full, braces the personality and strengthens the character. Self-reliance is a source of pride and self-respect. Trying to live off of others is a source of shame. We refused to do it.

Show Me The Money

Our pressing need was for money, for a cold cash injection that would put the trip to Africa back on its feet. The question was, where and how were we going to come by this elixir of life? The work force in Gibraltar consisted of Spaniards earning an average of \$15 per week. Since we ate more than that each week, we quickly ruled out the idea of taking jobs. We would either have to borrow the money, or give up altogether.

Borrowing. The word leaves a bad taste in the mouths of self-reliant people. It denotes debt and bankruptcy and repossessed television sets, ruined friendships, and ne'er-do-wells. But on the other hand, it is the foundation stone of the western world, upon which our lives were built. It is the credit system that allows pleasure and necessity to be dealt with immediately, and repaid when possible.

I had bought my cars and insurance, as had Geoff, on this system. We had received our education under the secure wing of borrowed capital. We had bought clothes and spare parts, rented homes and apartments, pulled our friends out of difficulties with pregnant girlfriends, financed chums in buying cars and paying rent—all on credit. For years we had been both recipients and benefactors of the borrowing system, and one thing we could honestly say: We had never left a debt unpaid.

We had been in debt before and would again, and felt no shame toward borrowing or borrowers, secure as we were in ourselves and our ability, not only to repay but also to accept repaying as a moral obligation, irrevocable, and not to be shirked because of distance or the passing of time. We felt that, having always borrowed

and always repaid, we had earned the right to do it again when the occasion arose. And the occasion had arisen.

Writing For Money

That resolved, we threw our hearts into the borrowing enterprise with the enthusiasm of entrepreneurs seeking venture capital for a new start-up. For the remainder of the afternoon, we sat on the beach and wrote passionate letters to friends, explaining our desperate position and asking for loans, to be repaid when we reached Johannesburg and began working again.

Most of the letters were addressed to people from whom we had extracted vows to call on them if we ever ran short and needed financial assistance. So we wrote: "Well, faithful friends, this is the pinch. You can't come with us personally on this journey, but you can accompany us in spirit; you will be sharing the adventure by helping to make it possible." Just before the post office closed that evening, we sent all the letters we had written by air express, plus two telegrams. Then there was little for us to do but wait for the replies.

A Surprise Announcement

That evening on the beach, much to our surprise, Bob announced that he was cashing in his chips. He had enough of sweating and insecurity and he was fed up. He said that he would rather go back to England than sit like a fool on a lonely beach waiting for money to come so he could go out and risk his life some more.

"You can't be serious, Bob. Not after all we've been through together?"

“Come on, Bob. What good are *two* musketeers? How can you leave us when Africa is within our grasp? Look! You can almost touch the lights of Morocco.”

“I’m not sold on this idea anymore. Why don’t we give it up and go to the beaches in Southern France? That we can do with the money we have left.”

“But Bob, we’ve come all this way to go to Africa. We can’t just quit!”

“Think about it, Bob. Don’t make up your mind tonight. It’s late; and it’s been a long day. We’ll talk about it in the morning, what do you say?”

“I don’t need to think about it anymore,” he said. “I’ve been thinking about it since Barcelona, and I’ve made up my mind. One third of the money is mine, and tomorrow I’ll take my share and leave.”

We tried to argue, using our long friendship as a lever, but it was no use. He had locked onto the idea of going back to England or France, like a bulldog, and staunchly refused to budge. We dropped the subject and turned in for the night.

Our hope for a change of heart failed to materialize. The next morning, after hiding our gear in the rocks once more, we rode back to the Barclays Bank in town and cashed the remaining travelers checks. Glumly, Geoff and I gave him his share of “the company,” 60 pounds. He took it and went off to sell his bicycle, leaving Geoff and me alone at the bank.

Taking The Plunge

“What do we do from here?”

“I think we should buy the Land Rover and find some way to continue on our way to Africa.”

“I can’t envision going back. After all this, it would be ridiculous.”

“Let’s go and see if Harten will accept 100 pounds for the Rover.”

To our surprise, Mr. Harten accepted the reduced offer. We took delivery of the Rover that afternoon. Excitedly, we drove back toward Sandy Cove, our beach, to test the four-wheel drive in the sand.

Coming around one of the sharp corners on the sea cliff road, we almost ran over Bob. He was riding into town to deliver his bicycle to a shop and move into a youth hostel at the far end of the main street.

We had no hard feelings toward Bob. We happily offered him a lift into town in *our* Land Rover, which he sheepishly accepted. A few minutes later, he sheepishly asked us if we had any openings for a spare driver to Africa.

“I didn’t think you’d buy the Rover,” said Bob. “I thought you’d give it up without my share of the money, and then we would all go back together.”

“Bob, old buddy, we are never going to give up. Not now, not if the money runs out, not ever—until we get to Johannesburg.”

“Anyway, welcome back. We’re glad to have you aboard again.”

Another Great Lesson

Later I learned that all great achievements begin with a leap of faith, a bold step into the unknown. Great success requires an irrevocable commitment, a cutting loose from the safety and security of the tried and true. “Act boldly and unseen forces will come to your aid.” They always do.

That afternoon we drove up and down the sandy beach, with the wheels churning, engine roaring, and three light-headed world-beaters cheering wildly. After supper, cooked beside the vehicle on the sand, we drove into Gibraltar and got drunk for the first time in a month. The lights on the Moroccan coast seemed 10 miles closer.

It is strange how our perceptions are so colored by the news of the day, or of the moment. What only a little while earlier seemed remote and distant and difficult, with one positive note now seems doable, close, and even imminent.

The Rock of Gibraltar

Shaped like a disfigured pear, cut off by a narrow channel and connected by a two-lane causeway, Gibraltar extends from the mainland like a small Anglo-Saxon island on the edge of a Spanish sea. The famous rock fills the easterly two-thirds of this area, with the city of Gibraltar draped compactly on the western base, flowing down to the harbor. On the eastern side, at the bottom of the steep rain catcher, the narrow winding road from the city that snakes around the cliffs ends at a sheer stone face just above the tiny beach where we had set up camp.

High above the road, the huge rock looms at an angle of 70 degrees, to an altitude of 2,200 feet, almost like a cliff, cutting off the sun to the beach below at 3 p.m. every day. But the beach was largely deserted, except on the weekends, and there we made our temporary home.

Home Sweet Home

We reckoned that it would take at least six days for people to reply to our requests for additional finances. We therefore set about filling the hours as constructively as possible, sure that the money would come, and wanting to be prepared for departure when it did.

The day following Bob's defection and subsequent return was Sunday. The beach began filling with tourists and Gibraltarians shortly after 9 a.m. Our haphazard procedure of tossing the sleeping bags on the beach each night to sleep, and then tossing them back among the rocks each day, was senseless if we were to be staying there for six days or more. We needed something more permanent.

We chose the most ideal spot against the sea wall that ran the length of the little beach to be our home. We then labored all day in the hot sun, carrying rocks from the base of the cliff to build walls that would give us a little protection from the breezes that came up every day or two, as well as some privacy. By the end of the day, we had completed a three-walled enclosure about four feet high, open to the sky and roomy enough for us to cook and move around inside.

Passing The Time Away

We mutually gave up the casual smoking we were doing and started training a little, throwing our football back and forth, running out for passes into the water, shouting and splashing. The water was crystal clear and cool, shimmering in the bright sun that shined all the days we spent in the tiny colony. We swam every morning, increasing the distance daily until we could do a mile. Our skin began to take on a copper tan, light at first, then darker as we spent hours in the

warmth of the Mediterranean early summer. Slowly the days passed, but with no reply from our friends.

The Land Rover was put into the garage for two days to have the muffler repaired and the electrical system checked. We changed the spark plugs, and had the contacts cleaned. Meanwhile, we bought five, five-gallon jerry cans, two for water and three for gasoline, and a small tool kit, to add to the spare parts that we had ordered from the Roots Garage. With a little black-and-gold enamel, we proudly painted the Bon Vivant emblem on both doors of the light green vehicle to add the finishing touch.

Nothing To Report

We soon developed a routine for those lonely days in Gibraltar. Every morning, we inquired at the post office, the telegraph office, and the bank to see if there had been any replies. “Not today, boys,” or “Nothing yet”, or “Maybe later on, call this afternoon,” the answers came back.

We had photographs taken and then driving tests for our International Driving Permits, as well as our Gibraltar licenses. The health center in the main square informed us that we needed yellow fever vaccinations, on top of boosters for Typhus A and Tetanus. We signed the forms and paid one pound each for the shots. They were really powerful. We lay awake the entire night, moaning at the pain and numbness in our left arms and shoulders. Geoff had a tooth filled at a small clinic in town, while Bob and I took the remaining bicycles to the large shop inside the city gates and sold them, for one-third of the price we had paid in London. We were glad to be rid of them.

And every day, morning and evening, we made our pilgrimage to the communications offices to check for the replies that never came.

Marking Time

At night, we parked the Rover and roamed the streets in search of bars with jukeboxes carrying tunes we wanted to hear again, before we said good-bye to civilization. We became regular customers of several places, dropping in each evening for a glass of beer and a little chat about our impending trip. The Dollar Bar, run by old Ben and his two married daughters, became our favorite hangout, a hole-in-the-wall place, but comfortable and always cheery.

“Behold a Pale Horse” starring Gregory Peck was showing at the main theater in town. We’d all seen it, but we went again. We also went to the movies at the military theater, and the small show house in the old part of town, on the other quiet nights. The days passed slowly by, one after another, and still there was no reply to our requests for money us at the post office.

Waiting can be the hardest type of work, because you see no progress and find no relief from anxiety. For us, the long slow days seemed to run together, with the sun rising each morning at 5 a.m., and becoming so warm by 6 a.m. that we would have to abandon our sleeping bags from the heat and perspiration.

The first thing we saw in the morning was the green Land Rover with its black-and-gold emblem, standing patiently by our open “house,” as if to reproach us for failing to take it to Africa, as we had promised. Once into town, the streets were alive with colorful clothing shops, run by ivory-toothed, smiling Hindus, always good for a bartering session on our way to the post office and the bank.

Look For the Good

There were flowers everywhere in Gibraltar during those bright spring days, filling the windows and storefronts, overflowing from the carts pushed by the Spanish women along the narrow main street. Music blared at us from the wide doorways of the many modern stores selling duty-free radios and tape recorders, gifts and souvenirs.

Daily, we trudged hopefully to the post office and resignedly to the bank, pessimistically to the telegraph office, and then disappointedly back to the Rover and home to the beach.

If the shadow of defeat had not hovered over us, like a cloud, we could have enjoyed those days in Gibraltar immensely. The weather was consistently beautiful, the people warm and friendly, the living cheap, and the pace of life soft and easy. But always the grim specter of failure rose to taunt us, to make a mockery of our fading nonchalance. The hardest part wasn't the waiting; we could wait for anything and for as long as necessary. The hard thing was simply not knowing, the silence from the outside world that was neither a negation of our requests, nor an affirmation.

We had worked it out in our minds so neatly, and written so eloquently, that it didn't seem possible our letters could be ignored. What was holding up the replies, and more important, the money? Sitting there on the beach by our Land Rover, ready to go, we felt like brides at the church with no groom in sight.

A Reply At Last

On the ninth day after mailing the letters, we received a reply from my Aunt Barbara. I had asked her for 100 pounds, if she could

spare it, and a certain suitcase from her garage, which she could send airfreight.

The reply was ripped open eagerly, with trembling fingers:

“Dear Brian, I have forwarded your suitcase as you requested. You owe me six pounds, which I suppose I’ll never see. As for your request for money, if you think I can afford to finance your aimless wanderings while you squander your youth to no good purpose, you will have to think again. You had no right going off without enough money to pay for your entire trip, and I am not prepared to rectify your mistakes. Why don’t you boys take a job in Gibraltar and work for six months? You don’t really care how you waste your time.”

The letter continued another page and a half, ending with a mention of how nicely her geraniums were blooming this spring.

So that was it. That was what they thought about our great adventure. That was why there had been no replies, no money, no response at all. Glumly, we drove back to the beach and parked, sitting in the Rover in silence. Everything had been so perfect, we thought. All the details were wrapped up and taken care of. We had found a seed called Africa, planted it, and nurtured it until it grew and was about to bear fruit. But now we lacked the money we needed to reap the harvest, while the sun beat down and the fruit rotted on the branch.

The Cold Wind Of Reality

How foolish we must look! Three boys playing a silly game called, “Let’s be men and go to Africa.” Three improvident youths living in a cheap utopia made of high ideals and childish fantasies—that’s what we were to everyone else, and we were the only ones too

dense to see it. Even a little old lady could see into our senseless dream world and hold the reality up for us to cringe before, like catching us with a stolen cookie, shame-faced and tongue-tied. After all our hopes and plans, our glorious ambitions, our eagerness to do battle with life in the Dark Continent, this is what it comes down to—a triumvirate of worthless juveniles, tilting at windmills?

We wondered if they all felt that way, that this trip, so precious to us, was just a great big waste of time. That night, we dejectedly discussed the possibilities of driving back to England and starting over. We could sell our watches, if need be, for petrol, and perhaps try again in five months or so. We'd made our big try and lost, and we knew we couldn't stay in Gibraltar forever. Perhaps we needed to face the facts and do something a little more "realistic."

We didn't go into town that night. Instead we sat on the dark beach beside our Land Rover, gazing out at the empty sea. We felt like old men on a lonely shore, unneeded and unappreciated by an indifferent world. The lights of Morocco now seemed very faint, and very far away.

The Opinions of Others

Don't let your dreams be destroyed by the opinions of other people, including close relatives. You alone know what your goal means to you, no one else. Other people always have a different perspective. They may be well meaning in their comments and their criticism, but they simply don't understand. Out of respect, you might listen to their words and weigh them, but the decision, and the consequences of your decision, are yours alone to bear.

“The most essential factor is persistence, the determination never to allow your energy or enthusiasm to be dampened by the discouragement that must inevitably come.” (James Whitcomb Riley)

Chapter 11 - The Turning Point

“There is only one thing for us to do, and that is to do our level best right where we are every day of our lives; to use our best judgment, and then to trust the rest to that Power which holds the forces of the universe in His hand.” (Orison Swett Marden)

The next day was Sunday, and “our beach” was half full of relaxed Gibraltarians, strolling along the water’s edge or picnicking in the bright sunshine. With the happy laughter and tinkling music around us, we tossed off our shroud of discouragement somewhat, swimming and tossing the ball around energetically.

If we couldn’t go to Africa, that didn’t mean we had to cry about it. There was always tomorrow, and tomorrow we could come back to Gibraltar and try again. No matter what, we would keep the Land Rover and the tools intact, for the next try, in a few months time. Disappointed? Yes. But defeated? Never!

Africa would still be there in September, and this time we wouldn’t make any mistakes. We had fought and lost; but the first battle didn’t decide the war. We were saddened all right, but we weren’t destroyed. It was a shame that we had come so far, only to be turned back on the very threshold, but we were only down, not out, by a long shot.

Our Lives Our Transformed

On Monday morning, staunch as Vikings, we strode to the post office, determined to accept the worst and carry on from there. Smiling bravely, we presented ourselves at Poste Restaunte, like disciplined

soldiers walking before a firing squad. There was one thin letter waiting for Geoff, from a friend of his father in London, whom Geoff had met only once in his childhood, and to whom he had written requesting 75 pounds, humbly explaining our position. We waited patiently, like doomed men, hearing the rifles cocked, as the letter was quickly torn open.

Geoff read it to himself, then aloud to us, and suddenly the world burst into a blaze of light and music, a joyous, crashing symphony of glorious relief and reprieve. The siege was lifted; the cavalry had come thundering to the rescue. We were world-beaters again in a burst of exultation and triumph. Slapping each other on the back, laughing riotously and jumping up and down in excitement, we made him read it again. It was brief and to the point:

Dear Geoffrey,

Your father wrote and told me you would be in London sometime this winter, and I look forward to seeing you again as a grown man. However, it will wait until you return from your journey into Africa. It is unfortunate that you have exhausted your finances, but as I was once a young man in similar circumstances, I appreciate how easy it is to under-budget, much more when you have so little idea of what to budget for.

It is a wonderful thing you boys have embarked upon; it would be a shame to abandon it for the sake of an innocent miscalculation of expenses. You must employ your youth to the full while you have the opportunity, and before you become burdened with responsibilities. To assure that you experience no further difficulties, I have ordered my

bank to transfer the sum of 150 pounds to you, care of Barclays Bank, Gibraltar.

Please do not feel that you are under any pressure for repayment, and if there is anything further I can do for you, please do not hesitate to write. Please extend my regards to your two friends, and may I wish you all, Good Traveling.

—Yours faithfully, Jack S. Turing

How can a person express gratitude so great it wells up in the throat like a shower full of tears? And to a man we had never met, in a distant city, who had, in a kindly gesture of warmth and encouragement, changed our whole lives? We had come to our Rubicon at the Gates of Hercules, and a hand had reached across the miles, pushing us confidently into the current.

It was not a question of whether we would succeed, or whether it was advisable. It was the simple realization that we must have the chance, and by giving it to us, to do with as we could according to our abilities, Mr. Jack S. Turing became our inspirational symbol, the banner under which we proudly entered into Africa.

Something Always Happens

This was a most important lesson for me. I had the same experience over and over again. I found that if you make a total commitment to a goal and you hang on long enough, something always happens. Many people lose heart and give up just one day, one step, one action before the breakthrough that leads to great success. It is as if nature poses a test to see how badly you really want

it, and it is at that moment, of quitting or continuing, when you demonstrate what you're really made of.

“Most people give up just when they’re about to achieve success. They quit on the one-yard line. They give up at the last minute of the game, one foot from a winning touchdown.” (H. Ross Perot)

One Thin Letter

What a difference a letter can make! One letter of rejection can dash your hopes and call into question your very purpose. It can dismiss you as a vain and foolish vagabond. One letter of acceptance then restores your faith, validates your mission, and ultimately makes the remainder of your journey possible. The special irony is that the affirmation or assistance may come from a distant relative—or even a total stranger.

“Our greatest lack is not money for any undertaking, but rather ideas. If the ideas are good, cash will somehow flow to where it is needed.” (Robert Schuller)

SECTION 4:

THE DAWN OF REALITY

“The thing that contributes to anyone’s reaching the goal he wants is simply wanting that goal badly enough.” (Charles E. Wilson)

Most great success in life comes just one step beyond where you are ready to quit. There is a time in your life when you feel yourself suddenly beyond caring, completely willing to accept the outcome, whatever it is. But you persist anyway. And at that moment, fate intervenes. Destiny acts. Something happens.

Every test you take and pass on your journey merely prepares you for more difficult tests and challenges. The problems and difficulties never end. They only change and become tougher as you grow and mature.

Never wish for things to be easier. Instead, wish that you were stronger and better. Never seek the easy way out. Instead look for the hard way through.

Nature is kind. She never sends you a problem that is too big for you to handle. She is clever as well. She prepares you step by step, raising the bar, the requirements, gradually, until you are ready for the big tests when they come.

As long as you have a clear goal and a plan, and you are willing to be flexible in the face of changing circumstances, you will continue to move onward and upward.

You will eventually look back and be amazed at how far you have come. But it is nothing in comparison to how far you have yet to go.

“Nothing worthwhile comes easily. Work, continuous work and hard work, is the only way to accomplish results that last.” (Hamilton Holt)

Chapter 12

Morocco and the Atlas Mountains

“A man to carry out a successful business must have imagination. He must see things in a vision, a dream of the whole thing.” (Charles Schwab)

On Thursday, May 4 at 2 p.m., we drove off the ferry from Gibraltar in Tangiers, continuing, after a brief customs formality, into the city, the now topless Land Rover heavily laden with cans, boxes of tinned food, the well-packed equipment and clothes, and on top, with Bob, two English girls who were only riding with us as far as Tangiers. We seemed to have just about everything.

The food took up most of the space in the back, making the Rover look like an overland delivery wagon. Calculating the distance, we anticipated being on the road for 30 days to Lagos, Nigeria, our next objective. Thus, the food buying was simplified immensely. We just bought 30 cans of each item—of beans, spaghetti, meatballs, sausage, peaches, and green peas. We had 48 cans of condensed milk to go with the tea and coffee, plus bullion cubes and sugar, salt, pepper, and garlic. The total cost, including two petrol burners for cooking, came to just under \$100.

We reckoned that two meals per day, morning and evening, would be sufficient. The monotony of a diet occasioned by the lack of variety in foodstuffs would be offset by the time lapse between the two meals, assuring hunger enough to make anything welcome.

Somehow, we managed to be wrong in almost every calculation we made, until it almost seemed safer in the long run to

make a decision and then to do the closest to the opposite we could find. But, in the process of planning on a two-meal daily diet, we had been quite correct. We could always supplement it with tea or bullion cubes.

My Kingdom for a Map

At a large, Spanish-type house overlooking the sea on the outskirts of the city, we dropped off the two girls, wishing them luck in their proposed plans to work the summer in an orphanage. We returned to the Casbah, the main shopping area, to buy insurance for the vehicle, not having done so in Gibraltar.

At this point, we felt we should finally get a map for the coming journey. After a couple of hours of searching, we were surprised and chagrined to find that there were no maps of Africa and the Sahara Desert available in Tangiers.

We knew that a map, at this point, was essential. We tried the Michelin Tire Company offices and asked if they had a map of Africa. The receptionist had no idea and went back to speak to her boss, a Monsieur Tourneau.

Monsieur Tourneau politely informed us that Michelin did not sell maps, only tires. We thanked him politely and went back to the car. As we sat there mulling over our situation, he suddenly appeared, looked at us searchingly, and then handed us a map and walked away.

I still remember that moment, that exact time and place, in the warm afternoon in the parking lot. We somehow felt that something important had just happened. We opened the map, fully two feet by three feet, and gazed at a miracle of the modern world.

A Modern Miracle

It was Michelin Map Number 953, covering Africa from the Mediterranean across Morocco, Algeria, and south almost 3,000 miles. It was incredible, a work of art. It detailed every city, town and landmark across the Sahara and into sub-Saharan Africa. It had obviously been drawn and upgraded over many years, when the French governed much of Africa. In the weeks ahead, it turned out to be an incredible blessing. I cannot imagine how we could have survived without it. It definitely saved our lives.

This was a vital life lesson. I later learned that usually any map or plan is better than none. And if it is complete enough, as this map was, it can make the critical difference between victory and defeat. It is amazing how many otherwise talented and intelligent people underachieve and fail in life because of poor or nonexistent planning and preparation. Sometimes the first 10 percent of the time you invest in doing your homework determines 90 percent of the value of everything that happens afterwards.

Two hours and \$48 later, insured for the entirety of the continent for three months, we were traveling on the southbound road for Rabat, singing, “It won’t be long, no, it won’t be long.”

Mechanical Difficulties

We had been right; it wasn’t long. It was a short 12 kilometers out of Tangiers when we began learning interesting things about our beloved Land Rover. We learned, for example, that the radiator was no good. In fact, it was bubbling, boiling, steaming, and pouring water all over the road.

A couple of minutes of stupidly staring at the radiator convinced us that it would not be a bad idea for us to sit and wait for it to cool, which we did. We had had no opportunity to drive for any distance in the confines of Gibraltar's limited roads, and breaking down so quickly on the open road did not present itself as a good omen.

"Cripes! Look at the steam! The bloody radiator looks ruined. Haven't we got enough troubles?"

"Apparently not."

"Are you trying to be funny?"

"Nope."

"Did you fill the jerry cans with water, Bob?"

"What do you mean, did I fill them? That was your job, wasn't it?"

"Yeah? Who says it was my job?"

"Oh, shut up, both of you. I filled them."

Driving with two wheels on the gravel shoulder to keep out of the way of passing traffic, we limped the 12 kilometers back to town to find a repair shop.

"I wonder how much it's going to cost?"

"Probably a king's ransom."

"Yeah, these Arabs are notorious thieves."

"And con men."

"And swindlers."

"Can't we go a little bit faster?"

"Why?"

"Oh, I'm just getting a little tired of kids on bicycles going by us and laughing."

"Well then, I've got just the answer."

"Yeah, what?"

“Don’t look at them.”

Suspicious Minds

At the first dusty little workshop we came to on the outskirts of town, we turned in and armed ourselves with the French dictionary before getting out. With exaggerated expressions of woe, thumbing frantically through the little book, we outlined our misfortunes to the sweat-stained, T-shirted proprietor of “Alphonso’s.” We finally had to lead him to the vehicle and point out the felonious radiator, at which he brightened knowledgeably.

Nodding and smiling like a door-to-door salesman, Alphonso regretted that he couldn’t help us personally, but if we would go with him into town, he would take us to his friend, who was in the radiator business. Dubiously, we fell in behind the battered pick-up and followed him through the streets.

“Where are we going?”

“He’s taking us to a friend of his.”

“What for?”

“Probably to share the pickings. You know, one fellow directs the suckers to the other, and afterwards, they divide the loot between them.”

He stopped in front of a tiny shop with the word “RADIATORS” over the door, and jovially introduced us to his worried friend, Manuel.

“Who’s that?”

“His partner in crime, I guess.”

After the customary round of hand shaking, they jabbered together in Arabic for a few seconds.

“What’s that they’re saying?”

“ They’re deciding how much they can take us for. What do you think?”

Our misgivings were rising by the moment.

No Quick Solution

We were hoping for a quick, and inexpensive, repair job, perhaps a few seconds with an acetylene torch, and then we would be on our way. But then again, we had had problems in the past with radiators, ruined radiators that had to be replaced, and this one, in light of our experience, appeared well beyond repair.

Alphonso left us in the hands of his partner in crime and disappeared with an uninspiring “Bon voyage!” Manuel said the radiator would have to come out, and when we had complied with the request, he proceeded to strip it down with astounding proficiency, demonstrating to us, beyond doubt, that the radiator was indeed irreparable. It was rusted out and rotten to the core.

Stoically, we resigned ourselves to fate and the procuring of another radiator, a job that included a tour of three scrap yards and the careful, critical inspection of five used radiators. After having examined the fourth and rejecting it, Manuel ceased to be looked upon as a Barbary pirate and was accorded instead the respect due a conscientious craftsman.

Our fears about being bilked turned out to be groundless. Manuel, finally satisfied with the fifth radiator, haggled the price down to half that originally demanded by the greasy Arab in the scrap yard when he perceived that it was for tourists that the article was being purchased.

After four hours of searching, testing, welding, and checking for further defects, the bill came to \$17, and the radiator, now reinstalled in the Rover, was functioning perfectly. We gave him \$20 and much thanks, the part alone having cost \$13. That sort of sincere honesty, we felt, had to be encouraged.

One of the wonderful things you learn in life is that most people you meet are good, honest, decent people who mean well. It is the occasional negative or dishonest person who puts you on our guard with everyone.

The Road to Casablanca

It was sundown when we got out of Tangiers once more, after having cooked our supper on the sidewalk while the radiator cooled, much to the amusement of the passers-by. There was no need to stop before Casablanca, we agreed; we had set ourselves a tentative schedule and were running half a day behind it.

It was 3 a.m. when we arrived outside Casablanca, blind, sleepy from the long day and night since Gibraltar. Fearful of cutthroats and thieves, with which the infamous city of intrigue and Casbah must surely be rife, we parked in the middle of a vast field, far from any buildings, and slept on and around our supplies rather than risk the ground outside.

Thus passed our first night in Africa. A small boy tending half a dozen sheep was the sole spectator to our advent from the Rover the next morning. Rubbing half a dozen spots where the corners of the boxes had dug into us in the night, we stretched and yawned in the warm sunshine, unloading a few cans of food for breakfast. Immediately after eating the beans and sausages, we drove into the

busy city of modern skyscrapers and traffic jams, becoming lost minutes later in the search for a place to buy discount petrol coupons.

On To Marrakech

By the time we extricated ourselves from the maze of crowded, cobbled streets, we had the coupons and were on the road to Marrakech. We were on our way at last.

The change in the people and the country from the day before in Gibraltar was profound. Gone were the trousers, shirts, and jackets of the European continent. In their places were the flowing robes and dark burnouses of Arabia, the women with their faces covered, except for a tiny patch over one eye, through which they peered at our passing.

The old men in the rocky fields, tending sheep or hacking listlessly at stringy rows of corn, wore rolled headdresses, covering their ears and necks from the baking sun, merging into loose folds of cloth, enveloping the body and legs to the ankles, where gnarled feet protruded into rugged rope or leather sandals.

The sun was hotter than it had been the day before. The fields, except where some sort of primitive irrigation was in progress, were parched and yellow with thin, scrubby grass and the odd thorn tree. The occasional river was shallow and light brown with mud, undrinkable, flowing languorously between dusty banks lined with tired cypress trees. The countryside, from the ancient stone houses and crumbling fences to the worn footpaths winding away from the road into the rocky, lifeless country beyond, gave one the impression of uncaring timelessness.

Traveling Across A Poor Land

The bicycle and the burro replaced the automobile as the common form of transportation. Clay and sticks replaced the bricks and mortar of Europe as the most popular building materials. Lassitude and passivity had settled over a land that had been poor for so long that the people accepted indigence and subsistence as a way of life, not to be questioned in this world. It was easy to understand how the Moslem law of Kismet (“Everything is written and cannot be changed—unless Allah wills it.”) had been received and embraced so unquestioningly by these people.

Spain had been poor, with its peasants and third-class trains, its dirty streets and blackened cities, but what we were seeing now was a poverty so deeply ingrained in the fiber and social structure of a land as to be ineradicable. The people looked as though they had lived with it for so long that any other way of life would have been a step toward dissolution of their system, not progressive or even regressive, just a removal of the security they had in being poor, and expecting nothing more than a continuation of that insecurity.

We had the feeling that, in our Land Rover, we were incomparably wealthy next to the citizens of the country, but that it didn't really matter much to them. It wasn't an affluence to gloat over or talk about; it was rather something to know, and to have, and not to make too much of.

Routes Across The Sahara

Our beautiful, detailed, incredibly accurate Michelin map indicated three main routes across the Sahara. We decided to remain with our original plan—to cross Morocco to the Sahara, cross the

Sahara from Morocco through Spanish Morocco to Senegal, 1,800 miles beyond, and travel around the hump of Africa to Nigeria. This route went through almost every country in West Africa, over a distance of about 5,000 miles, and was, as far as we could discern, the most interesting and comprehensive of the three routes available.

Our goal for the day was Agadir, on the Atlantic coast in southern Morocco. Agadir would be our jumping-off place for the Sahara, which we considered to be not much more than a long, boring drive, to get behind us as quickly as possible.

In our urgent desire to make as many miles as possible each day, we drove steadily, stopping only for an hour at Marrakech to eat our supper and refuel from the jerry cans. We then drove on through the night into the Atlas Mountains.

Terrible Roads

The road leading into the Atlas Mountains is paved, as is the road leading to Tarroudant and Agadir from the other side. But the 60 kilometers in between were the worst we had ever driven, taking two hours of jolting, bone-rattling fighting with the wheel and the gears to accomplish. Three times the radiator had to be topped up with water from the jerry cans, but the Rover responded beautifully the whole way.

When we came back onto the paved road, shortly after midnight, it was with the beginning of a pride and affection for that vehicle that was to grow to an undying love. I look back on that Rover with lifelong affection, as an older man might remember a childhood sweetheart.

By that time, we were again wilting from fatigue, and could think of little beyond getting to Agadir and getting some sleep. At 3 a.m. we drove through the dark, silent streets of the city to the sea, and then along the sea road until we found a cliff high above the crashing surf. There, in a rocky field, we threw our bags on the ground and slept like babies.

Further Repairs

The radiator had sprung a leak in the night, requiring a welding torch to seal, so that was the first business of the day. After breakfast in a goat-soiled alley, during which our two stoves blew up in flames, we sought out a workshop for the necessary repairs.

The French-Arab owner was very accommodating, and in addition to not charging us for the welding, he gave us some advice concerning our proposed route. The first, in which he was echoed by his partner, was that we should not attempt to cross the Sahara at that time of the year. It was too hot, they said. We would ruin our vehicle and have to leave it there. It was dangerous, as we knew nothing about desert traveling. And there was nothing to see in the desert anyway.

No Easy Way

We thanked him for his concern, expressing a friendly disinterest in his gloomy predictions. We weren't going to spend any more time than was absolutely necessary in the desert, we told him amiably. We were going to drive straight across to get to black Africa without further delay.

When he saw that we had no intention of heeding his warnings, he gave us another tidbit to think about. The Moroccans and the Algerians were embroiled in a border dispute in the area we'd be driving through that afternoon. Several soldiers had been killed in the past weeks arguing the point. If we must go, we had better visit the military headquarters in town and get a *laisser-passer* to allow us through the lines. That piece of information interested us a lot.

The Border Dispute

We didn't know very much about African politics, and we had no desire to become involved with them. This expedition, we agreed, was purely a friendly one, a gesture of goodwill, and any way we could avoid involvement was good for us. We therefore drove straight from the workshop to army headquarters to get a pass to allow us through the disputed area.

We arrived just after midday on Saturday, but already the offices were closed, and would stay shut until Monday. Since we couldn't proceed without the official authorization, we would have to wait until the offices reopened. That wasn't such an objectionable idea since many miles of sunny beaches stretched out around Agadir. We were, however, a bit perturbed at the delay, and the mess it made of our schedule, which called for us to make 200 miles per day.

Almost Heaven

Ten miles up the coast from Agadir we found an uninhabited little cove embracing 100 yards of firm, clean sand, sheltered from the wind and invisible from the main road. It was the type of place the holiday brochures describe to lure the tourists to North Africa. The sun was warm and brightly beaming the whole day. And the privacy was

above reproach. Except for an occasional passing Arab on his drowsy burro, we didn't see another person all weekend.

The water was lovely, like warm silk to swim in, and we forswore swimming trunks most of the time to cavort as close to nature as possible. In a place like that, at a time like that, it seemed that no price was too much to pay to be world-beaters. Except for one little detail, it was letter perfect. And that was the flies.

Flies Everywhere

From the first tinge of sun in the eastern sky to the last streak of crimson on the western horizon, the flies were everywhere. In the morning, we would wake from the flies on our lips, around our eyes, and in our ears. We were beset by clouds of flies at every meal and throughout the day—buzzing, crawling, nibbling droves of irritating flies. Any activity that involved sitting in one place was undertaken with something in a free hand to wave back and forth in front of the face to keep the flies away. Conversation, viewed from a distance, looked like a waving game.

Hand waving to keep the flies away, with our hands moving like windshield wipers, soon became a part of life in North Africa, as normal as breathing. We became accustomed to the flies after a while, like one does to a plaster cast on a broken limb. We were always happy when the setting sun drew them away, not to be seen again until the crack of dawn the following morning, when they returned in endless numbers.

Life's Like That

The flies in North Africa, like the wind and the rain in France and the cobblestones in Spain, were like metaphors for life. It seems that whenever you embark on any new endeavor, you will be beset by countless little problems, details, unexpected irritations, plus difficult and dishonest people of all kinds. They go with the territory. They are an unavoidable part of the price you have to pay to accomplish anything new or worthwhile. This is probably what William James of Harvard meant when he wrote, “What cannot be cured must be endured.”

We were up with the sun, and the flies, on Monday morning, eager to continue on our way into Africa. We took an invigorating swim to wake up, knowing that it would be almost a week, according to our calculations, before we would reach the sea once more, below the Sahara, in Senegal, on the other side of the desert.

The Map, Radiator, and Warnings

Call it luck or fate or a manifestation of brotherly love—but so often the one thing you need the most at a particular moment is provided, providentially, to prepare you for the next stage. Without the Michelin map, and the early breakdown and repair of the radiator, we certainly would have perished in the Sahara Desert. Every experience, no matter how unexpected or frustrating, was teaching us something we would need to know to survive in the weeks ahead, and in the trials to come

“He who knows no hardships will know no hardihood. He who faces no calamity will need no courage. Mysterious though it is, the

characteristics in human nature which we love best grow in a soil with a strong mix of troubles.” (Harry Emerson Fosdick)

Chapter 13

The Best-Laid Plans Of Mice and Men

“Each experience through which we pass operates ultimately for our good. This is the correct attitude to adopt, and we must see things in this light.” (Raymond Holliwell)

At 8 a.m. we drove up the gravel driveway to the military administration building, taking our map and a French dictionary to explain what we wanted. It took a little sign language and word hunting to send the message to the unshaved Moroccan soldier on the front steps that we would like to see an official of some sort to procure a laissez-passer for the frontier. We were eventually ushered into a bare office with only a desk and two chairs for furniture. One of the chairs was generously filled with a large, fretful captain.

The answer we received was equally bare. The border was closed. Period. There was no possibility of our passing through the disputed zone. It was too dangerous. If the Moroccans didn't shoot us going, the Algerians would probably shoot us coming. He was polite, concise, and busy. We would have to find another route.

“Well, that was quick,” said Bob. “What do we do now?”

“Like the man says, we have to find another route.”

Back To The Drawing Boards

Alas! It was one of the ups and downs of world beating. But why did we seem to be getting all the *downs*? Huddled over the map in the Land Rover, six weeks of tentative planning dashed in six minutes of Moroccan officialdom, we glumly worked out another plan.

The second trans-Saharan route on our map was through Algeria, across the heart of the desert, and into Mali, continuing along the Niger River into Dahomey, west to the Atlantic Ocean, and eventually into Nigeria. To intersect this route in the shortest distance, we would have to follow a series of ragged roads that ran 400 miles eastwards, across the Moroccan hinterland to the border with Algeria, at a town called Figuig. From there, we would turn south to cross the desert and be once more on our way toward Nigeria.

Two Steps Forward, One Back

Coming to Agadir had been a waste of four days, 600 miles worth of petrol, and one eighth of our supplies. To go back and toward the east involved a long, hard drive.

"It's sure as hell a long way to Tipperary," said Geoff, folding the map so our route was exposed.

"With our average speed, we can be in Algeria in 20 hours," I calculated. "The sooner we get started, the sooner we get finished."

"Oh crap!" said Bob. "That means we're going to have to drive all night again. What point is there in that?"

"We're behind schedule, Bob," said Geoff. "We've got to make up the time we've lost, and then we've got to make up the time we're losing while we're making up the time we've lost."

"Yeah, what could be simpler than that?"

Geoff eased out the clutch and steered the Rover back onto the main road. The sun was already beginning to beat down through the canvas top, making the inside of the vehicle stifling hot when it wasn't moving. It was, indeed, a long way to Tipperary.

One hour out of Agadir, we pulled off the road into an olive grove and ran the Rover into the shade to cool. The ignition was acting up, a combination of poor contacts in the ignition system and overheating, we thought, and decided to cure both at the same time.

When the engine cooled, we put in a set of heavy-duty points we had bought in Gibraltar, a special type we had never seen before, and never looked at them again after installing them. They were amazing. They lasted forever, reduced our gas consumption, gave us greater acceleration, and caused the vehicle to run cooler.

By that time, it was midday. The sun was amazingly intense, broiling the air even in the shade, convincing us that driving was not a good idea until later in the afternoon. This was our first exposure to the heat of the midday sun, something that each day would soon be designed around.

An Unexpected Meeting

Later in the afternoon, soon after we had started off again, we were passed by a large Land Rover, which contained the two English girls to whom we had given a ride from the ferry in Tangiers four days previously.

Recognition was simultaneous, and we both stopped to exchange greetings. They were driving from the railhead in Agadir with a sturdy-looking English woman, and were on their way to Tarroudant, about 30 kilometers farther. There, they would work with blind children for the summer. They asked if we would like to follow along and come in for a cup of tea.

Forty minutes later, we entered the mud-walled city and followed the other vehicle closely through the narrow, shadowy

streets. Deep in the town, it stopped at a large gate in the wall surrounding an old Moorish house. The gate was opened by an ancient Arab, who closed it behind us after we had entered into the flag-stoned courtyard.

The house was built of mud bricks in a box shape around a small lawn, fringed with flowers. It had high ceilings done in mosaic and was wonderfully cool inside. On either side of the courtyard were blooming orange trees in neat rows, on a carpet of lush grass. I couldn't help but think that it was a lovely place for a blind children's orphanage.

Let There Be Light

"Blindness," said Miss Walters, as she poured the mint tea into tiny cups, "is considered a curse, put on a family by Allah. If it has not cleared up by the time the child is five, they believe the only way to lift the curse is to do away with the child."

"You don't mean a family will actually kill its children, do you?"

"Yes," she replied. "It's quite common in Arab lands. However, often the child is taken into the country and abandoned, left to die of starvation and exposure."

"Surely there must be some law against that sort of thing," said Geoff. "Isn't there any way of stopping it?"

"Oh yes," she said, "the police watch out for it. Most of our children have been brought here at the insistence of the police, or after the children have been found wandering around, or been terribly beaten and left for dead."

"Why don't the parents bring the children here?" Bob asked.

“We’ve been trying to encourage that for six years now,” Miss Walters explained. “But they feel that we are somehow contradicting their beliefs, and they rarely do.”

At that moment, the door opened from the courtyard, and a single line of young Arab children were shepherded patiently into the room by the old fellow who had opened the gate for us. Their clothes were old, but neat and clean, and their little faces all brightened when Miss Walters called out to them in Arabic. They were both boys and girls, ranging in age from five to eleven, and by their glassy, inconsistent stares, it was immediately apparent that they were all blind.

Beaming With Happiness

“This is Freddy,” said Miss Walters, gathering one of the little boys into her arms. “He had a particularly bad time of it before we got to him, didn’t you, Freddy?”

The little boy obviously didn’t understand the words, but his face beamed a joyous grin toward the sound of the voice.

“His grandmother brought him to us after he’d been beaten terribly and left to the wild dogs outside the city gates. We didn’t think he was going to live, but he fooled us.”

Freddy came to the sound of our voices and shook hands with each of us in turn. His face was lined with scars from recently healed cuts, and one arm was encased in plaster. But even with the scars and the blank gaze, his face was beaming with happiness.

After the children were led into the garden to play on the grass before dinner, we rose and excused ourselves, thanking Miss Walters for the tea and a very enlightening visit. We wished the girls a good

summer at the same time and assured them we could find our way out of the city.

The Good That People Do

When we left that orphanage, we drove in silence until we were back on the road and heading away from Tarroudant.

“It would be interesting to know just how much goes on under the surface that you never even hear about,” said Geoff, breaking the silence.

“Look at those girls back there,” said Bob, “ready to spend the whole summer taking care of those kids, just for the sake of doing it. Makes a guy feel kind of useless.”

“Yeah, and that’s the kind of thing you never hear about young people doing. All you get in the papers are stories about protest marchers and gang wars.”

“Yes, it’s true,” said Geoff. “Gives one something to think about, doesn’t it?”

Later I realized that much good happens in this world that is never recognized, reported, or rewarded. And many of the true heroes and heroines are quiet men and women who serve others unselfishly, one day at a time. As Robert W. Service wrote, “To help folks along, with a hand and a song; why, there’s the real joy of living!”

A Hard Day’s Night

We turned off the paved road onto gravel just as the sun set. Two hours later, in the dark, we were hopelessly lost in a maze of cart tracks, creek beds, and what appeared to be roads through the rocky brush land, but were really just dead ends. The four-wheel drive of the

Rover carried us across washouts as wide as 300 yards and up the far sides to continue along the footpaths and goat trails.

Shortly before 11 p.m., after going around in circles for hours, we straggled onto a well-graveled road and came upon a sign that informed us of how far we hadn't come that evening. Half an hour later, the right front tire went flat, and we lurched to a dull halt. It was turning out to be a crummy night all around.

Unprepared For the Inevitable

This presented us with a little problem. Because the cheapest tires in Gibraltar had been selling at eight pounds each, we had chosen to ignore the fact that only two of our tires were half decent. The four pound price tag on the cheapest jack we had looked at discouraged us from adding that instrument to our toolbox before we left. We hadn't bought a wrench for the lug nuts either. Except that we had a spare tire, we couldn't have been less prepared for flats if we had made an effort.

But we weren't lacking in imagination. With a heave-ho and a grunt, we lifted the front of the Rover onto three jerry cans, suspending the guilty wheel. While Bob unbolted the spare tire from the hood and Geoff prepared tea, I experimented with various methods of removing rusty lug nuts without the proper wrench. There aren't any, especially in the middle of nowhere, in the middle of the night.

The Code of the Road

We had to rely on the next motorist, and the code of the road, the creed by which we traveled. It was a simple, unspoken, reciprocal

agreement ruling the conduct of drivers in less populated areas. If we saw someone with difficulties, we stopped and did our best to help them, and in turn, we reaped the benefits of someone stopping for us when we had problems, as we did at that moment.

In the driving we had done in northern British Columbia, and all across North America, in the rural areas especially, we had come to accept this code as a responsibility of driving, as much so as the dimming of our headlights in the face of oncoming traffic. In that lonely spot, we had no doubt that this code would be honored; it was merely a question of when the next vehicle would come along and whether it would have the necessary tools. In our years of driving thousands of miles, we had joined a silent brotherhood of the road, and since we had always paid our dues, we had no fear of being ignored by one of the fraternal members.

A Friendly Bus Driver

The water for tea was beginning to steam when the first oncoming vehicle appeared far away in the distant blackness. It was a full 15 minutes later before the vehicle, a bus, came over the rise and bore down upon us where we stood drinking tea.

The bus came to a smooth halt 20 feet from the rear of our Rover, holding us with our teacups in its bright headlamps. I went to the door and explained our difficulty to the burly driver, and asked him if he might have the correct wrench. He nodded, assuring me that he had a large tool box, and then cut the engine. Turning to the passengers, he said something in Arabic and chuckled, at which the passengers chuckled in agreement and started leaving their seats to get off the bus, for natural reasons.

The Proper Tool

As the driver and his assistant busied themselves with the toolbox, locked under the luggage compartment on the outside of the bus, the passengers, all men in various types of dress, filed off the bus and casually dispersed themselves on the ground to observe.

The driver found a T-bar tire wrench and went to the front of the Rover to try it. We followed behind to do the work if it was the correct tool. It was the right tool, but the driver of the bus and his helper refused to accept our offer, jokingly insisting that they take care of it. There was nothing to do under the circumstances but to pour another cup of tea.

In the glow of the lights from the tail lamps of the Rover and the parking globes of the bus, the passengers had gathered and now sat, or stood, conversing quietly or looking on with curious expressions. Several had squatted on their heels, and three or four sat cross-legged, Indian fashion, in their suits or robes.

Two old men, however, lay out on the ground with their hands on their chins, watching us interestedly and talking to each other in little whispers. These two looked exactly like grizzled old hounds curled before a fire, lying there on the road. The soft sounds of the tire changing in the background created a rather eerie, though peaceful, atmosphere. Around the vehicles surged the silence and darkness of the balmy summer night, like a breathless sea hugging around a small island, held in position by chains of warm velvet. Overhead, the sky was a sheet of tiny stars, sparkling faintly in the blackened heavens. It felt like a spell was cast over us in the stillness,

hinting at eternity. We leaned on the Rover and sipped the tea without speaking.

Time To Go

The spell was broken by the laughing of the driver at the jerry cans that were substituting for a jack. We put down our cups and took up positions along the bumper, lifting the Rover and dropping it squarely on the road. The driver and the passengers gave a delighted cheer and happily climbed back onboard the bus.

We offered the driver a cup of tea, but he just laughed and just shook hands, declining the tea and taking his place behind the wheel. With a roar and a beep-beep, the bus crept away, picked up speed, and lumbered smoothly down the road, gradually disappearing into the night.

From start to finish, the episode had taken less than 10 minutes. Once again we were alone with the still of the night, by the darkened tailgate, each with a cup of tea in hand, and a long, long way from home.

The Law of Reciprocity

You will find with experience that mutual reciprocity is one of the greatest of all principles for assuring success and happiness in life. This principle flows from the Law of Sowing and Reaping, which says, “Whatsoever a man soweth, that also shall he reap.”

In day-to-day life, whatever you put in, you get out. Whatever you are reaping today is a result of what you have sown in the past. And there’s no escaping!

Whatever you do for others will eventually be done for you, “pressed down, shaken and overflowing.” Whatever you do to others

will come back to you as well, so always treat others the way you want to be treated.

The great law is: ***The more of yourself and your resources you give away with no expectation of return, the more will come back to you from the most unexpected sources, and in the most remarkable ways.***

Always be looking for ways to give, to contribute to others. The rewards will flow back to you with the force and power of Universal Law. And in the long run, it never fails.

“For every force, there is a counterforce. For every negative, there is a positive. For every action, there is a reaction. For every cause, there is an effect.” (Grace Spear)

Chapter 14

A Change of Pace

“Your chances of success in any undertaking can always be measured by your belief in yourself.” (Robert Collier)

The dawn found us driving steadily eastward through desolate land. We had crossed the Atlas Mountains again in the night and now they rose bare and forbidding, far to the north. To the east, the south and the west, the rolling terrain extended to the far horizon, unbroken by trees, or hills, or salient objects of any kind. The entire landscape was covered with gray-black rocky gravel, settled close upon the earth, allowing only an occasional tuft of hardy grass through its roughened surface. The road was merely a well-marked track, scraped clear of loose stones to lessen the destructive force on the passing vehicles.

There was an aura of primitive beauty about it. Even though we were chilled by the cold of early morning, hungry and tired from the long night, we couldn't help but feel a trifle awed by the stark simplicity of that empty land.

The Edge of the Desert

“This is the northernmost reach of the Sahara,” said Geoff, opening the map to its full length. “But we still have to go another 500 miles south before the real desert begins.”

“If it's like this here,” said Bob, “what will it be like in the middle of the desert?”

“It’ll probably be the dullest land on earth,” I said. “We’ll get across it as quickly as we can, that’s for sure.”

“Yes,” agreed Geoff. “We didn’t come to this continent to see the Sahara—it’s just something in the way. The sooner we get it behind us, the better.”

“I wonder,” muttered Bob, “just what we came to this continent to see.”

“Black Africa, old buddy. That’s what. And it won’t be long now.”

Except for the odd goat herders and their tiny flocks, feeding off God only knows what, the few inhabitants of that region lived in small towns that seemed older than history. These mud-bricked clusters of dwellings, often surrounded with high walls, were invariably built around an oasis, visible from many miles off by the bright green of the tall date palms.

The life-giving water came from wells dug deep in the clay beside parched creek beds, and was hauled by hand or treadmill, to be spilled carefully into the closely watched vegetable gardens. The hardness of the life was etched into the faces of the old men and women who raised their heads mutely at the sound of our vehicle, and just as silently returned to their endless toil. We were only a two-day drive from Europe, but it seemed we were in a land that time had forgotten.

Ksar-es-Souk

The first large oasis we reached that morning had one lonely petrol station where we had our tire repaired before continuing. The first town we passed through of any size was Ksar-es-Souk, shortly

before midday. Ten kilometers later we were blessed with our second flat tire, and sat down resignedly to wait for the next motorist.

An Arab-driven, weather-beaten old dump truck came along the dirt road half an hour later, the smiling driver stopping and getting out automatically to see why we were waiting. He gladly loaned us the large wrench we needed and then drove off happily after we had changed the tire. Better safe than sorry, we figured, and returned to Ksar-es-Souk to have the flat repaired before continuing.

Compared to the relative bustle of the dusty little town an hour before, it was empty and silent when we drove up to the tire shop we had seen on the main square. All the shops were closed and shuttered, as was the tire shop, so we parked the Rover and sat in the shade of a small café to wait. It was obviously lunchtime, and we assumed that the stores would be open in another few minutes.

The Afternoon Sun

The cold Coca-Cola advertised in the cracked window of the single café turned out to be warm, but the proprietor was a friendly fellow so we didn't complain. My knowledge of French had progressed to the stage of being able to ask simple questions and understand simpler answers, so I asked the fellow just when the shops would reopen.

"Oh," he said, "not long."

"About what time, exactly?"

"Oh, perhaps 4 p.m., perhaps 5 p.m."

It was then just after 1 p.m.

"All stores are closed in the afternoons," he said.

Well, that was just dandy. We would have to revel in the joys of sitting and waiting for the next few hours.

We had been driving more or less steadily across country, and been away from the towns, in our first five days in Morocco. This was our first exposure to the profound change in the way of life necessitated by the extreme heat of the desert regions. We were to find that throughout North Africa and the Sahara, during the hours when the sun is at its zenith, all work and most activity comes to a standstill. To compensate for this, the working day begins early, at 6 or 7 a.m., and continues from reopening time, usually 4 p.m., until 7 or 8 p.m.

The four or five hours in the middle of the day are spent in noisy cafés blaring Arab music, in bed sleeping, or in some other pursuit requiring a minimum of effort. Rarely will one see a vehicle on the road during the searing heat of midday because of the danger of blown head gaskets, or the oil in the crankcase thinning to the point where it no longer provides sufficient lubrication. At that point, the engine seizes up, and the car never runs again. Many people had perished that way. It began to dawn on us that there was going to be a lot more to this Sahara crossing than rough roads and passport stamps.

Attitudes Toward Time

It took us a long time to get over the hurry-up, right-now attitude we had brought with us from Europe and North America. In fact, we never did completely shake off the sense of urgency that accompanied everything we attempted. We did eventually adapt,

however, to an amazing degree, to the unhurried pace of life around us.

But at that moment, we were fresh from 20 years of “not now, but right now!” We couldn’t help but become impatient when we were delayed for any reason. No one seemed to understand that we were in a hurry. We had a schedule to make, places to go, things to do. To us, procrastination was an evil. But, to the world we now found ourselves in, it was as natural as the midday heat.

Waiting three hours in Ksar-es-Souk to have a tire repaired was the beginning of a gradual realization of what we had bitten off in coming to Africa, and in the long run, it made everything just a little bit easier to chew.

Pace Yourself

Successful people tend to be action-oriented. They have a sense of urgency. They want to get on with the job, to get it done, to get on to the next thing. For them, time is precious.

But the majority of people move at a much slower pace. They see little need for speed. They take their time and work at their own pace.

One of the basic rules in life is that, generally speaking, “People don’t change.” Part of being flexible and adaptive is for you to pace yourself as well. Slow down when you have to. Don’t allow yourself to become tense or anxious, especially when you are at the mercy of the schedules of others.

As the Bible says, “There is a time for every purpose under heaven.” Sometimes the smartest thing you can do is to just “go with the flow.”

“There are many truths of which the full meaning cannot be realized until personal experience has brought it home.” (John Stuart Mill)

Chapter 15

You Will Die in the Desert

“The longer I live, the more I am certain that the great difference between men, between the feeble and the powerful, between the great and the insignificant, is energy – invincible determination – a purpose once fixed and then death or victory.” (Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton)

At this point we began to have an experience that was repeated in different ways throughout the trip. One of the Arabs at the tire shop asked us where we were going. We told him we were going across the Sahara and south into Africa.

He immediately said, “Oh no, you can’t do that. You’ll die in the desert.” He said it with such conviction and finality that I wasn’t sure I had understood the French words.

I asked him to repeat the words. He said, “Vous allez mourir dans le désert.” I looked it up word for word so I was clear about what he had said. When I double-checked the meaning with him, he nodded and smiled. I had it right. We smiled as well, and assumed he was just joking, or perhaps this was a common way of greeting desert travelers.

Later, however, he brought over a couple of Arab friends and introduced us as the young men who were going off to “die in the desert.” They seemed quite cheerful about it, as if we had said we were going to Disneyland, but we were a bit irritated. This was not what we wanted to hear.

A Common Refrain

From that day forward, whenever we would tell someone that we were crossing the Sahara, they would immediately respond, “Non, non. C’est pas possible. Vous allez mourir dans le désert.”

And by the way, these were not just city Arabs or town dwellers. Often they were Taureq or Bedouin, people whose ancestors had lived in the Sahara for 1,000 years. They were in a position to know.

In the years ahead, I learned later that whenever you decide to break out of the mold and try something new or different or unusual, people will line up to tell you that you can’t do it, that you’ll fail, you’ll lose your money or time or investment, that “you will die in the desert.”

To succeed at anything, you have to learn to ignore the naysayers, the negative people, many of whom should know better. You must have the courage to step out in faith, with no guarantees of success, to raise above all resistance and press on regardless.

Changing Terrain

In the morning driving, the country we were passing through now had gradually changed from stony terrain to scrub brush and rocky waste. After we left Ksar-es-Souk, the repaired tire firmly bolted to the hood, the country changed again, becoming more rugged and overgrown with heavier sagebrush.

In the late afternoon, we crossed two shallow rivers, the roadway marked by boulders spaced a few feet apart in the water. The deepest part was just over two feet, but the Land Rover waded through it like a sturdy little freight boat as water gurgled through the doors onto the floor. There didn't seem to be anywhere that vehicle couldn't go.

Sick As a Dog

After Boudenib, 60 kilometers east of Ksar-es-Souk, the country flattened out again, and the bad road became even worse. We were continually pounded by the jolting of the washboard roads. The constant wind made the cooking of our repetitive supper almost impossible. On top of these little joys of traveling in the outback, Bob had become violently ill. His stomach had started to bother him the evening before, after supper, and he had been unable to do more than pick at breakfast. Geoff and I didn't think too much about it, except to observe that if Bob didn't eat his share, there was more food for us.

The long day from Agadir, and then the rough night on the broken roads, followed by the long hot day that was just ending, had destroyed Bob's body's resistance to illness. His whole system seemed to be out of kilter—head, stomach, and bowels. He was bringing up

everything he ate or drank, even water, and he was afflicted with dysentery so persistent and painful that we were stopping every few minutes to let him out of the Rover, fumbling frantically at his pants as he dashed to the side of the road. He was dizzy and his head was pounding crazily, his face white and filmed with cold perspiration. Whatever he had, he had it in a bad way, and there was nothing we could do about it, except drive on.

Unprepared For Illness

Aside from a few bandages and a box of aspirin, we had no medical supplies whatsoever, having felt that we were too healthy to worry about disease, dysentery, diarrhea, or even severe pain. Geoff and I had taken first aid courses and passed at the top of the class, but we were not prepared for something like this. The only answer was to get to Figuig as fast as possible, and hope to find a doctor or someone who could prescribe a medicine for him.

But Figuig was still many hours away, and we couldn't continue in our exhausted condition without eating something. We tried to keep our kerosene burner lit by placing it in a gully, but the wind gusted nastily from all angles, carrying sand and grit into the food and blowing out the flame so often that we finally gave up and ate the slop cold. Morbidly tired, caked with sweat and dirt from the road, the cold supper still gritty in our mouths, Geoff and I made a place for Bob to lie in the back of the Rover, and we continued on.

Traveling At Night

That was a bad night. It started off with Bob sick and all of us dead tired, and it got worse, as the road deteriorated to a broken track

within a couple of hours. It seemed as though the blackened country was crisscrossed with tracks that confused us and left us hopelessly lost, time after time.

Having no idea of where we were on the map, we resorted to using our compass, as well as a couple of stars, to keep going in the general direction of east, hoping to eventually cross the north-south track to Figui and get our bearings once more. But the impassability of the rocky terrain kept turning us around, sending us off on diverse tangents, while the broken ground underneath threatened to shake the laboring vehicle and us into pieces. Fighting the road, the wheel and the gears was a Herculean effort, forcing us to change drivers every half hour.

Our speed was never more than 25 or 30 miles per hour, but hitting a washout or a small crevice, even at that low speed, would cause the vehicle to bounce off the ground and come hammering back down, bringing moans and curses from the suffering Bob in the back, and bringing our taut nerves to the snapping point. At every hard bump, we'd slow down and proceed more carefully, hunched forward tensely in anticipation of the next jolt.

From Bad to Worse

The headlights played tricks on us repeatedly, hiding large ruts in shadows and making smooth stretches appear dangerous. We'd been driving for six jarring hours and struggling to focus our bleary eyes on the ground ahead. When we came over a rise, suddenly the road was gone!

I slammed on the brakes desperately, but it was too late. We plunged off a riverbank and slammed into the opposite bank, coming

to a sudden halt. Bob was hurled from out of the back of the Rover right onto our heads. For a second we just sat there, all tangled up in each other, almost without the energy to move. We were sure that the whole front end of our vehicle was ruined.

Wearily, Geoff and I untangled ourselves from the moaning Bob, and crawled out to take a look at the situation. Bob leaned his head out the door from where he lay and retched hollowly, gagging from the emptiness of his stomach. The headlights were still on, murky against the dust rising from the collision with the bank. The only sound was the wind whistling through the dry sagebrush that bordered the gully in which we had landed.

Single Unit Construction

Thank God for small favors and single-unit construction, we muttered tiredly. The heavy steel bumper was solidly into the clay bank, but there wasn't a scratch on the vehicle. Bob shakily climbed into the back of the Rover again while I tried the motor. It started with a hollow pop and ran smoothly. Shoving it into four-wheel drive, I backed it out of the dirt and then followed Geoff's flashlight to get out of the gully. Geoff got wearily into the Rover and slouched back, watching the illuminated road ahead.

"You know something," he sighed. "We've let ourselves in for far more than we realized with this Africa idea."

"What do you mean, Geoff?" I let out the clutch and we started slowly forward. "Well, just look at us in comparison to a year ago," he said. "Here we are in the middle of nowhere, lost, beat as hell, with Bob sick as a dog, and 8,000 miles to go. And we've only really been in Africa for a week. Where's it going to lead to?"

“It’ll be interesting to find out. I don’t even want to take a guess, except South Africa.”

“Yeah,” he said. “That’s something, anyway.”

The Road To Figuig

We drove cautiously for the next hour and finally intersected the long-sought road to Figuig. According to the map, there was only one road so we had to be on it. We turned left in the direction of the North Star. At the most, Figuig could only be a couple of hours farther, but we were dead tired. Bob had finally fallen asleep, and there was no reason to go on anymore. I coasted the vehicle off the road into the brush and cut the engine.

“We’re home,” I said, but Geoff was already dragging his sleeping bag out of the back. Within a minute, we were sprawled in our bags on the sandy ground and fast asleep.

Our Last Day in Morocco

It was 9 a.m. when we stirred from our beds on the dirt, awakened by the passing of a truck full of Arab workers, all shouting at us. Bob had improved considerably with sleep, but he still couldn’t look at breakfast. He was a bit shaky on his feet and very pale, like a man who had been terribly frightened and hadn’t quite regained his composure.

Owing to our loss of direction in the night, we had come on to the gravel road much farther from Figuig than we had calculated, twice as far in fact. It was shortly after 1 p.m. when we arrived in the little, unpaved border town and drove up to the old building with the Moroccan flag in front. We were informed that we had to be checked

out of Morocco before entering Algeria, and the man in charge would not be back until 3 p.m. We got out the makings for tea and Geoff set to it.

A Cheap And Lousy Stove

At first we tried to keep the stove going on the tailgate of the Rover, but there was too much wind. We then set the cheap contraption on the ground-level porch of the customs building, lit it, and put the kettle on it to boil. Several curious Arabs, who had been lounging around the building, gathered to stare at us and observe the tea-making operation, as simple as it was. The decrepit stove picked this particular occasion to put on a show.

We had leaned the wooden top from a packing crate against the stove from one side to stop the wind, and the seam on that side burst and ignited from the pressure of burning gasoline dribbling down the side. In seconds, the ground around and under the wooden crate was aflame, black smoke billowing up around the kettle. As more gasoline leaked out and stoked the fire, the smoke increased in density, enveloping the stove and sending the flames up two feet.

The Arabs became quite concerned, pointing to the stove and jabbering excitedly, offering advice on how to extinguish the little inferno that had now obscured the stove and kettle and was filling the verandah with oily smoke.

Then suddenly the bottom of the stove and the remaining petrol went up with an ominous whoosh, causing the on looking Arabs to jump back in fright. The smoke filled the little porch even thicker than before, swirling in the gusty breeze and pouring over the brick wall next to it.

A Cup Of Tea

Geoff had by now completed the laying out of the cups, the teapot, the sugar, and a can of evaporated milk on the tailgate. With a nonchalant smile at the Arabs, he strolled casually into the blazing cloud and plucked the blackened kettle from the flames. Just as casually, he strolled back and made the tea, with a bored look at the astonished locals. I yawned and turned a nearby hose on the fire, dousing it and cooling the misshapen lump of metal that had been the stove. Then, picking it up as though it were a valuable instrument, I wiped it off a bit with a piece of paper and set it back in the Rover. Bob was sitting in the front seat, glumly reading *Scaramouch*, and didn't even bother looking up.

We managed to convey to the Arabs that this was our normal way of making tea—you had to *smoke* it. From their huddled chatter and bewildered expressions, we got the impression that it was not done that way very often in Figuig.

Another Wrong Turn

The captain in charge of Moroccan customs arrived at 3:30 PM and examined all our papers before stamping us out of the country. After the handshaking routine with the entire office staff, about six of them telling us we would die in the desert, we were directed toward the east end of town and told that Algeria was *thataway*.

There were two roads leading in the general direction of east, and with that unerring sense of path finding, inherent in us pioneers from the west, we took the wrong one.

Stuck In Morocco

The street soon became too tight for us to turn around, narrowing to a passage just wide enough for the Rover, and then turned sharply down a steep slope.

In an attempt to turn the Rover around in the narrow street, we became stuck. The engine stalled and wouldn't restart. We got out and tried pushing the vehicle back and forward, but to no avail. We were stuck fast.

Almost immediately, the street filled with curious young men and boys, dressed much alike in baggy pantaloons and worn, button less shirts. (Aha! The necessary labor force is at hand.)

"What are they staring at?"

" Why don't they offer to push? "

"How do you say, "push" in Arabic?"

"Maybe they need a little encouragement."

" Yeah, let's set them a good example."

With dumb smiles, we weakly gave the Rover a couple of useless shoves, laughing foolishly and motioning to everyone that they could play, too. They thought it was a splendid idea, and the entire crowd—about 20 men in all—clustered around the vehicle and started pushing in all directions. We laughed and waved them to the front end, chanting in French, "un, deux, trois—and shove, un, deux, trois—and shove."

A Team Sport

Everyone picked up the chant, and the street soon filled with cheering and grunting. They dislodged the Rover on the third heave. During the round of applause and congratulations the men gave each

other, we fiddled with the electric fuel pump and got the engine started again, with a sigh of relief.

We had to back all the way up the street we'd come down, beeping the horn and waving to the gang chasing along in front. They wanted to play "Push the Happy Green Land Rover" again. This time we took the right road, which ended at the edge of town and came, a few minutes later, to the guarded frontier of Algeria. Our Morocco days were at an end.

Patience Is a Virtue

There is a time for urgency and aggressive action, and there is a time for patience. It is essential for you to be able to decide which is which, and act accordingly.

Many of your decisions will turn out to be wrong. The smartest thing you can do in many cases is to stop and reconsider. Slow down. Think it through. Develop alternatives.

Then, take a deep breath, smile, relax, and be patient with the fact that not everything happens at the time and speed you desire.

Henry Ford once said, "Patience and foresight are vital for success, and the man who lacks patience is not cut out for responsibilities in business."

Be cool. Go slow. Take it easy. Everything is probably unfolding as it should, in its right time.

"Life is a series of experiences, each one of which makes us bigger, even though sometimes it is to realize this. For the world was built to develop character and we must learn that the setbacks and griefs which we endure help us in our marching onward." (Henry Ford)

Chapter 16

Algeria and the Sahara

“It is in the compelling zest of high adventure and of victory, and in creative action, that man finds his supreme joys.” (Antoine de Saint-Exupery)

In both directions, as far as we could see, the barbed wire of the disputed border blocked off any thought of entering Algeria at this point. It was about 50 yards deep and ran in either direction as far as we could see. It was grim looking and very impressive to us, we not having seen anything of this sort before.

The first 10 yards were a mass of barbed, coiled loops about 10 feet high, with three barbed-wire fences running parallel through them about six feet apart. Then came a cleared space, 30 yards in width, with a single 12-foot high, electrified fence running down the center on heavy cement posts. The other side of this no man's land was bordered with another mass of the terrible-looking strands. At intervals of 200 yards, on the other side of the wire frontier, the ugly faces of concrete pillboxes glared at the palm trees of Morocco.

A Gap In The Wire

Although there was no road leading up to it, our map indicated that there was a way somewhere, and since one direction was as good as another, we turned right and followed the wire south. It had been a good guess, for three kilometers further we came to a road in a channel leading through the wire and up to an electrified gate.

Two dirty soldiers pointed machine pistols at us, while a third swung the gate open and motioned for us to enter. Once we were inside the canyon of barbed wire, the two soldiers flanked our vehicle, weapons drawn, while we drove at a walking speed along the narrow alley to the next gate. We had no inclination to drive any faster than they wanted us to.

Our First Impression Of Algeria

On the far side of the second gate, two more Algerians waited with machine pistols to assure that we didn't overrun their country. We were ordered out of the Rover while they briefly inspected it for contraband Moroccans, and then ordered us to follow another car to their headquarters, about three blocks into town. With all that hardware around, they didn't need to order. The slightest suggestion would have been quite sufficient.

With the aid of our map, we answered all their questions concerning our route and destination, obviously to their satisfaction, for we were soon allowed to proceed. We were told, however, that we would have to obtain Algerian visas in Colomb-Béchar, the next town south, immediately upon our arrival. We assured them that we would be there within two hours, and most certainly would comply with the request. After pumping up one of our tires at the air hose outside, we drove south from Beni-Ounif on the first paved road we'd seen since Tarroudant, three days before.

Damage To The Rover

The paved road also confirmed a suspicion we had formed regarding our front end being damaged from the riverbank we'd hit in

Morocco the night before. The steering wheel had been more difficult to handle. Halfway to Béchar, we stopped to check a grinding sound coming from the front tires, and we were chagrined to find that the rubber was scraping off at an alarming rate. In fact, there was no tread left, and it was obvious at once that the wheels were toeing in, due to something being broken or bent in the front suspension. We drove slowly the remainder of the way.

The Need For Visas

A well-dressed Algerian flagged us down as we approached Colomb-Béchar, explaining that he was from the police and had been informed from Beni-Ounif of our arrival. He led us into town to the police station, and taking our passports, told us to return the next morning with 14 dinars each (about \$3) for our visas.

We were to learn later that visas were a serious business indeed. Throughout Europe, visas are not required to pass from one country to another. But once you get into Africa, you cannot travel between countries without them. The correct visa, stamped into your passport, makes the difference between entry and rejection. The absence of a visa can lead to arrest or detention, as we were to learn later.

In life, there are critical skills and information that are like visas. They make the difference between success and failure. If you lack them, you cannot proceed or get ahead. And ignorance of them does not excuse you from the consequences of their absence.

Unable to Continue

Since our two front tires were now completely bald, we could not avoid the glaring reality that we needed four good tires and a spare if we were going to continue into the desert, and that meant procuring two more tires immediately, if not sooner. It was late afternoon, and all the shops in the small town were open. But neither of the two tire shops in Béchar had used tires for Land Rovers, and the price they were asking for new tires was a whopping \$42 each. Each shop had one tire that fit our vehicle, and we decided to have one tire installed before driving out of town to make camp for the night. We had a lot of discussing to do.

Sitting by the Rover in a small grove of palm trees, we worked out our position on paper as of that moment. The situation was definitely not good. We were almost out of money. The ferry had cost \$50, the insurance another \$48, the food \$100, and after buying gasoline and oil for 1,200 miles in Morocco, another stove, tire repairs, and the radiator, we were down to \$150 when we reached Béchar. The \$42 for the tire had dropped the total to \$108 at that moment, and the bad news was just beginning.

Bob Bails Out, for Good

The following morning, we would have to pay \$9 for visas and another \$42 for the second tire. If we forswore the needed repairs and took a chance on the tires lasting, we would have just over \$60. We needed a wrench for the wheel nuts and enough gasoline for 2,200 miles, the distance to Lagos. The gasoline alone in Morocco and Algeria cost more than \$1 a gallon. Even if we averaged 25 miles to the gallon, we would need a minimum of \$100 to reach Lagos. There was simply no way it could be done.

“Well,” said Bob. “That is the end of that.”

“What are you talking about?”

“We’ve had it; that’s all,” he replied. “The whole thing’s been an abortion from start to finish—and the end is now.”

“Just because we’re a little low on money? We’re not broke yet, you know.”

“No, we’re not broke,” he sniffed. “We’ve got enough to get back to Gibraltar and sell the Land Rover, and we’ve got no other choice. I say we leave first thing in the morning.”

“Bob, old buddy, this is a discussion to find a way to go on, not back. We’ve come too far to go back.”

“The hell we have!” he replied. “It’s on paper in front of you. We can’t go on.”

“What’s your opinion on this, Geoff?”

“Now there’s a question,” he said, picking up the poetry book beside him. “Would you like to hear a poem?”

“What kind of a poem?” I already knew.

Ignoring the question, he began to read from “Carry On” by Robert W. Service:

*It's easy to fight when everything's right,
When you're mad with the thrill and glory.
It's easy to cheer when victory is near
And wallow in fields that are gory.
It's a different song when everything's wrong,
When you're feeling infernally mortal.
When it's ten against one and hope there is none,
Buck up little soldier and chortle,*

*Carry on, carry on! There isn't much punch in your blow
You're glaring and staring and hitting out blind,
You're muddy and bloody but never you mind,
Carry on, carry on. You haven't the ghost of a show.
It's looking like death, but while you've a breath,
Carry on, my son, carry on!*

The Resolve To Carry On

Geoff closed the book with deliberation and spoke to Bob.

"That's how I feel, Bob. For the first time in my life, I've really got a little despair and defeat to contend with. We didn't expect this trip to be easy. If we'd thought it would be easy, we would not have come. And if we quit now, not only do we let ourselves down, but we also let Jack Turing down, and that I won't do. There has to be a way to get to Johannesburg, and no matter what challenge we face, that's where I'm going."

Geoff and I agreed that Johannesburg was our goal, regardless of the difficulties that cropped up on the way. "Surely, if we're determined enough, we'll find a way," I said.

"Do you know something?" Bob spoke slowly and distinctly. "You're both crazy. You read a stupid poem, and you're too blind to admit you're beaten. I'm not interested in this idiotic idea anymore. When you stop fooling yourselves, you'll see that I'm right. But I've had enough; I'm leaving for Gibraltar tomorrow morning."

Try as we may, this time we couldn't change his mind.

Heading Back

After cashing the rest of the travelers checks at the bank the next morning, we left the Rover to have the second tire fitted and walked over to the police station to retrieve our passports. On the way back to the vehicle, we stopped and bought a wrench to fit the wheel nuts. We were probably going to need it.

While we waited for the tire, Bob resolutely packed his rucksack with his belongings and one week's worth of tinned food. Geoff gave him \$9 in Moroccan and Algerian money, the most we were willing to spare, leaving us with exactly \$50.

Bob refused to change his mind. The bout with dysentery had taken the spirit out of him, and he wanted nothing more than to get back to England and forget this trip had ever happened. Geoff and I were, on one hand, sorry to see the end of such a long friendship, but on the other hand, we were glad to be rid of the voice of dissent and pessimism. It was a mixed emotion that actually left us feeling neutral about his decision. We were thinking more of the road ahead, and what we would have to do to keep from returning to Gibraltar as well.

Saying Farewell

There being no other mode of travel, Bob had decided to hitchhike back to Gibraltar. We therefore drove him to the main highway on the outskirts of town and let him off with his heavy pack.

"You sure you won't change your mind, Bob?"

"You should change yours," he said.

"Bob, old friend, do you really think that we won't make it? Do you think we could ever quit without making it?"

He looked at us carefully for a few seconds. “Ah, you’ll make it, all right. I know you’ll make it, somehow. But I’m just not interested anymore.”

“So long, Bob. Say hello to Gibraltar for us.”

We made a U-turn on the empty highway and drove back into town. Our friendship of many years had come to an end, at least for the foreseeable future.

Reviewing the Situation Once More

After receiving the money from Jack Turing and before leaving Gibraltar, we had rewritten to three or four people, affirming our requests for loans and asking that they send them to us in care of Barclays Bank, Lagos. We also left the address of Poste Restaunte, Lagos, at the bank and post office in Gibraltar so that any mail to arrive after our departure would be forwarded.

We still had a lot of faith in our friends and were sure that once we reached Lagos, we would have ample funds to complete the trip to South Africa. There now remained the small matter of getting to Lagos—across 1,000 miles of desert and three more countries.

We knew that we couldn’t possibly drive all the way on our limited finances, but if we could reach Gao, on the Niger River, 1,200 miles south on the other side of the Sahara, we could leave the Rover with the police and hitchhike to Lagos, returning with enough money to carry on from there. It seemed to be a reasonable plan, and we were quite confident that it would succeed.

Parting of the Ways

Very few relationships in life are permanent. Many are functional, formed to achieve a certain purpose by combining certain strengths until the goal is attained, but then they no longer serve the best interests of either party.

When goals or circumstances change, the players often change as well. New players come on the stage with new roles, and other players leave the stage, to be seen no more.

How many relationships in your life have reached the point where it is time for you, and the other person, to move on?

People are who they are. They are going to do what they are going to do. Each person has his or her own agenda, and you can't change it. Sometimes the best thing you can do is to accept the situation the way it is and let them go. Get on with your own life.

“No man ever achieved worth-while success who did not, at one time or other, find himself with at least one foot hanging over the brink of failure.” (Napoleon Hill)

SECTION 5:

NEVER GIVE UP

“Austere perseverance, harsh and continuous, rarely fails of its purpose, for its silent power grows irresistibly greater with time.”
(Johann Wolfgang von Goethe)

“If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.” This approach to life has been responsible for the success of many men and women struggling against apparently insurmountable obstacles.

Sometimes your greatest asset can be your ability to persist longer than the other person. Your willingness to continue, even when you feel like quitting, will often win you the day.

Between where you are and your goal, there are a number of hurdles or “tests” that you must successfully pass to succeed. And you never know how many there are. You only know that the number is limited and that at any time you might be just one step away from great achievement.

Expect to meet many obstacles, difficulties, and temporary failures on the way to your goal. They are essential to your eventual success. You need them. They are each sent to teach you something vital that will help you in the future.

And you never can tell how close you are to your goal, right now.

“There is no failure except in no longer trying. There is no defeat except from within, no really insurmountable barrier save our own inherent weakness of purpose.” (Elbert Hubbard)

Chapter 17

The Sahara Crossing— The First Attempt

“Developing the plan is actually laying out the sequence of events that have to occur for you to achieve your goal.” (George Morrissey)

After leaving Bob at the highway, we returned to town and spent the remainder of the morning rotating our tires, putting the two worst tires on the defective front end. In the heat of midday, we washed all our clothes in the dwindling river, bathed ourselves, and put our things in order for the big push. When the petrol station reopened at 4 p.m., we filled the tank and three jerry cans, and started out on the long haul south.

Welcome to the Sahara

Two hours and 90 kilometers later, only a short distance before Abadla, the first town after Colomb-Béchar, we ran into a sandstorm.

Although it was still a full hour before sundown, the light began to fade rapidly, and the sky became overcast. Then, off to the east about five miles, we saw it. Like a huge dirty cloud, thousands of feet high, a wall of murky gray was moving across the land like a monstrous amoeba, enveloping everything in its path. We were driving parallel with its front, and from the wind rattling the plastic windows, we recognized it for what it was immediately.

No Escape

The sandstorm seemed to be moving quite slowly, and we thought perhaps we'd be able to outrun it. However, its speed was deceptive, and it rolled over us as we reached Abadla. The few people still outside were running for cover, clutching clothes and headdresses over their faces. We didn't stop at all, but continued through the howling, dry blizzard to get out from underneath it. The windows and the air vents of the Rover were shut tight, but it made little difference. The fine sand poured in everywhere, and into everything, forcing us to pull our shirts up over our noses to reduce the dust we were inhaling.

The storm was so thick it obscured the road, like a dirty blizzard. Geoff had to peer intently through the dusty window to keep us from lurching off into the sagebrush. The wind pummeled at the canvas top and shook the doors angrily, whistling and gusting, hitting us first from one side and then from the other. Shifting again, it would rise and come straight down the road, shaking the Rover from side to side like a small boat on a choppy sea.

This Too Shall Pass

Then, just as suddenly, we were out of it and driving in the quiet sunshine of early evening. Behind us, the whole countryside was blotted out in a whirling mass of gray, while ahead the road flowed on peacefully across the empty landscape. A few kilometers farther, we stopped and wiped the grit from our faces and ears, and dusted off the windows, hearing the distant roar of the storm coming through the still air. We had our first welcome to the Sahara.

Later I found that the storms of life, the unexpected crises, come suddenly and wreak their havoc, causing damage and

endangering lives. But because you usually can't anticipate them or avoid them, all you can do is respond to them effectively and hope for the best. Once the storm is past, you pull yourself together and carry on with your life and your journey as best as you can.

Into The Night

The sun sat on the horizon like a burnished ball of gold when we came out of the sandstorm. As it gradually fell below the horizon, it looked like a knife-edge of flame. Then it was gone. The darkness fell and then rose again with the twinkling of a million stars.

The country had begun to flatten after Abadla, and the occasional mesas that had dwarfed the sagebrush covered desert, at heights just under 1,000 feet, ceased to be a feature of the landscape. The headlights sucked in the flowing ribbon of tarmac, to the accompanying purr of the tight little engine and the ominous growl of the scraping tires on the front. The miles fell away into the darkness behind with easy regularity. We drove in silence broken only by the odd comment on how lucky we were that, after all the floundering that had marked our first six weeks on the road, the way ahead at last seemed clear and largely uncomplicated.

Fellow Travelers

There was no traffic, in either direction, for a long time after dark. The first headlights that appeared on the road ahead aroused little interest, until we passed the car and saw that it was on the shoulder and quite stationary. Stopping immediately to investigate, we found an old 1955 Ford packed with seven Arabs among baskets and bedding and one dog. The driver, a bedraggled Algerian in a dirty

shirt, got out as we approached and began jabbering rapidly, much too fast for us to understand.

We answered him in English and got the desired reaction—he shut up. Then, speaking slowly and distinctly in French, we gleaned that he had stopped for some reason, after which the car had refused to start again. Bringing the flashlight from the Rover, we lifted the hood, exposing a filthy engine with jumbles of loose wires and broken fittings—a real mechanic’s nightmare. With a pair of pliers and a screwdriver, we tightened everything that had any thread left and told him to give it a try. It made no difference; the engine turned over but would not fire.

Get It Running

There was no question about leaving them. In that empty country, the code of the road required that we either send them on their way or take them. I brought the Rover around behind the old car and Geoff, over the protests of the Arab, took the wheel of the Ford while I pushed the old wreck down the highway. After a quarter of a mile, it finally caught with a roar, sputtering and coughing.

Shouting over the noise of the engine, we told him to keep the revs up and, no matter what, not to stop before Abadla. We waited until the rumble of the old Ford had faded into the distance before continuing. It had been our first opportunity to reciprocate for the assistance we had received, and we were glad of it.

Never A Dull Moment

Half an hour later, we came upon another vehicle and were met with a strange scene. A half-ton Citroen pickup truck, piled high with

baskets and blankets, was parked by the road, while behind it on the ground, 16 Arabs squatted peacefully around a little fire. Stopping the Rover where we could watch it, we approached and inquired of the man who rose to greet us if he was in need of anything.

Oh yes, he said cheerfully, he was out of petrol and would be most pleased to buy a little from us, if we had enough to spare. But first, he said, we must have a cup of tea. Always suspicious of smiling foreigners, and more so in the middle of the night, we declined the tea but poured 10 liters of petrol into his tank, charging him what it had cost us in Colomb-Béchar. However, he was not to be put off, and insisted we come and sit by the fire.

A Roadside Tea Party

An old Arab was feeding pieces of broken brushwood into the little blaze under a blackened pot. Everyone seemed quite relaxed about being stuck in the middle of nowhere, 40 miles from the nearest town. The driver produced a package of cigarettes and we squatted with the fellows to join the party. When the tea was ready, we relaxed a little and became a part of the gang.

The tea was poured into thick, little clay cups, and was sweet, minty, and very hot. Soon we were chatting away jovially. But for us the complete nonchalance of the strange group toward their circumstances was slightly unfathomable. We were enjoying the tea and the chatter but were becoming uncomfortable about the time we were losing, whereas they didn't seem to care at all.

Finally, the tea was finished and the party broke up. All 16 of the long-robed Arabs arose to shake our hands, some twice, with cheery smiles and vigorous head nodding. As we regained our vehicle,

they began to reload themselves back into the pickup, until it was a mass of humanity, the rear end almost touching the ground from the heavy load. We waited until they continued on their way before driving on. We were behind on our schedule, and hoped our services wouldn't be required anymore that night.

Ruined Tires

About 20 minutes later, our left front tire went flat with a dull plop. In the 135 kilometers from Béchar, the half-worn tire had been ground right down to the tube and was ruined completely. The other front tire was only slightly better.

We realized that we were faced with a major mechanical problem, and although we had a spare tire of sorts, it would be folly to continue. Not only was the vehicle not capable of being driven, but we were also too tired to continue. We drove the Rover 20 yards off the road, parked it, and went to sleep on the sand nearby.

We had left civilization behind, but we hadn't left the flies. More dependable than an alarm clock, they drove us out of our bags at half past sunrise, buzzing delightedly at the two guests who had stopped during the night.

A sober inspection of the Rover showed that it would have to be partially repaired before we moved, or the other tires would likely be ground to the inner tubes, leaving us stranded. Mounting the front bumper on the jerry cans as before, we dug out under the wheels with the machetes and removed them to see what we could see. And all that we could see was the other side of the front wheels. We decided against dismantling anything before having a qualified opinion on the

cause of the trouble. I departed for Béchar, hitchhiking, half an hour later.

Hitchhiking In the Desert

It was one hour before a car came along the lonely road northbound, another hour before I reached Abadla, and three hours after that before I was dropped off in Béchar. In the meantime, the sun had burned off the coolness of the morning and set in like a bake oven, making me very thankful that I'd thought to bring a canteen. The lack of passing motorists had turned an 80-mile trip into a five-hour ordeal in the hot, empty land.

At the main garage in Béchar, I tried to explain our problem. They told me that they would have to see the vehicle before passing judgment. I next tried the Foreign Legion post on the edge of town, but they wouldn't let me in the gate to speak to a mechanic. The guard, however, told me to ask at the Highway Department building, a mile down the road.

The Highway Department

The girl at the desk in the entrance hall ushered me into the unadorned office of Monsieur Leroux, the type of man who can be found occasionally in obscure places, seemingly for the set purpose of restoring one's faith in human nature. He was a husky man with a long face and an ability to grasp the essentials of a situation, no matter how confused its presentation, and my presentation was surely confused.

As soon as I had outlined the problem and showed him approximately where the vehicle was on the large wall map, he told

me to go back to the Rover. He would radio to his garage in Beni-Abbes, 40 kilometers past the spot, and have someone sent out to take a look at it. There was no question of payment, or mention of the fact that it wasn't his responsibility to help itinerant travelers, nor would he accept any thanks. Only 10 minutes after entering the building, I was back on the road, waiting for the next car south.

The Return Trip

Four hours later, I finally grinned down a truck that got me back to Abadla, where I waited another two hours for a second ride in another truck, arriving back at the Land Rover just before sunset.

It was like coming home after a weekend out of town. Geoff had passed the day reading and waving to the few motorists, all of whom had stopped to offer assistance, food, and water before going on. Two hours previously, he said, a light truck had come from the south, and the two Arabs inside had stopped to inspect the Land Rover before saying something about tomorrow morning and disappearing back down the road.

I explained what had taken place in Béchar with Monsieur Leroux, from which we reasoned that the two fellows had been sent and would return in the morning to repair the defect. We were there for another night.

Time for a Council Meeting

It was time for another war council to decide how to proceed from that point. The mechanical difficulties were only part of the

problem facing us, since now we needed a minimum of two new tires before we could continue toward Lagos. The repairs were going to be expensive, we reckoned, and in our financial situation, we couldn't have them done and continue with the Rover, too. Since going back, as Bob had done, was unthinkable, we would have to find another solution.

There was only one alternative—hitchhike to Lagos, pick up the money that we assumed would be there waiting for us, and then hitchhike back to Algeria for the vehicle. It would be extremely difficult, we knew, but it was our only choice. We certainly could not quit, not at that stage of the game.

We could leave our Land Rover at the Highway Department in Colomb-Béchar, load up with enough food for two weeks, and hope for the best. Once over the Sahara, which increasingly seemed to be our big stumbling block, we would be in more heavily populated countries, and would surely get along somehow. Realizing that any more discussion was worse than fruitless, we turned in early to be well rested for the coming day.

No Good News

At 7 a.m., the light truck from the previous afternoon reappeared, and the two Arabs examined the Rover once more. The driver of the vehicle shrugged and said that there was nothing he could do, but he would escort us back to Abadla, to the workshop, and perhaps they could repair it.

We put the old spare on in place of the ruined tire and followed him slowly. The mechanic at Abadla hemmed and hawed for the entire morning before informing us that he knew nothing about Land

Rovers and we would have to go to Béchar to find someone who did. He had held back that little tidbit of information until it was too hot to drive, forcing us to wait the afternoon in a little mud-walled café, listening to the wailing of Arab music coming from the speaker above the door.

Back Again

The return to Béchar took four hours of 15-mile-per-hour driving. The grinding sound of our tires made us cringe, and it was with great relief that we made it back to the riverbank outside of town to spend another night. It was a bit like the battle of Dunquerque, we felt, in that we had made a successful retreat, but we weren't any closer to winning the war.

We woke in the morning amid a herd of goats bleating, their bells tinkling merrily. The old gaffer steering them along the riverbank showed no emotion at the rudeness of our awakening, aside from a toothless grin, and plodded on, swinging his staff. Fortunately, the goats avoided stepping on us directly, and we withdrew into our sleeping bags to avoid any low-flying hooves until they were past. No one sleeps after something like that, not us anyway, even if the flies weren't there to remind us that it was time to be up and out hitchhiking.

Our patron saint of Colomb-Béchar, Monsieur Leroux, readily agreed to our leaving the vehicle in the Highway Department compound, where it could be watched during the day. We thanked him profusely once more, then pulled on our loaded rucksacks and hiked out to the main highway to hitchhike 2000 miles to Lagos, Nigeria.

Attacking to the Rear

Sometimes a tactical retreat, allowing time to reassess and reconsolidate, can save the entire situation. There is a time to advance boldly, and there is a time to back off and reconsider.

The person who is going back the fastest is often the person who is going forward the fastest in the long run, especially if he is on the wrong road.

It is essential that you conserve your resources. Don't risk everything at once. There are some decisions you cannot afford to make. The cost of being wrong is too high.

Look at your life today. Where do you experience the most stress? In what areas would it be a good idea for you to reassess, to withdraw and regroup?

Taking time to rethink and reevaluate your situation can enable you to see it in a much better light. Always be prepared to admit that you could be on the wrong track, trying to do the wrong thing, or the right thing in the wrong way.

“To decide, to be at the level of choice, is to take responsibility for your life and to be in control of your life.” (Arbie M. Dale)

Chapter 18

The Sahara Crossing— The Second Attempt

“The greatest thing a man can do in this world is to make the most possible out of the stuff that has been given him. This is success, and there is no other.” (Orison Swett Marden)

This plan, to hitchhike across the heart of the Sahara Desert to Lagos and then return, as though going to the corner store to pick up some groceries, surely ranks as one of the dumbest decisions of my life.

Looking back at it with a shudder, I can think of no pastime more unrewarding and more fraught with disappointment than that of a hitchhiker in the deserts of Algeria. A more miserable, wretched, soul-searching way of traveling surely cannot exist. With temperatures during the day climbing over 120 degrees Fahrenheit, and not a breath of wind stirring, with distances between towns of 50 miles or more, and with almost no traffic on the roads, except for a brief period each morning and afternoon, traveling by thumb has to be the lowest form of mobility.

Broiling Under The Desert Sun

We got our first ride just after 10 a.m., which seemed like a good start. But 10 minutes later it ended at a small village on the outskirts of town. And there we sat, waiting for a ride, for five long, hot, broiling hours in the raging sun. The urchins from the nearby village threw stones at us for a while, and then ran away laughing. However, we tired of the game before they did and our aim was better, so they eventually left us alone to fry in peace. Our real enemy

was the sun—that merciless ball of flame, producing a heat we didn’t think was possible, coming as we did from the cool mountain country of British Columbia.

Not only was such heat possible, but it was very real, and in our circumstances, unavoidable. There was very little traffic on the road, so we couldn’t seek shade without risking missing a possible ride.

Although we weren’t having much luck with our schedules, we were still determined to get to our destination as quickly as possible, in spite of the difficulties it entailed. The heat, as terrible as it was, we accepted as an occupational hazard, to be endured since it seemed to be an unavoidable part of the job of world beating.

Our Second Ride

At 4 p.m., after waiting all day, we finally got our second ride, in the back of a vegetable truck loaded with onions, oranges, and Arabs. We were so pleased to be under way again that we would have ridden in a garbage truck.

When the Arabs started singing a native refrain, we joined in and howled along happily. While they were laughing among themselves at us, we were stealing all the oranges we could without being seen, stuffing them into our already fat rucksacks. The driver turned off in Abadla, stopping to let us climb out. But as we started hiking away, he suddenly called us back. Going to the rear of the truck, he pulled out a sack and gave us each four oranges, smiling and wishing us “Bon voyage” at the same time. We thanked him humbly and walked away sheepishly, feeling like ingrates for stealing a few oranges earlier.

We lugged our heavy rucksacks, full of canned food from Gibraltar, to the dry riverbed on the far side of Abadla. Once more we

sat and waited for hours by the roadside. It was dusk before a Frenchman stopped and took us another five kilometers, turning off on a small dirt road and leaving us far from any human habitation just as night fell.

Any Port In A Storm

Hours later, another car came out of the darkness and stopped. The Arab driving the small, overloaded Citroen station wagon insisted that he had plenty of room for us. We didn't need much encouragement, but the Arab was wrong about having "plenty of room." Including the family, the baskets, and the bundles, he did not have room for us. Nonetheless, we squeezed in, and in return for the ride, he talked at us incessantly.

During the next two hours, from our cramped positions in the rear seat, we vigorously agreed with him that: a) Arabic was the most important language in the world; b) that his skinny daughter had a beautiful voice; and c) everyone should see Algeria before they die.

At midnight, he let us off at the turning point to Beni-Abbes. A tiny two-room house stood at the lonely crossroads, and for some reason, the Algerian police were checking identification papers there by lantern light. We had to stand for half an hour with several truck drivers before showing our passports to the bored policeman. We then shouldered our packs and walked down the road for 15 minutes, under the silent, star-riddled desert sky. By the quiet roadside, we spread our bags and drifted gratefully off to sleep.

We had been on the road for 14 hours, covering the impressive distance of 140 miles, and the traffic on the road was diminishing with

every mile we proceeded south into the desert. At the rate we were going, it would be a long, long way to Tipperary.

No Rides To Be Had

The decrease in vegetation was the first thing we noticed in the morning, after the flies had arrived to tell us that the sun was up. The ground was bare, rocky gravel, flat and unbroken for miles, and the road stretched across it north to south, from horizon to horizon. The tiny building at the crossroads looked like a toy block that had been left behind when the desert floor was swept clean, and we felt like tiny ants in a huge, empty ballroom.

In the five hours between our waking that morning and the sun reaching its zenith, only three trucks passed on the road south. Each driver stopped and inquired about our destination, but since they were not going too far, they all told us to wait for another truck going farther.

By 11 a.m. the heat was too intense for us to sit unprotected any longer, hotter still than the day before, and since there had been no traffic for the last two hours, we donned our packs and hiked back to the little white building, to stay until the sun abated somewhat. The hike was only about one mile, but it felt like five miles. We were sweating and puffing with the effort when we flopped down on the bench on the cement verandah.

The Midday Heat Once More

The building turned out to be a café of sorts, selling as its sole product warm orange soda to passing drivers. The owner was definitely not in the business to get rich.

By noon, several Arabs—two boys, four young men, and three grizzled older fellows—wandered in from somewhere to sit out the heat. They were soon joined by a young, clear-eyed Algerian who parked his truck by the road and lazily sat down with a magazine at the one table on the porch. We were there for the afternoon with nothing to do, so we eventually started chatting with the amiable driver, who immediately offered us a ride back north to Colomb-Béchar if we were going that way.

We declined, but as the sun burned hotter and hotter, we began to rethink the whole idea of hitchhiking.

“Geoff, this is the stupidest thing we’ve ever done,” I said.

Outside the building, the rising heat waves were so heavy they blurred everything over a distance of 100 yards. Even in the shade we were breathing laboriously, the salty perspiration dripping off our chins and soaking through our clothes. The air was heavy with the drone of the ever-present flies.

“What else can we do?” he replied after a while.

“I don’t know, but there has to be another solution. It’s so stinking hot here that you could can the heat and take it home.”

“In the last two days we have traveled only 140 miles. Do you know how many days we could be stuck in the desert?”

We sat musing quietly for a few minutes.

“We need more money; we’ll have to borrow some more. Is there a Canadian embassy in Algiers?”

“There’s only one way to find out. You speak better French than I do. Tell your friend we accept his offer for a ride.”

A New Strategy

That afternoon in the oppressive heat, we worked out a new strategy, rationalizing away the idea of hitchhiking with reasons that were as good as they were obvious. The energy-sapping, 120-degree heat was making itself felt, and it was difficult to envision glorious sagas of winning in the face of great odds when we were feeling like boiled dishrags. There comes a point when stubborn resolve gives over to simple reasoning, and we were there.

We needed our vehicle to make the trip, and we needed a way to get our vehicle repaired and running properly. We decided that we would return to Béchar that night with the truck driver, and tomorrow Geoff would leave for Algiers with a hard-luck story to deliver to the Canadian embassy, about how we had mailed most of our money to Lagos, and due to unforeseen difficulties, needed a small loan to get us there. We would promise to repay the Canadian representative immediately upon our arrival.

In the meantime, I would remain in Colomb-Béchar to sell our extra groceries, raise some money, and enact the necessary repairs. It was a good plan, we figured, and much more logical than this heart breaking, death defying, botched effort at hitchhiking.

Lunch for Everyone

Borrowing the proprietor's stove about 3 p.m., we got out a can of beans and started preparing a late lunch, with every Arab eye on the porch following our movements. Up to then, they had been sitting quietly in various positions of lassitude on the floor and along the bench at the end of the porch, saying nothing, doing nothing, just sitting blankly. None of them had anything to eat, and from the ragged

clothes that hung on them, young and old alike, the reason was obvious. Missing a meal wasn't going to be a new experience for them.

"Geoff, I can think of a better idea than dragging all this food back to Béchar," I said, referring to the bulky packs.

He looked at the blank stares coming from the hungry Arabs, and then back at our packs.

"Yeah," he said. "These are the only people I know who are worse off than we are."

Borrowing a large pot from the wall of the café, we emptied 10 cans of beans and spaghetti into it. The unkempt proprietor, who lived in one room and sold his wares from the other, watched us thoughtfully for a while, knowing what we were doing without our having to explain it. He had been ignoring the presence of the ragged crew on the porch, preferring to do what little business he was doing with cash customers—the truck driver, Geoff, and myself being the only ones there with money. Now he felt that he had better get into the act, perhaps fearing that he would lose face if foreigners fed his people.

As the stew began to steam and boil, he produced a huge loaf of bread and a few tin plates, which he laid out on the slatted table. He helped us to ladle the stew and pass the plates to everyone, the gang squatting on their haunches, eating two to a plate, slurping the food down and jabbering happily in Arabic the whole time. The proprietor didn't partake, but brought us another bottle of orange soda, a gift this time, and sat watching interestedly while we ate. Because of the language barrier, the preparation and serving had been

done with a minimum of conversation, but the communication seemed to be quite good for all that.

I've learned in life that you will regret many things, but you'll never regret being too kind or too fair. You'll never regret being too helpful or too generous. From those to whom much is given, much is expected. Never be reluctant to give of yourself and your substance. It always comes back to you.

Back to Béchar

The ride back to Béchar was broken at Abadla (a town we were rather sick of seeing) while the driver chatted with a couple of his friends. We sat in the truck the whole time, muttering, but knowing that we were better off waiting impatiently in the truck than waiting warily along that empty highway. At sunset back in Colomb-Béchar, we straggled up the stony riverbed to the palm grove to spend our sixth night in Algeria. Except that the riverbed was now dry, things were pretty much the same as they had been the evening of our arrival a few days ago.

The two days of exposure to the unmitigated heat exacted their toll that night. Geoff was lucky—he only paid in physical exhaustion and was unconscious shortly after dark, sleeping through the night without stirring. I know he didn't stir because I was awake with stomach cramps and dysentery until the early hours of the morning.

For the rest of the time we traveled in Africa, the dysentery (otherwise referred to as the Algerian runs, the Nigerian trots, tummy palaver, rumbling guts) was a part of life. It was brought on by the weather, the water, the insects, or the local foods, but it was ever-present. Constipation is a word that does not exist and is not

understood in Africa above the tropic of Capricorn, or below, for that matter.

Money and Repairs

With four cans of spaghetti, two cans of beans, and 10 dinars in his pocket, Geoff took all the papers he would need to prove his story to the consulate in Algiers and left the next morning, expecting to be back within three days. I wished him luck and waved him good-bye. He was on his way to do his job, and I was hiking back to the Highway Department to start mine.

In the rear of the little bungalow housing the Highway Department were situated a bath and two small bedrooms, one of which the radio operators offered me as a place to stay until Geoff returned. The offer was accepted immediately. I had already been wondering how I was going to keep our things together and out of the hands of the many wandering, light-fingered Arabs while the vehicle was being repaired.

Off To The Market

After moving our things into the room, I sorted out enough food for 12 days and then took the remainder, except for six cans of beans and spaghetti, into town to sell.

Scanning the shelves of the little store for the prices of similar articles to those I had to sell, I added the sum, tacked on 20 percent, and then started the bartering. The Arab storekeeper was not a beginner at this game. He also worked out the value of my things—mostly peas, condensed milk, beans and spaghetti—added it up on a piece of paper, divided it by four, and made me a “final” offer. Twenty

minutes of final offers and ultimatums later, we came to a compromise at about 60 percent of the retail value, 104 dinars, or about \$24, approximately what we had paid for the items in Gibraltar.

Repairing The Rover

The finances replenished somewhat, I then took the Rover into the main garage in Béchar, where I explained our hitting the bump to the jovial manager in the service department. He told me he would have to take it apart and look at it. “Come back tomorrow after lunch,” he said.

We seemed to be making a little progress, I thought. I certainly hoped it wouldn’t cost more than the \$40 that represented our total savings. There was no telling how successful Geoff would be with his story in Algiers, and it would be a tragic thing for him to come back broke, find me also broke, and the Land Rover in the shop with an account against it. That would be too much.

Two days later the Rover was finally returned to me. One steering rod had been bent, shortening the distance between the forward edges of the front tires and causing the excessive wear. After discovering the fault, the mechanics took it out, heated it with an acetylene torch, tapped it straight, and reinstalled it. From beginning to end, once they got at it, the job took half an hour, involved no new parts, and cost a total of 12 dinars, about \$2.50.

Little Things Mean A Lot

For the two days I had been waiting, nervously fingering the 180 dinars in my pocket, I had been trying to think of something else to sell just in case I didn’t have enough money. We had ruined three

tires, been set back 10 days already, lost a childhood friend, and suffered the heat of two days in the open—all for a lousy 12-dinar repair job. Driving the snug-steering vehicle back to the radio shack, I was trying to decide whether I was mad, glad, or sad—or a bit of all three, and how much of each.

Again I learned that often the most important thing you can do when faced with a new problem or situation is to stop and think for a while. Don't rely on your own limited knowledge. Ask someone for input, advice or guidance. Sometimes a few words or instructions from an experienced person can save you huge expenditures of time or money.

New Tires

The next problem on the agenda was tires. Although the garage had no new tires for a Land Rover, it had one good used tire, which I bought for 50 dinars. A search of the junkyards around Béchar turned up nothing, but in back of the Highway Department, half buried in the sand, was the remains of a Land Rover that had been demolished in a collision. The tires had blown out on impact, but except for tears in the sidewalls, two of them were almost new.

The parts department of the garage denied having what I needed, but the thin-faced, harried Arab agreed to look in the back anyway, and he found them—large rubber patches made for repairing the inside of tires. These patches are frowned upon universally by companies dealing in tires, for obvious reasons. But, I had once had occasion to use them on a car when I was in school, and I knew they had amazing potential.

After three hours of scraping, sanding, and shaping—and after buying two new, heavy-duty tubes—I now had four good tires and a spare, and the Land Rover was ready to roll once more.

The Kindness of Strangers

Adding to the delight of having the Rover repaired and ready at such a low cost, a Frenchman, with whom I had chatted at the garage, came by at that moment and said that he had a sixth tire for me if I wanted it. He rolled it out of his carport and showed me that it was ripped on one side, but if I could use it, I could have it. You bet I could!

From various inquiries among the truck drivers in Béchar, as well as a bit of advice from the garage owner and the friendly Frenchman, I learned that there was an 800-mile stretch in the desert where it would be impossible to get petrol or any repairs. The trucks that went across in convoys, every two weeks or so, carried half a dozen spare tires, spare parts enough to overhaul their entire vehicles, and enough petrol for the trip both ways. They said that the desert was dotted with the abandoned vehicles of travelers who had not been properly equipped. This “simple” matter of a long, hot drive was turning out to be a very complex affair indeed.

The evening after settling the tire problem, I removed a 16-gallon tank from a ruined truck and mounted it on blocks in the back of the Rover. That tank, along with the three five-gallon jerry cans, gave us a fuel capacity of 39 gallons. I figured that, at 25 miles per gallon, this was seven gallons more than we would need for the long stretch. With the addition of a jack, we were as prepared as we could

possibly be for the crossing. All I needed now was Geoff and a little bit of money. But Geoff was already one day overdue.

The Familiar Work of Waiting

Geoff had reckoned on covering the 500 miles to Algiers in one day, allotting one day to obtain the money and one more day for the trip back. He had hoped to arrive back in Béchar the night of the third day, or at the latest, the morning of the fourth.

Before being given the place to stay at the Highway Department, I had assured him that I would camp by the riverbed on the edge of town and be waiting for him when he returned. The vehicle now being road ready, I therefore started making regular pilgrimages to the riverbank, where I would sit and read Paris Match, looking up the new French words to pass the time.

The Time Drags By

The time began to drag after the fourth day and the fifth, and the sixth came and went with no sign of him. I read or wrote poetry, and went for walks. I gave the young radio operator a couple of driving lessons, and started going into town with him at lunchtime to eat Arab food. I did calisthenics to keep fit. I wandered around the town. I wrote in my journal and translated bits of French. But still the time dragged and I began to worry.

What if Geoff had been hurt or fallen sick, and was unable to remember that I was back in Béchar? He had the passports and all the papers from the Rover, so I couldn't leave and go looking for him without being arrested for lack of identification.

I checked at the post office to see if he'd written, but there was nothing. On the morning of the seventh day, I drove to the riverbank again and waited until noon, but there was still no sign of him. More than impatient, I was genuinely concerned, nervous, and worried.

A Foolish Error

That afternoon, when the traffic on the roads had stopped for the midday heat, I did a very foolish thing. Thinking perhaps that a bit of strenuous exercise would relieve the tension, I went for a long walk in the open country west of town, bareheaded, in the very heat of the day.

Half an hour of walking in the broiling sun brought me to a place where thousands of empty bottles had been dumped in piles over an area of several acres. Setting a long row of bottles on a ridge, I walked back a few yards and hurled rocks at them until my arm was sore. Feeling a bit giddy from the 120-degree heat, I walked back to my "home" an hour later.

The radio operator on duty, an ex-soldier, looked up when I came in and commented that it was not a good idea to walk around without a hat in the sun. I laughed and told him that Canadians were hardy—we didn't worry too much about such things. He left at 6 p.m. as usual, and after one more visit to the riverbank, I crawled onto my canvas mat and went to sleep. For some reason, I was feeling especially tired.

Sunstroke Can Be Deadly

The next morning I couldn't get up. The noise of the radio operators arriving in the room outside the door woke me, as it had

done for the previous week, but my body failed to respond when I tried to stand. “Perhaps I need more sleep,” I thought, and closed my eyes once more.

It seemed only a moment later that I reopened them, but the sun was leaking in the window from high in the sky. My watch said 11:30, making a total of 15 hours since I had laid down the night before.

“This is ridiculous,” I mused. “No one needs that much sleep.” With a deep breath and a shove, I got to my feet. That did it. A searing pain shot through my head and down the length of my body, like a tongue of flame, and everything went black, with flashing lights dancing and screaming through my eyeballs. Lurching against the wall, I just stood there shaking in agony, my limbs trembling and my heart pounding insanely. “What the hell is wrong with me?” I thought, as the pain lashed across the nerve endings. I’d never believed such suffering to be possible.

A Near Death Experience

For five minutes, I remained perfectly still, and gradually the room came back into focus, the roar of blood in my temples abating slowly. I had to get to the bathroom outside the door, I thought. I must be poisoned from that Arab food I’ve been eating. That’s why my abdomen felt like a knife was being twisted into the muscle. Moving very slowly, I aimed a foot in the direction of the door six feet away, and pushed from the wall gently, toward it. The agonizing pain crashed back, worse than before, leaving me gripping the door handle from the floor, holding on for dear life while the cold sweat poured down my face.

It was another five minutes before the furious pounding diminished again, and another 20 minutes before I was able to crawl to the bathroom and get back to the canvas mat on the floor. I collapsed, unconscious, thoroughly spent with exertion and confirmed in the belief that I could soon be dead. I think I might have been looking forward to the relief of it.

Two Days In A Haze

For the next two days, I was in a state of semiconsciousness. My existence consisted of trips to the bathroom, aspirins washed down with the water from the canteen, and dazed slumber. I found that if I didn't move a muscle, my head remained clear. The Arab radio operators in the next room accepted that I was sick with something, and paid no more attention to me, except for the young fellow, who plagued me continually with questions and requests for driving lessons, to which I was barely able to reply.

Slowly, very slowly, the pain began to abate, like a tide going out. Once it began to appear as though I would live after all, I discarded the idea of seeking medical attention because of the possible cost. We simply couldn't afford doctors if we were going to have enough money to get to Lagos. Those were very grim days indeed.

By the afternoon of the third day of illness, I was finally able to get up and move around, and though still weak, drove out to the riverbank to check for Geoff. That evening, I drank a little tea with plenty of milk and once more collapsed to sleep for 12 hours. What I had was a "minor" case of sunstroke. This bit of bad luck I experienced, through foolishness and ignorance, serves as an excellent

example of just how hot it really is in that country. And we still had several hundred miles to go before we would arrive in the hottest part.

Never Assume Anything

One of your greatest enemies, or weaknesses, can be complacency. Never take an important situation for granted. Never assume that things will be all right whether you do anything or not. Be careful.

On the fourth day of my illness, the pain and the constriction in my stomach were gone, replaced by a nagging hunger, reminding me that it had been a long time since I'd eaten. After checking once more to see if Geoff had returned, I bought six eggs in town and took them back to the radio shack to scramble. The eggs were just beginning to steam when the stillness was shattered by a loud whoop coming from a dirty, unshaved fellow toting a rucksack and wearing a battered old straw hat.

Back in Business

It was Geoff in all his glory. He was weather-beaten, dusty, and eight days late, but from the smile on his face, I knew right away that he had the money. I was sure glad to see him.

It had not been easy to hitchhike to Algiers. Rides on the main road north, when there had been traffic, were fairly easy to come by, but there had not been a lot of traffic going long distances. In the course of eight rides, going the wrong way once and getting lost twice, Geoff had spent almost two days getting to Algiers, arriving there late in the afternoon of the second day. By the time he made his way to the part of town housing the foreign embassies, not only were

they all closed, but also there was no Canadian delegation to be found.

Sitting down on the curb opposite the heavily guarded palace of President Ben Bella with a can of beans, Geoff pried it open with a screwdriver, using the bent tin lid as a spoon to wolf down the contents. He was debating with himself over where he could sleep the night when a well muscled, sharply dressed Algerian in tight black pants and a purple T-shirt walked past him on the sidewalk, stopped, then turned around and came back.

A Place To Sleep

Curiously but in a friendly manner, the Algerian asked Geoff where he was from and where he was going with a rucksack on his back. Hunched over the can of beans, Geoff replied that he had just arrived from Colomb-Béchar, and was going to visit his embassy in the morning. When asked where he was staying in Algiers, Geoff replied that a temporary lack of funds was limiting his choices; he was going to sleep in a park. The good-looking Algerian laughed and said that Geoff could sleep in his nearby apartment if he wished. A bit suspicious but game for anything, Geoff thanked him for the offer and accompanied the Algerian to his home.

Although not large, the apartment was in a new building and quite luxuriously furnished, with a balcony overlooking a nearby hospital. Once inside, the Algerian poured them both drinks from a small bar, later frying a couple of steaks in the kitchenette, and kept up a steady stream of questions and jokes for several hours. Geoff was becoming sleepier as the evening progressed, and a bit uncomfortable

after noticing that there didn't seem to be a bed in the apartment, let alone two beds.

Just after 10 p.m. the friendly Algerian indicated that it was late and time for Geoff to sleep. Turning a handle on one of the walls, he pulled down a well-concealed double bed and told Geoff to make himself comfortable.

"No," said Geoff, "you sleep here; I'll sleep on the floor."

"No, no," said the Algerian, smiling. "You must sleep in the bed."

"No thank you," said Geoff, also smiling. "The floor would be just fine; I much prefer sleeping on floors anyway."

The Algerian insisted and Geoff resisted, beginning to think he'd better go and find a park after all.

The Algerian looked at Geoff and was obviously a bit perplexed. Suddenly he broke into a big grin of understanding. Motioning for him to follow, he led him to the balcony and pointed to the hospital below. "That is where I work," he said, "and I am leaving for work now. I won't be back until the morning."

Geoff would be alone in the apartment, and he was free to sleep wherever he chose. Geoff was already in the bed when the fellow left 10 minutes later.

Show Me The Money

Early the next morning, Geoff put on his clean shirt, carried from Béchar in a plastic bag, and went off to peddle his story. The

chosen victim for his tale of woe was the British consul, on the third floor of an office building downtown.

The consul was singularly unmoved by the unfolding tragedy in the desert, and the array of papers proving the existence of a vehicle and a destitute friend had no effect on him. Every summer, he said, people like Geoff came there looking for handouts or passage money home. "We are not authorized to supply funds, except in the case of emergency or theft," he went on, explaining that even then it was only the necessary amount to fly the destitute traveler back to England. "Haven't you got any relatives to whom you can wire for money?" he asked.

Geoff replied that he could ask his parents, but he couldn't afford a cable (all the money was in Lagos, you see). "Well, old boy," the consul replied brightly, "you can use our wire service, and pay for it when the money comes." He wrote out a request for \$150, which the consul sent that morning. After writing a letter explaining the circumstances behind the request and mailing it, Geoff shouldered his rucksack and wandered into the streets to begin the wait.

Hurry Up and Wait

After two days of sleeping in a urine-stained alley while the rats nibbled at his ankles and ate the bits of bread in his rucksack, Geoff began to think that there had to be a better place to sleep. An undersecretary at the consulate, where he hung around most of the day waiting for a reply to his cable, told him of an old hotel on the waterfront run by an Englishman for seamen and expatriates. The manager of the Republican Hotel listened to his tale of desert tragedy,

and told him he could sleep in the broom closet if he wished. After the alley, the broom closet was just dandy.

For the next five days, Geoff haunted the British consulate, stopping to inquire every two hours. The rest of the time he spent reading old periodicals and anything available concerning the country through which we would be passing, finding out many interesting details that were to become very important later.

And if I wasn't exactly enjoying my sojourn in Béchar, Geoff was a long way from delighting in the excitement of Algiers. Having no way of knowing how I was faring, and thus feeling obligated to keep expenses down to a minimum, he refused the consul's offer of a small loan, instead living for the entire 10 days on his limited supply of canned food and the 10 dinars he had taken with him.

The Parents Come Through

Finally, on the morning of the ninth day after leaving Béchar, a bank draft came through the consulate in the name of Geoffrey E. Laundry for the grand sum of \$150. Half an hour after receiving it, he was on his way out of town, on the southbound road.

A good night's sleep in a culvert did him no harm, and neither did a ride straight through to Béchar early the next morning. When there was no sign of me at the riverbank, except for a lot of tracks, Geoff went to the only other place he could think of me being—the Highway Department. And there I was.

Ready To Go At Last

That afternoon, when the petrol station reopened, we filled the tank and the jerry cans and once more drove out of Béchar toward the

south. After 17 days in, out, and around that town, we never wanted to see it again. But without those 17 days, with the repairs and the equipping of the vehicle, and the replenishing of our finances, I do not like to think of the things we might never have seen again, or at all.

Thank Your Lucky Stars

These were the worst of times, and simultaneously, the best of times. We were frustrated and stymied at every turn, making mistakes and doing incredibly dumb things. But unbeknownst to us, we were learning at a rapid rate. We were inadvertently becoming the kind of people we would need to be for the crossing ahead.

We learned one of the most important of all success principles through these setbacks and difficulties. We learned that, in retrospect, every experience in your life seems to be part of a grand plan to teach you something essential you need to know to move forward. Often when you are in the midst of a crisis, you can't make out the lesson. But it's there nonetheless.

Give thanks for all the good things in your life. Actively seek out the blessings in the most difficult of circumstances, and the good in the most aggravating of people.

The more you give thanks for what you have, the more things you will have to be thankful for. It's a universal law.

"The very greatest things – great thoughts, discoveries, inventions – have usually been nurtured in hardship, pondered over in sorrow, and at length established with difficulty." (Samuel Smiles)

Chapter 19

Third Time Lucky

“Troubles are often the tools by which God fashions us for better things.” (Henry Ward Beecher)

We were in no real hurry that evening, all the desire to rush having drained away in the aftermath of almost three weeks of going nowhere, except perhaps growing a bit older and wiser. We both had had time to think about what we were doing, to examine the idea as a whole, and we chatted quietly, philosophically, as the miles rolled steadily by, to the comforting hum of good tires on good road.

Geoff had brought an article from a Life magazine on Existentialism, which he read as we drove. After he had folded it and put it away, we discussed the theory of “engagement,” the coming to grips with your environment, which precedes “essence,” the maximum enjoyment and satisfaction possible in life.

We agreed that since we left Vancouver, we had been more involved with the business of actually asserting ourselves in our environment than ever before in our lives, and increasingly so since we left London seven weeks previously. It had been damn difficult much of the time, in fact, but we couldn’t think of anything we’d rather be doing than driving that little green Land Rover down that quiet road, toward the heart of the greatest wasteland on earth, with the stars twinkling overhead and a song in our hearts. If that was Existentialism, we believed in it.

Rolling Along

Once more, we drove through Abadla and across the dry riverbed, down past where we had come to an inglorious halt 17 days before, through the crossroads at Beni-Abbes, which had been our furthest point south, and on into the night. We kept going for miles, not stopping until we were far beyond the spots in the unfeeling desert that had marked our defeats.

Our destination was Adrar, a tiny dot 376 miles south of Colomb-Béchar. From Adrar, it was 86 miles to Reggane, an even smaller dot, and then came the 800-mile stretch to Gao. At midnight we stopped for our meatballs and spaghetti, washed down with black coffee to clear the drowsiness for the all-night drive.

The Sahara Escarpment

The map indicated that the paved road ended about 100 miles north of Adrar, and when we reached that point, there was no need to check to be sure. In the dark night, the Rover left the pavement, lurched at an angle, straightened, slammed into a series of ruts that almost tore the wheel out of my hands, bounced crazily, and shook to a halt, my foot hard on the brake.

A brief inspection showed that we were still on the road, what there was of it, and that we would have no choice but to creep along at 10 miles per hour for the next five hours, until the sun came up the next morning. But with the rise of the orange-gold ball far to the east, it was not the road that arrested our attention.

We were just then atop the last rise in a series of low rocky hills, overlooking the desert floor, which stretched away forever, the distant horizon obscured by a pink haze. Silently, reverently almost, Geoff

stopped the vehicle. We climbed onto a jagged shelf to take a good look, gazing in quiet amazement.

The Face of Death

Before us flowed a ragged landscape, silent as a graveyard, with little more than a few tufts of withered grass. The Sahara seemed to be lying in wait, terribly dangerous, without a sound or the slightest trace of movement, like a monstrous trap for us to step into. We stood staring, completely awed, at the immensity of what we had dared to challenge in a half-broken vehicle with three bald tires and enough gasoline to get halfway across.

The lifeless enormity of the desert, and the terrible ignorance in which we had looked upon it as “just something in the way,” gave me a feeling of looking into the face of death.

We realized at that moment, with great clarity, that if we had not had every difficulty of the past 17 days, and learned the appropriate lessons that went with each one, we would certainly have “died in the desert.”

Sleeping Out The Heat

About 30 miles before Adrar, when the sun was high in the sky and the midday heat was building up, we stopped by the track to sleep the day in a conical mud hut. It was deserted, and had been for some time, judging by the amount of sand that had drifted into it. For our purposes, it was ideal.

The flies made sound sleep impossible, but we managed to doze comfortably until 3 p.m., when we ate “breakfast” and refilled the tank from the jerry cans before continuing on into the town. We had

finally gotten over our tendency to rush things, and amidst the timelessness of that huge wasteland, we would have felt a little foolish going any faster than was absolutely necessary.

A Town In The Desert

The drab brown buildings of the spread-out Arab town of Adrar began merging from the haze of dust and heat about 15 minutes before we arrived. It was supposed to have 1,000 inhabitants, but the town was sprawled over several miles with no main center of population. A huge empty lot, probably at one time a parade ground for the French army, marked the point from which the wide, dusty streets meandered in all directions toward the outskirts.

The one trace of “the good life” facing this square was an old hotel, for which we aimed. One day in the heat of the desert—and though it was early evening, it was still hot—makes a person rather favorably inclined toward something cold to drink when the opportunity presents itself—and that hotel reeked of opportunity.

News of a Convoy

Just as we got out of the vehicle, a European with short khaki pants, thin white legs, knobby knees, bald head, red face, and sunburned arms, approached us and asked us in heavily accented English if we were also going with the convoy. “What convoy?” we asked.

We knew of the occasional truck convoys formed for mutual security on the journey to Mali, the first country below the Sahara, but they were largely suspended during the summer months because of the incredible heat. He accompanied us into the hotel and explained.

This was a late convoy, and the last of the season. It had been forming for 10 days and now consisted of almost 30 trucks. They would be leaving the next day, or at the latest, the day after—a rare stroke of luck for us indeed. Now that we were getting into this desert-crossing business, the prospect of 800 miles alone was not a joyous one, and the existence of the convoy, which we had not suspected, was a fact we viewed with no little relief. The alternative, which we felt had been forced upon us by circumstances, was to cross by ourselves, one vehicle and two young men against the desert.

Strength In Numbers

A great life lesson is that can be strength in numbers—as long as all the players are unified behind a common vision and goal and everyone is committed to pulling their own weight. Real strength lies in unity.

The fellow who gave us this information, Hermann, was a German from Hamburg, and was also a minister with a degree in theology. He told us that he was on a leave of absence from his parish, hitchhiking down through Africa to study the need of the black people for Christianity and to write a thesis to be applied toward his doctorate. He spoke French as well as English, and we were rather impressed. We even stopped swearing for a few minutes.

Hermann had arranged a ride with some other Germans as far as Gao, 800 miles south. He had met them three days previously, and they were also awaiting the convoy.

Our Social Director

With the vague air of a social director under whose auspices we had fallen, and as though he greeted and invited thousands of Canadian travelers to Adrar to cross with the convoy, Hermann assured us that he had a place we could stay and would soon introduce us to the others with whom we would be making the journey. Smilingly, we accepted his casual patronage, having nothing to lose by it.

Through some process that we didn't question, he had acquired squatter's rights to an empty house on the outskirts of town where we drove after leaving the hotel. Facing a large square, the old dwelling was rundown, deserted, and only accessible by a small gate in the high wall around the half-acre of dusty yard in the rear. There was, however, a tap in the back, which could be manipulated to produce a tired dribble of clear water, the most important item of all once we had everything else we needed. For a brief camping spot, it was quite satisfactory.

Hermann himself was no longer staying at the house, choosing rather to keep close to his countrymen and his future ride, a sentiment we well appreciated. After a brief inspection of the place, we gave him a ride to an open-air workshop on the far side of town to meet the other Germans.

New Traveling Companions

Geoff and I were, by this time, three weeks into Africa, brown from the sun, black stubble surrounding dry, cracked lips marking our weather-burned faces. Without hats, our hair fell uncontrollably in two or three directions, our clothes were well lived in, and we were a good deal leaner than we had been in Gibraltar days. I suppose we

looked something like desert travelers, and the four Germans were our identical counterparts.

When we rolled up with Hermann, they were sitting around a small stove waiting for a pot of water to boil, and except for a seemingly disenchanted glance at our companion, continued watching the pot. I sensed immediately that we were not the first people Hermann had introduced to them, and that he was not as well thought of as he had led us to believe.

The shop was half-covered by a tin roof, the rest being open to the air, and the whole area surrounded by a high wall topped with broken glass. A Volkswagen minibus, obviously belonging to the Germans, was propped up on two bricks, and an Arab was working on one of the rear wheels. Camping gear lay on the ground on all sides, attesting to the fact that they had not just arrived for repairs that day.

Hands Across The Sea

Taking the initiative from Hermann, I said “good evening” in German, one of about three expressions I remembered from a year of studying that language in high school. One of the fellows, Hans, got up to acknowledge the greeting and shake hands, the others remaining seated disinterestedly around the blackened pot, which was just beginning to steam. From this simple meeting was born a most extraordinary friendship.

Hans was clearly the leader of the group. He looked like a young lion—fit, tanned, and blue-eyed. He was well muscled, though not tall, and he had an air of authority about him. He was the kind of

person who could take in all the details of a situation quickly, make a decision, and then act.

Hermann stepped forward to explain what they were doing in Adrar and where they were going, which immediately put us on a common footing. Josef, the tallest of the group, invited us to join them for coffee. With a jumble of French, English, German and Spanish, plus Hermann translating occasionally, we soon became quite friendly, joking about the various incidents that had preceded our separate arrivals to join the same convoy in that little town.

Traveling Tales

They had left Munich, in southern Germany, the same day we had left Gibraltar and had experienced as many problems of various sorts as we had. Their most recent difficulty was a back wheel that had bogged down in the sand outside Adrar. The torque in the sand had caused the spline to shear off on the inside of the wheel drum.

For three days they had been camped at the blacksmith-type garage, while the Arab mechanics fiddled with various ways of repairing the wheel, none having yet been discovered. When we left one hour later, after a good deal of laughter, we assured them that we would come by in the morning to see how they were getting along. The seeds of friendship were beginning to grow.

Missing Objects

Prudently moving everything that could be stolen inside the gate, we set up camp that night in the yard under the stars, preferring the ground to the dirty cement floor inside the house. In the morning we cooked breakfast and then visited the little marketplace off the

main square to see if there were any vegetables for sale, before returning to shave and wash our clothes.

Foolishly, we had left our belongings in the yard, and much to our chagrin, our one camera and an alarm clock had vanished in our absence. Considering that we would likely never have another chance to take photographs of the desert ahead, the loss of the camera was a minor disaster.

Mad as hatters, we drove straight to the old police station and raised a fuss, committing the police chief to do everything in his power to recover the items. He climbed into his black official Citroen and followed us back to the house, the speedy arrival of the two vehicles scattering a band of ragged urchins playing near the gate.

Harshly, he shouted at them to come back, which they did, terrified, skulking like whipped puppies. Two of the brats were trembling so much they could barely speak, but all denied any knowledge of the theft. The Arab police chief rubbed his swarthy mustache and shrugged, insisting that such a thing never happened in Adrar and promised further inquiries. We never saw the camera or the alarm clock again.

We once more relearned an important lesson: never become too complacent or overconfident. Be on your guard. In life, the most successful people are invariably those who are the most fastidious about the critical details of their work. They don't take things for granted or trust to chance. They know that it's the details that will get you every single time.

A Snail's Pace

Back at the shop, the repair job was proceeding at a snail's pace. This slow pace was making the Germans nervous about being

ready in time to leave with the convoy. Just to double check, Hans, the leader of the group, came with us to check the departure date with the truck drivers camped on the edge of town.

There was no need to be concerned, they assured us. They weren't leaving until the next day, or maybe the day after. We returned to the garage to urge the Arab mechanic to hurry. He merely gave us a bored shrug. There wasn't enough "get up and go" in that garage to fill a teacup.

Swimming In The Desert

We sat in the shade pondering some method to pass the time. After a couple of minutes, Hans visibly brightened. "Would you like to go swimming?" he asked. He had to be joking; we hadn't seen enough water all together since we arrived in Algeria to take a bath. But Hans insisted he knew of a place if we could go in our Land Rover.

With the seven of us jammed into the vehicle, Geoff followed Hans' directions out of town, the mid-morning sun almost overhead and the dashboard thermometer reading 110 degrees. Only five kilometers out of Adrar, a slash of bright green slowly emerged through the dancing heat waves.

Another two kilometers brought us to a large vegetable farm, surrounded by a hedge and above which turned a steel windmill. Still following Hans' eager directions, we circled the perimeter to the far side, stopping at a gap in the thorn bushes. Quickly doffing our clothes for bathing trunks, we followed the four Germans through the hedge and across the cultivated rows.

There amid the melon plants and citrus trees was a large reservoir, 50 yards square and five feet deep, the brilliant algae-green

water shining like a huge emerald. With a yell and a whoop, we were all in the water, splashing and diving, cavorting like exuberant porpoises. For two hours we stayed and played in the cool water, bothered by no one except an old Arab who shouted at us for a while and then stalked away, muttering.

Teaming Up With the Germans

On the way back to Adrar, everyone laughing in high spirits, we made a critical decision. We told the Germans not to be too concerned about their Volkswagen bus. If the trucks left before it was repaired, we could form a convoy of two and make the crossing together. The pact made, we left them at the workshop, where a young Arab was slowly filing away at their wheel drum, and went “home” to sleep through the heat.

The Weather In The Desert

We had arrived in Gibraltar on April 20, and it was now May 30. Except for an increase in the temperature as we moved further south, the weather never varied. The sun rose clean and fresh about 5:30 a.m., climbed to its maximum height and intensity by 1 p.m., cooled by 6 p.m., and set shortly after 8 p.m. There were never any clouds, no mist, very little dew, and always a scarlet-red sunset to finish the day. Occasionally there was wind, but by and large the weather was consistently beautiful and completely dependable.

The mornings were fine and cool, and early rising was a pleasure. The evenings were warm but not hot, and the air was very dry, causing perspiration to evaporate rapidly. The gentle evening

breezes came like soft caresses through our hair and into our open shirts, making idle contemplation a pleasurable pastime.

Ready For the Crossing

We had arrived in Gibraltar a full five pounds heavier than we'd left London, from the exercise and all the eating we had done on the way. Since arriving in Tangiers, we'd both lost 10 pounds and felt none the worse for it. We weren't eating much, and according to the books, we weren't eating well, but we were physically sound. We were sleeping better, though lighter, waking quickly and completely at the slightest noise. Our senses of hearing and sight were sharper, our reflexes faster, and our mental grasp of situations, as well as our adaptability to them, was much quicker. Even our ability to see the humor in a difficult situation was improved, though we had never been overly beset with pessimism.

In short, we felt more genuinely alive, mentally and physically, than we could ever remember being. We felt as though our senses were sharper, making us more alert, and giving us a confident glow. We felt ready for anything—sing a song, write a book, cross a desert, love a girl, anything. And it was a nice feeling to have.

It seems that when we are living in total harmony with the best that we know, we feel most alive. Our senses are heightened, and we feel ready for anything.

At Peace With The World

Both in Béchar and in Adrar, the vast quietude of the Sahara Desert seemed to work in a strange manner on us during those days of forced waiting for the next segment of the journey. It gradually

drove the impatience and insistence out of us, and replaced it with a calm acceptance of a slower pace of life to which we simple had to adjust.

Instead of increasing the need and desire for human companionship, that great empty land had the opposite effect on us. The feeling of solitude and the joy of being quietly alone with our thoughts became very precious, more so than they had ever been in the city. Geoff and I found that we derived a great deal of pleasure from hours spent reading or writing, or just staring at the flickering embers of the tiny campfire, with scarcely more than a word passing between us.

Even when we sat around in the evenings with the Germans, it was very much the same. And yet, without words, the bond joining the six of us set, and hardened, and bound our lives together in the course of three short days.

Fish Or Cut Bait

The next morning was Wednesday, and the Arab at the garage was still avoiding any serious work on the Germans' wheel drum. "Why don't you tell him to get a move on?" I asked Hans. He answered that none of them spoke French except Hermann, and the Arabs just ignored Hermann's meek inquiries. The whole idea of poking around at such a small job for five days was nonsense, and now that we had agreed to cross with the Germans, the minibus was partially our problem as well.

I decided to assert myself and get the minibus back on the road. Picking up the wheel drum, I took it to the Arab in charge of the workshop. Politely, in slow French, I told him that if the Volksbus

wasn't ready to leave that evening with the convoy, not only would we finish the job ourselves, but he wasn't going to be paid one dinar for the five days he had already wasted.

With great indignation, he launched into a long story about how hard he'd been working on it, and how much work he had to do in the garage. He said that he didn't realize the convoy was leaving so soon, and he didn't think it mattered how long the job took because we were waiting for the convoy anyway.

Money Talks

Carefully avoiding being outright rude, I repeated that the car must be ready by that night at the latest, or he wouldn't be paid. I thrust the wheel rim into his hand and gave him a big grin, then turned and went back to where the Germans were sitting and watching. They hadn't understood anything except the object of the exchange.

The Arab examined the wheel drum for a second, and then shouted at two of his assistants, who came running. Waving the drum in their faces, he berated them for their laziness, and pointing vigorously at the crippled Volksbus, relayed the urgency of getting the job done by that evening. They all glared at me as if I was some kind of traitor.

With the Arabs finally making progress on the repair of the wheel drum, we left the Germans to begin repacking their vehicle.

When I returned to the shop in the late afternoon, I was told that the repair had been simple, a matter of welding new splines onto the sheared drums, but it was the filing of those new splines so that

they would fit on the axle that was taking so long to finish. The man in charge insisted, however, that the job was almost finished.

The Germans were all packed to leave, and we agreed to meet at our “house” the next morning to cross with the convoy.

The Issue of Traveling Companions

Choose your friends and associates carefully. Work only with people you respect and whom you can count on. Take your time in assessing new people. Until they are tested “under fire,” it is hard to assess their true character.

Your choice of the people you surround yourself with in life can affect your success more than any other factor. The people with whom you most identify have an inordinate influence on how you think, feel, talk, and behave.

Your choice of traveling companions in life can determine the success or failure of the entire journey.

“There are powers inside of you which, if you could discover and use, would make of you everything you ever dreamed or imagined you could become.” (Orison Swett Marden)

Section 6:

One Oil Barrel at a Time

“All great masters are chiefly distinguished by the power of adding a second, a third and perhaps a fourth step in a continuous line. Many a man had taken the first step. With every additional step, you enhance immensely the value of your first.” (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

Whatever your goal, you can achieve it by taking one step at a time. This is one of the greatest of all success principles. “By the yard it’s hard; but inch by inch, anything’s a cinch!”

Do you want to be financially independent? The achievement of personal wealth begins with you saving your first dollar, and then adding one dollar at a time. Do you want to be thin, fit, and healthy? Superb physical health simply requires that you eat a little less and exercise a little more each day.

If one of your goals is to be among the top people in your field, you can achieve it by getting better a little bit at a time. You can practice and develop one skill at a time. You can learn and grow one day at a time.

Take your biggest goal and break it down into daily, even hourly, activities. Then discipline yourself to take the first step, and then the next step, and then the one after that, until you finally arrive.

Remember, *happiness* is the progressive, step-by-step realization of a worthy goal or ideal. And whatever someone else has done, you can probably do as well. Whatever goals others have achieved are possible for you, if you just take the first step.

“Nothing splendid has ever been achieved except by those who dared believe that something inside of them was superior to circumstance.” (Bruce Barton)

Chapter 20

The Convoy

“Help thy brother’s boat across, and lo! Thine own has reached the shore” (Hindu Proverb)

We had just finished packing our things carefully back into the Rover the next morning, Thursday, when Hans and Helmut came roaring up in their Volksbus, fully repaired, cheering jubilantly and blasting the horn. Their joy was infectious, and we all laughed at the thought of being on the road again. Geoff and I leaped into the Rover and raced pell-mell, bumper to bumper, back into town with the Germans.

The convoy had left at dawn, but they planned to stop at Reggane, 80 miles south, for the night, so we weren’t pressed for time. After stocking up fully with gasoline and water, we checked the oil and water in the vehicles, as well as the tires, declared ourselves road ready, and set out to catch the trucks. After four days in Adrar, we were glad to see the last of it.

The Algerian government stamps your passport in Adrar, 500 miles north of the border, and as far as they’re concerned, you no longer exist. If something happens to you in the desert, you’re on your own.

The Truckers To Africa

The Arab truck drivers on the run from Oran and Algiers into central Africa are a lazy lot. They carry bales of cheap textiles, tin pots and pans, canned fish and tomato paste, and other cheap, high-profit

goods to be sold in the bazaars of sub-Saharan Africa. They are in no hurry and often stop for days at a time to visit friends and family on the trip south. When they do drive, it is only for two or three hours in the morning and perhaps the same in the evening.

They rarely drive at night, the time we preferred to travel, and the 2,000-mile trip to Gao from Algiers, or the 2,500 miles to Niamey, in Niger, usually takes them four weeks. The financial benefits of making better time didn't weigh too heavily on them.

Waiting Out The Heat

It was not surprising then, that only two hours out of Adrar, we came upon three of the trucks that had left that morning stopped next to the "piste" (the track) for the midday heat. Since it was just 11 a.m. and the sun was becoming fierce, we waved to the Germans that stopping was not a bad idea, turning off and parking next to one of the trucks to get as much shade as possible.

There was only a slight draft of hot air coming through the open doors of the vehicle, and the heat was terrible. The difference in the intensity of the sun between three weeks and 400 miles north, and the outskirts of Adrar, was astonishing. The temperature rose to 125 degrees in the meager shade of the vehicle. Struggling for breath in the searing heat, sweat pouring off us in sticky rivulets, we drank and drank and drank, consuming five gallons of water between us in that five-hour period.

Sleeping was out of the question, and eating virtually impossible. We didn't even have enough energy to talk much, each of us thinking miserably to ourselves, "If it's like this here, what will it be like when we get into the middle of the desert?"

Nonetheless, for the sake of the vehicles, we disciplined ourselves to stay until 4 p.m., when it had “cooled” to 100 degrees. Then we left the lumbering trucks and continued to Reggane.

The Jumping Off Point

Reggane is the last town in Algeria, although the frontier was 500 miles farther south on the other side of the desert, and it looked like the last town in Algeria. There was one lonely petrol pump about 200 yards from a cluster of brown buildings, several of which were deserted, the sand already beginning to fill their doorways. At one time, there had been a Foreign Legion post at Reggane, but now it stood away from the houses, windblown and uninhabited.

It was just before sunset that Thursday when we arrived, and the funereal atmosphere of the lifeless, darkened doorways made us willing to drive right on through. However, we had to refuel and refill our water cans before for the last time.

We stopped the two vehicles by the lone gas pump and waited for someone to come and unlock it. When five minutes passed with no one in sight, Hermann said he would seek information about the convoy.

Before leaving Adrar, we hadn't seen too much of Hermann. He hadn't accompanied us swimming, always being in town chatting with storekeepers, police, and anyone else he could find. He was about 35 years old, and not our type of friend at all, so his little side trips didn't cause too much concern. Besides, he was constantly returning with gems of information about the area and the desert.

Eventually, a young Arab came running with the key to the pump, and we topped off our tanks. After filling the water containers

at a nearby well, we followed the dirt road around and to one side of the settlement, meeting Hermann coming back. He had found the main convoy and learned that they weren't leaving until the next day—or perhaps the day after. He suggested that we camp somewhere nearby until they were ready to go.

Going It Alone

With this latest news of further delays, we decided to hold a council to determine our next course of action. We had all had enough of Arab procrastination. The Germans were just as anxious as Geoff and I to cross the desert. The breakdowns, the holdups, the retracing of steps, the expenditures, the heat, and the Arab mentality—all of it had worn our patience thin.

We discussed our options by the Rover's headlamps while Helmut and Kurt made a large pot of coffee. The only reason we had waited for the convoy was for added insurance against a breakdown in the desert. But two vehicles, we reasoned, were enough insurance to get us over the last lap, especially since the convoy would be coming behind us.

There was a waterhole marked on our map 450 miles south, at a place called Bordji-Perez. If something happened to one of the vehicles, we could drive in the other vehicle, either back to Reggane or to the waterhole, or just sit tight until the convoy came along. Hans was in complete accord with us, and the other Germans went along with what he said, without argument. The only dissenter was Hermann.

A Dissenting Voice

Hermann now put his opinion forward, in the manner of one dealing with people who are in complete ignorance of a field in which he specialized. Having spent so much time gathering bits of information, he had apparently lost sight of the fact that we had all crossed the same rugged country to arrive in Reggane, and were equally aware of what lay ahead.

He nonetheless delivered his opinion confidently, pointing out that if both vehicles broke down, we could die before the slow-moving convoy came up. He went on to say that the only way to cross the Sahara was with a large group, for mutual protection. It was better to go slower and be assured of success than to take the chance of going alone. He ended by saying that he knew of a very good place for us to camp while we waited, as if that ended the discussion.

As it happened, Hermann was correct. But because we didn't like him, we rejected his ideas and input, refusing to consider their possible validity. We made the mistake of focusing more on "who" was right rather than "what" was right.

A Time To Choose

The Germans, with the exception of Hans, seemed hesitant. Geoff just looked at Hermann as though he had said something very foolish indeed, and then walked away. I finally told Hans that Geoff and I were leaving that night, convoy or no convoy. They must make up their own minds.

Hans looked me in the eyes for a few seconds in silence, and then, his mind suddenly made up, he turned to Hermann and told him

that we were all leaving in half an hour. He could come or stay as he chose. Then we all sat down and drank the coffee.

Hans was clearly the leader of the group. Not only did he accept complete responsibility for every detail, but he never shrank from making a decision and taking action. He was as solid as a rock.

How Leaders Lead

More than anything, leaders lead by example. They demonstrate the qualities of courage, vision, and foresight. Above all, they step up to make decisions and take command.

Leaders accept a high level of responsibility for results. They take initiative and are action-oriented. They don't wait for things to happen; they make them happen.

Each person can be a leader by deciding to act like a leader whenever the situation calls for it.

And we have never been more in need of leaders—at every level of our society—than we are today.

“When you take charge of your life, there is no longer need to ask permission of other people or society at large. When you ask permission, you give someone else veto power over your life.” (Geoffrey F. Abert)

Chapter 21

The Crossing

“The one thing over which you have complete control is you’re your own thoughts. It is this that puts you in a position to control your own destiny.” (Paul G. Thomas)

The coffee was finished when Hermann finally decided he would come with us, but he didn’t pretend to be pleased at having his advice ignored. His know-all attitude was beginning to grate on Geoff and me, and we were glad he was riding in the other vehicle. At 8 p.m., with the Volksbus leading, we pulled out of Reggane and drove into the dark toward the Tenezrouft, the heart of the Sahara.

According to the map, the road ran almost due south across the desert and deep into Mali. The first place we could get water was a dot called Bordji-Perez at the 450-mile mark. The route was broken at two places between Reggane and Bordji-Perez; at Poste Weygand and at Bidon Cinque-Poste Maurice Courtier. Geoff had learned a little about these two places when he was waiting in Algiers.

The Desert Outposts

When the French controlled the Sahara, there was a steady stream of traffic across the desert into the colonies below. The two way stations were built by the Foreign Legion to allow travelers to break their journeys, make repairs, and restock with petrol and water. All travelers had to register at Reggane and deposit the equivalent of \$300 per vehicle before starting across. The time of departure was noted and radioed to the next post, a set time being allowed for the

traveler to report before vehicles were dispatched from either end to find it. The \$300 was to cover any expenses incurred by the French government on behalf of the traveler, and was returned in Gao upon arrival.

There were several facts that necessitated these precautions. Since the Sahara officially became French territory, late in the 19th century, over 2,000 people had perished there. Many more were never found and were presumed dead. The incredible heat is the fiercest on earth. A lightly dressed man who collapsed in the open sun at 1 p.m. would be dead of dehydration within 20 minutes. A person without a hat could suffer sunstroke, irreparable brain damage, or even death after only one hour at midday. Each traveler was expected to carry five gallons of water per person per day. Crossing the Sahara was rightfully made out to be a very serious business.

On Your Own

When the French withdrew from their colonies in Africa, the new government of Algeria abandoned the desert outposts and lifted all restrictions on travel. We had been officially stamped out of Algeria in Adrar, and we were on our own. We were crossing at our own risk, and there would be no inquiry if we never came out. Having full confidence in our vehicle however, we were not frightened at the prospect, but like soldiers before a battle, we certainly had something to think about.

Clear Goal, Hard Going

Our goal for the first night was the second of the abandoned way stations, Poste Maurice Cortier, two thirds of the distance across, about 300 miles. If we could get there before the sun caught us the

next day, we would have shelter and only 150 miles to go the next night, to the well at Bordji-Perez. The difficult part of the crossing would then be behind us.

From the first, the *piste* (track) was very bad. Fifty years of heavy traffic and several years of neglect had left it a mess of ruts, holes, and bumps. In countless places, the drifting sand had covered the road with a layer of fine powder, often to a depth of 18 inches—and in stretches of as much as 200 feet. It was in one of these dry swamps that our troubles began.

The Troubles Begin

We were perhaps 20 miles along. Geoff was driving, and the Land Rover was about one quarter mile in front of the minibus. The sensation of hitting the soft sand was that of all four tires dropping to half pressure simultaneously. Geoff shifted from fourth, to third, to second, to get more torque, and then into four-wheel drive. With the motor screaming and the front tires digging in, we slowly moved out of the patch onto the firmer road ahead.

“Guess we’d better wait and see if they get through,” said Geoff, as he pulled to the side and shifted the transmission into neutral. We got out and watched the approaching headlamps from opposite sides of the vehicle. As the roaring Volksbus hit the silt, the sand rose in a spray like splashing water, the vehicle careening from side to side drunkenly. Still it kept coming, but slower and slower until it came at last to a tired halt. As it stopped, the dust billowed past it, across the headlamps, in thick rolls. Hans was already out and inspecting the sunken back end.

Pulling and Dragging

Without a word, Geoff got into the Rover and started backing it up. I walked over to the vehicle and asked Hermann if they had a towrope. They did, and while Helmut dug for it, everyone gathered around and looked at the wheels. They were buried to the frame in the sand and barely visible.

Even with the Rover pulling, the Volksbus refused to budge. We put our backs into it and tried again. It moved a little and then once more bogged down. We would have to dig it out and try it with the wheels clear.

While Geoff maneuvered the Rover forward and back to pull from an angle on undisturbed sand, Hans and I started digging underneath the rear wheels with machetes, Josef and Helmut working on the other side and Kurt helping Geoff with the rope.

There was nothing casual about our attitude toward the job. We scrambled frantically to get the bus out and get going again. We dreaded being caught by the sun without protection, and we had a long way to go to reach that protection. Yet as fast as we dug, the sand ran back in, and soon we were all dripping with perspiration, including Geoff and Kurt, who had started digging with pots at the front tires.

Hapless Hermann

The last one to descend from the bus had been Hermann, and while we were working, he stood back and watched us like an interested spectator. After a couple of minutes, he came over and said we must get all the sand out from around the wheels, as if we weren't already trying to do just that. We had better not drive anymore in the

dark, he added, then climbed back into the vehicle and lay down. We were concentrating too hard on the digging to pay attention to him.

In another five minutes, we had the wheels as clear as we were going to get them, and with the Land Rover pulling, the wheels of the Volksbus spinning, and the four of us pushing and straining every sinew, it slowly began to move—10 feet, 20 feet, 40 feet, and then it stopped. We stopped too, lungs and legs burning from the exertion.

Geoff had just come back to see how it was going when Hermann stuck his head out the window to inspect the proceedings. That was too much, even if he was a minister. Puffing and wiping the salty sweat from my nose, I walked around the bus and yanked the side door open.

“Get out!” I panted. “You can damn well get out and work with the rest of us.”

“I thought the work was all finished,” he replied in an offended tone as he climbed out onto the sand.

“Well, the work is not all finished,” I said, and pointing to the rear of the bus, added, “You can push from there, until the bloody thing is out.”

“You take a turn at driving,” Geoff said quietly. “I’ll kick him in the ass if he looks like he’s slacking off.”

Hermann petulantly took up a pushing position against the back of the Volksbus, and Hans changed with Helmut as driver. When I got back into the Rover, I gave a blast on the horn and let out the clutch full throttle, slowly inching forward until the Rover was on solid roadbed. We were out.

Everyone Doing His Share

On small teams, everyone has to do his or her fair share.

Everyone has to pitch in to get the job done. Everyone is responsible for the end result. No one can stand aside and expect someone else to do more while he or she does less. Unfortunately, there are always slackers and free riders, people who try to get by doing the very least, even though they expect to be rewarded at the same level as the hard workers.

As Hans untied the rope, we all cheered and laughed, climbing happily back into our respective vehicles. Even Hermann looked pleased, though guiltily, his face dripping from the effort. We pushed on, relieved and eager to make up the lost time, a bit delighted at having met an obstacle and surmounted it as a team, but hoping that the necessity would not arise again.

Our relief was short-lived. Ten minutes later the Rover piled into another drift. We just managed to get clear when the Volksbus came in behind us and bogged down again. This time Hans didn't spin the back wheels—the frantic effort that only dug the minibus in deeper. We leaped out of the vehicles before the dust had settled and muscled the van out with brute strength.

Not stopping to rest in our urgency, we yelled and cheered each other on, chanting and straining on every third count until it came clear. This time we were too out of breath to rejoice. We just climbed back in and drove on.

It Gets Continually Worse

For the next five hours, the pattern of the Volksbus bogging down, and we muscling it out, repeated itself, over and over again,

until we were ready to collapse from exhaustion. Sometimes we could use the Land Rover to pull or push, but most of the time we had to push it out by hand, lungs screaming and every muscle straining painfully.

But no one was complaining, and after the incident with Hermann, no one shirked. Everyone gave the best they had to give, every time they had to give it, no matter how tired they were. It never occurred to Geoff and me that we were breaking our backs for a vehicle that wasn't ours, owned by fellows we'd never met until a few days ago, and whom we'd probably never see again after the crossing. We were in this together, one hundred percent.

A Silent Pact

We had formed an unbreakable pact, not in words but by implication. From the first, when we said we'd wait for them if the convoy left before their vehicle was repaired, the fabric binding our seven lives together began to interweave and entangle. We were caught up in it and carried forward, inextricably, powerfully, feeling the strength of the bond growing over the miles.

There in the desert, we were the only people on earth. Every bit of our separate lives, every laugh, every tear, every success and every failure had played its part bringing us together at that time and place in the middle of that wasteland.

We were channeled by fate into one small struggling mass of humanity pitted against the desert. When we heaved together in the powder-fine sands to extricate the Volksbus, it was not their Volksbus, it was *the* Volksbus, and it was pulled out by *the* Land Rover. We succeeded or failed together, as one indivisible entity. And the strength

of the bond lay in the strength of the individuals who formed that bond. No one could give any less than his best, for our entire beings, and even our very lives, depended on defeating 450 miles of unfeeling sand.

The Invisible Bond

There was little conversation, as discussion was irrelevant. In a way not fully understood by us, we were caught up in something that transcended words and philosophy, something very strong, and something that couldn't be clearly examined until the journey was finished. And it couldn't be finished unless and until we reached the water at Bordji-Perez.

What often kills a marriage or merger or partnership is the notion of his or hers, mine and yours, ours and theirs. When you're in the Sahara—or facing any significant challenge—such distinctions can be fatal. You must believe and act as if, “we're all in this together.”

From Rough to Smooth

By 2 a.m., we had been clear of heavy sand for almost an hour, but the going was still very rough on the vehicles, and on us, so we signaled a stop and suggested a 20-minute coffee break. The fatigue from the long day before and the five hours of steady exertion that had marked most of the time since leaving Reggane was making itself felt on all of us.

While the water boiled on the Germans' little stove, the vehicles positioned in such a way that the headlights of each fell on the other, we hauled out our petrol containers and refilled the tanks. The miles of strain and high revs in getting in and out of the sand had taken consumed too much of the precious amber fluid. Also, something was

wrong with the carburetor on the Volksbus, causing it to use too many liters of petrol for too few kilometers. Hans and Geoff took the carburetor apart and cleaned it over coffee, then reassembled it carefully. Then we continued onward.

Thinking Out of The Box

The track was still shaking the Rover violently, and without a moon, the endless country beyond the range of the lights appeared dark and forbidding. But a thought occurred to me. The reason we were staying on the rough piste was that, if we strayed off it and couldn't find it again, we would be lost in the desert. But, I thought, since the road runs straight north and south, if we *deliberately* drove off it to the west, it would always have to be to the east. The open desert was probably a lot smoother than the worn track, and we couldn't possibly get lost as long as we kept the road on our left.

Swinging the Rover up over the sandy ridge bordering the track, I drove an eighth of a mile straight west, telling Geoff what I had in mind at the same time. Leveling off and running parallel to the piste, it was obvious we'd made a very useful discovery. The open country stretched flat and unbroken to the furthestmost reaches of the headlamps. The bouncing and rattling that had kept us peering ahead for deep ruts was gone. We were free to swing to the right or the left, or drive in circles if we wanted. From a narrow broken track 10 yards wide, we had come upon a sand-gravel highway the length and breadth of the Sahara between the piste and the Atlantic Ocean, 1,800 miles to the west.

Resistance to New Ideas

Excited about our discovery, I swerved back over to the piste to stop and let the Germans catch up with us. I then explained the idea to Hermann so he could translate it to the others. But he balked. It was too risky, he said. The piste was the only safe place to travel if we didn't want to get lost in the night, and besides, we shouldn't be driving at night anyway.

Patiently, I asked him if he could explain the idea to Hans and Helmut, the drivers, and let them decide, which he did, in a discouraging tone of voice. They began arguing among themselves in German, with Hermann adamant that they not leave the security of the broken track. We got back into the Rover and left them to work it out for themselves, driving along parallel with them on the smooth desert floor for a few minutes, varying the distance from a hundred yards to a quarter mile.

Give It A Try

Hermann had obviously made a fuss about our idea to get back at us for having made him sweat a little, because the Volksbus lurched along the uneven piste for several more kilometers. Then, all at once it swerved and lurched over the sand ridge, off the piste, and came straight for us. Just before reaching us it swung parallel and we drove along side by side, laughing and honking at the newfound sensation of freedom.

I don't know what was said between the fellows and Hermann in that brief interim, but after that incident, he didn't have so many suggestions to make—and no one paid much attention to him when he did make them.

We stayed off the piste for the remainder of the night, always keeping it fairly close on the left. We had a wonderful feeling of freedom driving that way, sometimes close enough to touch the other vehicle, sometime swerving far out and cutting in on each other—turning just in time to avoid a collision. Most of the time, though, we drove about 100 yards apart, one or the other a little ahead, boring our way through the night with the stabbing headlights.

This was another valuable lesson. It is normal and natural for us to get into a comfort zone, a rut, and then resist every suggestion to get out of it—even if we're not happy with the results we're getting. We must continually be asking, "Could there be a better way?" We must deliberately force ourselves to try something new or different if the old way is no longer working.

Absolute Nothingness

Even with the windows open to let in the cool air as we drove, we were having real difficulties staying awake in the early hours of the morning. The first edge of light in the east somehow lifted the dull fatigue a little, and soon we could see the terrain. At the first clear view of it, I snapped wide-awake and nudged Geoff, dozing on the seat beside me.

"Look at that, Geoff! Just open your eyes and take a good look!" Geoff shook his head numbly and leaned close to the windshield. Slowly his eyes widened and his jaw went momentarily slack. Then he sat back in his seat and just stared, silently. We had come to the end of the earth. We had arrived in a land where the nothingness was absolute. We had never seen or imagined anything like it.

The barren terrain had begun in Morocco. As we had driven south, the land had weakened; the pulse had faded and diminished. The silent rattle of its last breath had touched us in the dark. Now, at last, the land was dead.

The Volksbus had fallen behind in the pre-dawn hours, and we were alone, pressed between the sky and the yellow sands, a lifeless void, with only the sound of the engine to break the eternal stillness.

Flat As A Tabletop

Before us lay a flat, unbroken, yellow expanse that flowed away on all sides endlessly, to the horizons. Further north, there had been tufts of scraggly grass and a bit of rugged sagebrush fighting for survival. Now there was only lifeless sand. Before, there had been a slight roll to the arid terrain that broke the monotony of the desert; now it was perfectly flat. Before, there had been a glimmer of hope that nature had not turned her back on the Sahara; now there was nothing.

The brilliant blue of the desert sky joined the dirty yellow of the desert floor in a perfect circle, of which we were the precise center, and remained so as we moved. The flaming gold of the sun, climbing high in the sky, was the one thing nature had bestowed on the last of the lands. We felt as if we had come in on the middle of a colossal joke, being told by the sun to the unhearing sands, and its punch line was death.

We slowed to let the Volksbus catch up with us, resolving not to lose sight of it again. When it came up about 10 minutes later, we increased our speed and stayed even with it. There were no more cheery grins and waves. The long, trouble-filled night had set us back

too far on our proposed schedule. With the sun sitting on the horizon, like an evil yellow cat waiting to pounce on two silly mice a long way from their holes, the only thing that mattered now was mileage.

Crossing Your Sahara

The keys to great success have always been *focus and concentration*. There are critical times in life when you must throw your whole heart—mind and body—into what you’re doing in order to succeed. As Peter Drucker wrote, “Whenever you find something getting done, you find a monomaniac with a mission.”

Once you begin, you must devote your entire time and attention to the task or goal. Throw your whole heart into it. Never let up. Keep pushing until the objective is reached. Resolve to press forward until the goal is 100 percent complete. This is the ultimate test.

“It is the constant and determined effort that breaks down all resistance, sweeps aside all obstacles.” (Claude M. Bristol)

Chapter 22

One Oil Barrel at a Time

“Nature can not be tricked or cheated. She will give up to you the object of your struggles only after you have paid her price.” (Napoleon Hill)

You couldn't get lost driving in the Sahara in the daytime. The piste is marked with black 55-gallon oil drums at five-kilometer intervals, exactly the curvature of the earth. Wherever you are on the piste, you can always see two oil drums, the one behind and the one ahead.

As you reach one oil drum, the next one, five kilometers ahead, pops up on the horizon, and the one five kilometers behind falls off, as if it had been shot in a shooting gallery.

All you have to do to cross the biggest desert in the world is to take it “one oil barrel at a time.” I learned later in life that, if you go as far as you can see to go at the moment, you will be able to see far enough to go one step further. You can accomplish even the greatest goals “one oil barrel at a time.”

Poste Weygand

At 6:30 a.m., a small blot appeared on the horizon ahead. Some time later, we came to Poste Weygand, the 160-mile mark, after 11 hours of solid going. It consisted of three decrepit Quonset huts and a large frame building, possibly an old barracks. Ghostlike and deserted, doors half ajar and windows broken, the buildings sat like tombstones, alone and abandoned.

We didn't stop, and only slowed to read the blackened sign 100 yards past. White letters on a charred background, under a skull and

crossbones, stated in French, “Do not leave the piste beyond this point.” Ten minutes later we passed another blackened sign that stated simply, “Tropic of Cancer.”

Our Enemy, The Sun

Now the sun really became the enemy. It had first appeared in the east as a golden sliver of light along the horizon. Then the first roundness peeked over the horizon, as though looking for a victim. Slowly the entire sun rose into the sky and then sat silently on the horizon before beginning its inexorable climb toward midday.

Geoff and I entertained each other by quoting verses from “Carry On:”

*And so in the strife of the battle of life
It's easy to fight when you're winning;
It's easy to slave, and starve and be brave,
When the dawn of success is beginning.*

*But the man who can meet despair and defeat
With a cheer, there's a man of God's choosing;
The man who can fight to Heaven's own height
Is the man who can fight when he's losing.*

*Carry on, carry on. Things never were looming so black;
But show that you haven't a cowardly streak,
And though you're unlucky, you never are weak.
Carry on! Brace up for another attack.
It's looking like hell, but you never can tell.*

Carry on, old man! Carry on!

The Race Was On

The race for Bodin Cinque (Poste Maurice Courtier), the second abandoned army post, was on in earnest, although it was already lost. We knew it was impossible to cover 170 miles before the sun reached its fiery zenith. We had lost too much time in the struggles of the previous night. It was now a matter of how close we could get to that landmark.

The Land Rover was running beautifully. Throughout the strenuous night, it had never coughed, sputtered, or failed to respond to the continuous demands of pushing, pulling, and dragging through the clinging sands. The hum of the 96-horsepower engine transmitted its confidence through our weariness, letting us feel that, whatever might lie ahead in the way of difficulties, our vehicle would remain one constant dependable factor.

The Volksbus, however, was having troubles. The battered machine gave the impression that it was going along with this mad idea, but in no way did it approve. From the first time it was driven off the paved roads, it began to protest. If it was driven over a hard bump, a tire would blow out. If driven in heavy sand, it would bog down and refuse to budge.

Now that it had been tricked into coming so far into the desert, it refused to run properly, gobbling petrol greedily. Several times in the night we had stopped and adjusted the carburetor in vain efforts to cut down on its gluttonous consumption. And as the heat increased that morning, the Volksbus ran even worse, forcing us to go slower.

Victims of The Desert Sun

The ideal cruising speed of the Rover was about 35 miles per hour. With the firm unbroken terrain, we should have been driving at maximum speed the whole time, but we were lucky to drive at 25 mph without leaving the Volksbus behind. Meanwhile, the sun continued its relentless climb, burning away the early morning chill by the time Poste Weygand had fallen off the horizon behind us.

We began to pass the remains of vehicles that had not survived the crossing. Usually they were just shapeless masses of colorless scrap—all their usable parts having been stripped off by other travelers. On three occasions, though, the automobiles were in good condition, complete with tires, seats, and windows. They were locked tightly, as though their owners had parked them minutes before and then vanished. Just after 10:30, we came to one of these cars, a Renault-Dauphine, sitting a few yards off the barely discernible piste.

Stopping to scavenge anything of possible use, we soon saw there was nothing of value left in it or on it, except the tires, and we were too exhausted to consider taking them off. Climbing back into our vehicles to escape the blistering rays of the overhead sun, we urgently hurried on. But minutes later, the Volksbus developed a vapor lock and came to a halt. The fuel pump on the Rover was also acting up with the heat, and the engine quit as we approached the vehicles. We had no choice. We were there for the day.

Stuck In The Open

At 11 a.m., the thermometer read 110 degrees, and the air was already stiflingly hot. Geoff dragged a full jerry can of water out of the back and onto the seat between us. Now that the vehicle was no

longer moving, the relief from the heat afforded by the air currents had ceased. Breathing became laborious, and conversation was an effort best avoided. Trickle of sweat began to flow down our faces to mingle with the soaked stench of our shapeless T-shirts and drip onto the seats where we sprawled, drained of strength after 30 hard hours without sleep. Outside, the noiseless inferno of golden rage pounded down in merciless fury on the two little vehicles that represented the only life in the very heart of hell.

The mercury began to climb inexorably inside the glass tube of the thermometer. By noon the temperature was 120 degrees and rising, as though to mock the inert figures in the soundless vehicles, where the only motion was the slow tilting of water bottles to quench an insatiable thirst that parched the throat and swelled the tongue, thick and rubbery, no matter how much we drank.

The only noise in the scorching stillness was the steady gasping that never quite filled the straining lungs. We were all exhausted, and semi-conscious, but sleep was impossible. Motion was unthinkable. Just to breathe and to drink took every bit of strength we had. And still the temperature climbed.

At 1:20 p.m. the red line had stopped rising at 130 degrees of searing, broiling, terrible heat. The yellow sands had turned a dazzling, blinding white, reflecting the glare at us from all directions. The only relief was in the blank, listless staring at the brown canvas top, heads lolled back like those of rag dolls. The minutes never passed and the hours lasted forever. The thirst was unquenchable; a quart of water disappeared in three spasmodic swallows, a single gurgling slurp, and minutes later the throat was so dry it took a choking effort to swallow. The intensity of the bake-oven temperature was unbelievable,

unbearable, and inescapable. It was an incredible feeling to be held in one spot, immovable and suffering, in the middle of nothing, with only the sun above and the sand disappearing into the distance on all sides.

The Agony Recedes

Finally it was over and the worst was past. By 2 p.m., the mercury had begun its slow descent, and by 4:30 it had sunk below 110 degrees for the first time in almost seven hours. We were utterly debilitated, feeling only a vague wonderment that the ordeal was finally over.

Our 40 liters of water had dwindled to 10, and the Germans' supply wasn't much better. Everyone looked haggard, and a bit stunned, after the ferocity of the day, as we numbly adjusted ourselves in our seats, started the vehicles, and continued on. We were just halfway to Bordji-Perez, way behind schedule. We knew that if we didn't get there before the heat of the next day, we would be in serious trouble.

Our Spirits Revive

The exhausted semiconscious state we were in before we were stopped by heat and exhaustion had changed very little, but with the motion of the vehicle and the decline in temperature of the dwindling day, our rundown feeling gradually gave way to a tired patience. Spirits had also risen among our comrades. When the Volksbus pulled level with us, Josef and Hans were sitting on the roof wearing old pith helmets and looking for all the world like two hardy explorers who'd lost their camels.

Hans had a pair of binoculars and was scanning the horizon when he took them from his eyes and pointed to a dot far ahead, indicating that we should stop there. The dot slowly took form and became a Taurus van, very similar to the Volksbus, sitting perfectly intact a quarter mile off the piste.

We coasted to a stop next to it. The Germans were out and all over it before the engines had died, forcing open the locked doors and the hood to get at the seats and the motor. They would have made great car thieves.

With a dexterity that amazed and delighted Geoff and me, they stripped every spare part and accessory and stored it away in the Volksbus—the radiator, the fuel pump, the carburetor, the distributor, all the spark plugs, and most of the loose wiring. The two front tires found their way off the vehicle and onto the roof rack, leaving the previously intact Taurus van a half-wrecked hull in a matter of minutes. I sure hoped no one was coming back for it.

Food and Repairs

Since we had eaten nothing that day and were stopped anyway, we decided to rejuvenate our flagging constitutions with a little nourishment. Besides, there was work to be done on the Volksbus if it was going to reach Bordji-Perez. The sun was low in the west by this time, and the terrible heat was gone for another day. But a soft breeze came up, making it difficult to operate the stove. The Sahara was not about to forgive us easily for coming so far. The inside of the van provided some shelter, and the beans and sausage were soon steaming in the pan.

We were eating more from necessity than hunger—the sun and the fatigue having destroyed our appetites. The food tasted like chalk in our still-swollen mouths. We gave up the idea of eating after a few laborious mouthfuls, but we could still drink. Geoff soon had a pot of tea brewed, into which he sliced one of our three lemons and added half a cup of sugar.

That was the most delicious drink I had ever tasted in my life. I had partaken of lemon tea many times over the years, as had Geoff, but until we drank that steaming, sweet, tangy liquid in the middle of the Sahara, it seemed that we had never been thirsty before, and never quenched a thirst in so regal a manner.

We made pot after pot, gulping it down, letting its warmth flow and sing through our tired limbs, erasing the hardships of the day and the apprehension of the night. There was nothing special about the ingredients, nor anything unusual about the taste as lemon tea goes, but in that place and at that time, it was nectar such as the gods on Olympus had never tasted.

An Unexpected Delay

When we were at last satiated and the dishes stored back in the Rover, we joined the Germans at the rear of their vehicle to see how the repairs were coming along. They had adjusted the carburetor and changed the points and were trying to start the engine. But for some reason, it refused to fire. Geoff started the Rover, and we gave the minibus a push in a circle that brought it back to where we had started. It still showed no sign of life. After changing the points again, we pushed the bus in a larger circle, at a faster speed, but got no response from the engine at all.

This was very serious. A car that wouldn't start in these conditions, with our water supply almost depleted and the next well almost 200 miles away, must be repaired quickly or abandoned, and we all knew it. By the powerful beams of the Rover's headlamps, Hans, Geoff and I worked impatiently to find the fault—the other three fellows standing by, unable to help, while Hermann lay prostrate on the sand nearby, snoring.

Try and Try Again

Nothing we tried made any difference; there was no spark in the electrical system to fire the plugs. As our frustration at the unsolvable riddle grew by the minute, our tired hands and weary minds refused to function properly, causing us to drop the tools and confuse each other with unworkable solutions. We started to snap at each other from frayed nerves and exhausted irritation. We were clearly reaching the end of our rope, and still nothing was being accomplished. I finally dropped the screwdriver I'd been working with, walked back to the Rover, reached in, and switched off the lights.

Angrily, Geoff stood up and glared at me. "What the hell do you think you're going? How do you expect us to see?"

"Enough is enough," I said tiredly. "We're calling a halt. We're just too washed out to think clearly, let alone find out what ails the bloody thing. I vote we all lay down for an hour and then try it again."

Hans was standing by Geoff, eyes blazing at the interruption in the light. When I explained to him what I told Geoff, he wearily nodded in agreement. "You're right about us being wiped out," sighed Geoff. "We're getting nowhere this way."

A Brief Respite

Like seven corpses, we all stretched full length on the sand around the silent vehicles and dozed for an hour. No one slept; our nerves were too taut for that. But by 10 p.m. our heads were a little clearer and we went back to work on the carburetor while Helmut and Kurt boiled water for coffee. Hermann hadn't moved.

As we worked away on the ignition, we agreed that, if the minibus wasn't started by midnight, we would have to leave it. With what water we had left, we couldn't possibly survive another day in the sun.

Then it dawned on Hans what was wrong. Silently, he unscrewed the two bolts anchoring the distributor, removed it, and held it in the light. Dismantling it to expose the condenser, and then unscrewing it also, he peered at the tiny wire inside and broke into a triumphant grin. The wire had worn through without breaking, making it impossible to see until it was removed and examined under the light at a certain angle. Excited with relief, we quickly replaced the condenser with a new one from the well-equipped spares kit on the roof rack. Reassembled and fastened tight, the engine caught with an angry snort and ran perfectly. It was 11:50 p.m.

After gulping down the coffee, we were on our way immediately. Barring any unforeseen incident, we now had enough time to make it to Bordji-Perez by the next day.

The Second Way Station

We passed through Bidon Cinque two and a half hours later, both vehicles running smoothly—the Volksbus running at a good

speed for the first time and keeping up with, and ahead of, the Rover the whole way.

The second way station was much larger than Poste Weygand, and was in much worse condition. Walls were caved in, the windows were broken, and all the wooden buildings had been gutted by fire. The desert was well on its way toward reclaiming it and blotting it out, the sands having filled the Quonset huts to a depth of three feet. There was a haunted, lifeless shroud of stillness hanging over the post and after a quick inspection, we were glad to get away from it.

Only Eighty Miles To Go

At 2:30 that morning, we figured that we had eight hours to travel the 80 miles to Bordji-Perez. It seemed that the difficulties were all behind us. We were on the downhill side of the slope at last. Then we made the mistake that nature never lets pass: we became overconfident, and then complacent, about our inevitable success, speeding up to hurry the process along. And that was when the real problems began.

Just 30 minutes outside Bidon Cinque, the Volksbus came to a sand-spraying, lurching halt with the left rear wheel falling off and the axle buried deep in the ground. I swung the Rover around and came up with the lights so we could view it clearly. It was worse than bad. The wheel had shaken loose, shearing its nut and cotter pin, and instead of falling off and rolling clear, it had jammed under the fender as the vehicle dug into the sand. Before it could even be examined properly, it had to be dug out, jacked up, and braced. The splash of dust hadn't yet settled when Hans was out and digging with both hands.

Back To Work

There was little room to work, and it was slow, painstaking labor. We spent about 40 minutes of precious time in digging, jacking, bracing, re-jacking, re-bracing, and prying before the wheel came out and the truth was known. The only question we had was, "Can we fix it, or do we leave it?" As tight as we were with the Germans, the answer was as important to us as it was to them.

We mutually determined that the wheel could be fixed, at least temporarily. The spline on the axle had not sheared, only that on the wheel nut and the drum. We hammered the wheel back on and secured with another nut, finishing the job by jamming a thin screwdriver through the axle in place of a cotter pin.

Slow Going

It was 4 a.m. when our "convoy" moved out again. We knew the wheel wouldn't hold for very long, but then, it didn't need to. Hans was taking no chances. He drove as though he had a cargo of eggs on board. We followed slowly behind to watch for any sign of wobble in the crippled wheel.

For the next hour, all went well. Hans avoided any swerving or increases of speed that might antagonize the shaky wheel. With only 45 miles separating us from water, and the dawn just beginning to glow in the eastern horizon, it looked as though we would make it after all. Again we became overconfident, and again the wheel wobbled, came loose, jammed under the fender, and ground the Volksbus to a sickly halt.

The Situation Worsens

The work began anew in silence. It was exactly the same as the first time—the same order of jacking and bracing, the same division of labor, the same slow, sweating process. Hermann was asleep on the sand as the sun came up, and the wheel came off once more.

The drum was worse this time, and our alternatives were limited to one—the same as before. As long as there was the slightest chance we could get the Volksbus to Bordji-Perez, we entertained no thought of leaving it. Hans hammered the wheel back on, forced the half-stripped nut onto the axle, and banged a new screwdriver into the hole to hold it a little longer.

The Enemy Returns

The sun sat on the eastern horizon for a few minutes, as if to mock our efforts, then began to move slowly and ominously up the sky. We watched its relentless progress—grimly, through sunken eyes—as we carefully nursed the tired Volksbus along. The fiery orb had watched and waited; now it was coming in for the kill.

With 30 miles to go, the wheel fell off again. It was the same story—same digging, jacking, repair job, new screwdriver for the axle, wake Hermann and carry on.

At 9:30 a.m., the wheel fell off again, deeper this time, taking 45 minutes to dig it out and hammer it back on. Still, we were not worried, as it was only 19 miles to Bordji-Perez.

But now the desert was beginning to bake. For the fourth time, the beaten shaky wheel sheared and fell off. Hans dragged the worn jack to the wheel and mutely began to dig. Tapping him on the shoulder gently, I pointed to the sun ablaze in the sky and shook my head; it was no use. We were out of screwdrivers, out of water, out of patience, and out of time.

Geoff was already undoing the back of the Land Rover and together, we unloaded everything onto the ground except the two sleeping bags. The Germans climbed glumly, tiredly inside, bringing some food and two empty water containers. We left everything else where it lay, and hoping the map was right about the water, drove on down the track.

Dealing with Adversity

Adversity often brings out the best in you. It can show you what you are really made of, and make you even better. When you embark on any new venture, you will have an unending series of obstacles and difficulties you could never have foreseen. But this is the “testing time” where you show your true character—and everyone is watching.

“Adversity does not make the man; it simply reveals him to himself.”
(Epictetus)

Chapter 23

Bordji-Perez

“Within you right now is the power to do things you never thought possible. This power becomes available to you as soon as you can change your beliefs.” (Maxwell Maltz)

We had been driving for 20 minutes, slowly so as not to overheat the vehicle, when the antennas atop the military post of Bordji-Perez appeared above a small rise, far off to the left. Leaving the piste, we drove straight over the rise toward the first sign of life we'd seen in what felt like two months.

The final outpost consisted of a group of featureless mud buildings, completely encircled by a loose array of barbed wire. In front of the buildings was a large open area, also enclosed in the same barbed wire but having two wide gaps, obviously for access to the post from the road. Against a small clump of dark green bushes, on the side of the open space near the buildings, we could make out one lone water pipe with a tap on the end. We headed straight for it.

It was 11:15 and the blistering heat was rising. In the packed Land Rover, we were already sweating profusely. With our water now gone, the only thing on our minds was the quenching of the growing thirst that had already dried our mouths and parched our throats. Without slowing, I drove the vehicle through the first gap in the wire and stopped at the tap.

We had made it. Haggard, dirty, exhausted, and thirsty, we had nonetheless reached water. We had beaten the desert, after a hard

battle, and the spoils were ours. Silently, we piled out of the Rover and converged on the tap.

The Politics of Water

Geoff was just about to turn on the water when he was suddenly stopped by an angry, incomprehensible shout. Led by an unshaven Arab in a dirty undershirt, six ragged Algerian soldiers hurried from the nearest building, rifles pointed at us as they waved us away from the tap.

“What are you doing here?” demanded the undershirted Arab in French as he came up and stood between us and the water pipe. The rag-tag collection of military rejects following him got into line and brandished their ancient weapons foolishly.

“We need a little water,” I told him.

“Where have you come from?” he demanded, folding his arms across his flabby chest. “Why are you here? Why have you driven up to my fort? Where are your papers?”

He turned to the soldiers to see that they were taking it all in and had their weapons fixed on us. Then he turned back arrogantly and sneered, waiting for answers.

We were taken completely off-guard by this barrage of questions and had no idea why he was carrying on in such a manner. We were tired and dirty, not in the least bit offensive, and obviously unarmed. We didn’t even know there was a military post at Bordji-Perez. I tried to explain our position.

“We came from Reggane. We’ve been in the desert for two days, and one of our vehicles broke down. We had to leave it. We need water and shelter from the sun, that’s all.”

“Where are your papers? Where is the other vehicle? I demand to see the other vehicle! Why have you entered the fort without permission? Give me your papers immediately!” He kept looking back at the others for approval.

Desert Diplomacy

Geoff got our passports from under the seat and gave them to him, but with the exception of Hermann, the Germans had left theirs in the Volksbus. The Arab glared at the passports and demanded in a louder voice, “Where are the other passports? I want to see the others!”

“The others are in the broken vehicle about 10 kilometers from here,” I tried to explain. “We need water and protection from the sun until evening. We can bring the other passports to you then.”

The sun was now pounding down on our bare heads from directly overhead, and we were getting thirstier by the minute, our mouths too dry to lick our cracked lips. And this idiot seemed to think he was some sort of god.

“Who is German?” he demanded, waving Hermann’s passport. “I know German from the war. I speak good German. Who is German?”

Hermann stepped forward and spoke to him in German, trying to explain again what happened and that we needed water. It was obvious the Arab could barely understand the German he was supposed to speak so well, but when Hermann switched into French, he irately silenced him and demanded that he continue in German, looking over his shoulder cockily at his men. Finally, he seemed to figure out what we were saying, nodding with a know-it-all smirk, as though it were a pack of lies.

Desert Etiquette

The gate we had entered to approach the water pipe lay 200 yards away at one end of the rectangular-shaped parade yard. Opposite the front of the “fort” where we were standing, about 20 yards away, was another gap in the wire. From the worn look of the ground, it appeared to be the main gate to the fort. The Arab pointed to the nearby gap in the wire and said, “That is the water gate. You must come through that gate for water.” We had entered through the wrong gate, and he would not give us any water until we came through the correct one.

“Oh, for hell’s sake, let’s go through the right stinking gate and get something to drink,” snapped Geoff. “I’m dying of bloody thirst.”

We were all tense with anger and exhaustion when we got back in the Land Rover. Helmut and Josef started to walk to the gate, rather than ride the short distance, but they were stopped at gunpoint. They must also go in the vehicle, they were told. Everyone must do the same thing.

I started driving toward the water gate, seething with anger at the unbelievable stupidity of the whole situation. But the pompous little Arab started shouting and waving again. I quickly halted the Rover.

“You cannot drive straight to the water gate,” he stated indignantly. “You must go back the same way you came in and drive to the outside of the water gate.”

It was utterly ridiculous. We were 10 yards from the gate at that moment and the other gate was 200 yards behind us. Speechless, teeth gritted to keep from swearing at him, I swung the Rover around and headed back the way we had come, out the gate, along the perimeter

of the wire, across the front of the fort, and back to the water gate—almost a quarter of a mile to go 10 yards. And the farce was not yet over.

An Exercise In Exasperation

The loud-mouthed little Arab had put on a dirty shirt and was waiting for us with eight men. Shouting again, he ordered us out of the vehicle and away from it. It had to be searched before we could have any water.

If they had rehearsed it, they could not have looked stupider, or behaved in a more idiotic manner. The vehicle—with the exception of the sleeping bags, the food, and the water containers—was quite empty. Yet each soldier fell out of line and took a turn coming over and poking his rifle in, then his head, to look around.

Meanwhile, the mouthy Arab in the undershirt declared that he was keeping our passports until he not only had the other passports but also the broken-down vehicle for inspection, to verify that we had not sold it to someone in the desert.

“Fine, fine,” we agreed. “Now can we have a little water, and for the love of God, some shade from the sun?”

But no, this was forbidden as well. We couldn’t come near the fort to sit in the shade. Instead, there was a stone hut about a quarter of a mile away where we must go to get out of the sun. As for water, we would have to come two at a time to the front gate and ask the guard on duty for permission to fill the containers. With that, he strutted into the fort like a bantam rooster, clutching our passports in his dirty hand.

A Terrible Urge

At that moment, we were so angry that, if we'd had weapons, or any chance of success with our bare hands, we would have stormed that post and murdered every man in the place. We were all pent up with a hate that was only a few degrees short of uncontrollable. I'd never felt that way in my life, nor had I ever thought myself capable of such an emotion. Our eyes were narrowed to slits and our jaws set rigidly to contain the burning rage within us as we drove to the hut. Even Hermann was gripped with the intensity of the sudden lust to kill.

Abigail Adams once wrote, "All men would be tyrants if they could." I've learned in life that some people, given a little authority, will often abuse their power for no other reason than to prove to others that they have it. These people can be dangerous.

A Little Water, At Last

The small hut was occupied by two Taureq holy men who were engaged in prayer when we walked in. There was a large earthen pot of cool water in one corner, and without so much as a by your leave, we grabbed it and passed it around until it was empty. As the praying continued, we brought in our few possessions from the Rover and laid out our sleeping bags on the dirt floor. Somewhat cooled, temperamentally and physically, and paying no more attention to the Tauregs than if they had been fence posts, we sprawled out on the open bags and dozed off.

We couldn't sleep long, and we didn't sleep well. The tin-roofed hut was cooler than outside, but it soon turned into a sweatbox, and the flies descended upon us in swarms. After a couple of hours, it was

too uncomfortable to sleep, and we were too tired to care, so with a few scraps of wood, plus the loan of a blackened pot from our co-inhabitants, we cooked up a stew of noodles and gravy that we devoured to the last morsel.

The Water Brigade

Hermann and Kurt were the first to make the trek for water, then Hans and Josef, then Geoff and I. Each time the water containers were brought back, they were immediately emptied for various uses and then taken by the next two. On each visit, as required, we would approach the guard and ask him politely if we could have a little water.

Following the playground rules, he then went to the post and returned a minute later to tell us that our request had been granted, but we must hurry. The droopy-faced little soldier, his oversized trousers dragging in the dust, sloughed behind us to the tap and stood about 10 feet off. After washing our faces and arms, we filled the containers, and walked back out the gate.

The Germans Call It Quits

We had not known what to expect at Bordji-Perez, and had vaguely hoped that there would be some place for mechanical repairs, but since the fort and the hut were all there was, the Germans decided to throw in the towel.

Without new parts, the Volksbus was beyond hope. They decided that they would sort out what they needed and could carry, give us the remainder, and then wait for the convoy to arrive. They could continue south with it to the first major city.

It was a wise decision and the best to be made under the circumstances, but Geoff and I were greatly saddened that they'd failed, especially after all the hardship and bad luck they had experienced. We agreed, though not eagerly, to take Hermann with us to Mali, where he would write or wire the families of the four fellows and tell them what had happened.

That afternoon, Hans and I drove back to the Volksbus to bring it in. While he hammered the damaged wheel back on again, I loaded everything of ours, and most of the heavy things from the Volksbus, into the Rover. We left the spare tires from the roof rack, as well as a complete spare engine lying on the sand. We then hitched the two vehicles together with the towrope and started back to the post just as the sun was setting.

Further Delay

When we towed the Volksbus up to the front gate, the Arab came out and glanced at it disdainfully. Snatching the proffered passports from Hans, he counted them. We told him that three of us were leaving for Mali in a few minutes, and we needed our passports returned right away.

He looked at me up and down, then sneered. They wouldn't be ready until 10 p.m., he sniffed. We would have to come back then. This time he strutted away without looking back. It didn't take much to work up a real hate for that fellow.

An Unexpected Windfall

If the end of the Germans' vehicle had been a tragedy for them, it was certainly nothing of the sort for us. Our petrol supply had been

three-quarters consumed by the time we reached Bordji-Perez, and without the 15 extra gallons we inherited from them, we would have had no possibility of reaching Gao. They also gave us a large box of tools: two hydraulic jacks, a tent, some food and medicines- including the first malaria pills we'd seen. With the addition of these articles, we were fully equipped for Africa for the first time—except for *visas*, of course, and this was about to become our next big problem.

No Travel Without Visas

Until we entered Algeria at Beni-Ounif, we knew nothing about the need for visas to visit foreign countries. The very word “visa” implied to us some special circumstance or reason for entering a country that went beyond the simple motive of ordinary traveling. Our passports had allowed us into England, France, Spain, Gibraltar, and Morocco without questions. We considered paying 14 dinars for visas when we arrived in Algeria to be an inconvenience more than anything else. After all, we were just tourists.

While some African nations were starting to encourage tourism, Mali was apparently not among that number. When Geoff inquired into Mali visas during his wait in Algiers, he was told that not only were Canadians barred from Mali without visas, but also that the necessary visas would cost \$40 each, a small fortune in our circumstances. Even worse, to get a Mali visa, you had to send your passport to the Male Embassy in Paris and wait 4-6 weeks, something that was clearly impossible for us.

Serious Consequences

He was also told of a group of four travelers that had crossed the Sahara with a convoy and then been refused admittance and

turned back, despite their willingness to pay anything to be allowed to continue. They had to wait at Bordji-Perez for a week before a northbound convoy came through with enough petrol to get them back to Reggane.

Despite this story, Geoff had decided that the visas were beyond our means and had returned without them. We had not been aware of a country named Mali before Gibraltar, and besides, \$80 was too much to pay to cross a geographical entity we had no interest in, one that we had not come to see, and one we would pass through as quickly as possible. We decided to play the cards as they were dealt, working something out when the time came. Well, the time had now arrived.

The Personality For Success

Perhaps the most important and respected quality in people is what is called “social” or “emotional” intelligence. It is the ability to read other people in a complex situation, and then to speak and act effectively.

Political savvy requires that you understand the dynamics of power and influence among people, and then decide how to respond appropriately to gain maximum advantage.

Of course, often the time when political skill is most required is when you are angry, excited, or confused, when you are least likely to have your wits about you. This is when you must remain calm and cool if you are to make the right decisions.

Your ability to think, plan, and act effectively in stressful situations will determine your success as much as any other factor.

“Luck often means simply taking advantage of a situation at the right moment. It is possible to make your “luck” by being always prepared.”

(Michael Korda)

Chapter 24

Running the Border

“The beauty of the soul shines out when a man bears with composure one heavy mischance after another, not because he does not feel them, but because he is a man of high and heroic temper.” (Aristotle)

Late that afternoon, a truck came from Mali came by and stopped at the hut for the night. The driver was as interested in our story and the ruined Volksbus as we were interested in what he could tell us concerning the road ahead.

For a start, he told us, the road was quite bad, and he confirmed that if we didn't have visas we would not be allowed through. We asked him if, once we were past the border, there were any more checkpoints where visas would have to be produced.

There were, indeed. On the 350-mile stretch between Bordji-Perez and Gao, there were three towns, each having a police post to check traffic. He showed us his passport, with the stamps from each post, to lend credibility to his story, and assured us that it was impossible to pass without our passports, insurance, and visa registration in order. We listened intently to everything he told us, but laughed off his pessimism.

No Turning Back

We were becoming reconciled to the sad fact that nothing in this trip was going to come easy. If it wasn't the Rover, it was the police, the dysentery, the heat, or the insects. There was always going to be

something to make it rough until we got to Lagos. As usual, there was no question about turning back. It was onward or nothing. We would just have to run the border, go around the checkpoints, and somehow get to Gao to secure enough petrol to get into Niger, the next country.

As foolish as we may have been, we appreciated the hazards of such a procedure. If we were caught in the country illegally, we could be imprisoned, indefinitely, and have everything we owned confiscated. It was not a pleasant prospect, but going back was worse. We would have to try it and just hope for the best.

Saying Farewell

There remained nothing more to be said. We took down the addresses of our German friends and shook hands all around, wishing them good luck, and they us, each promising to look the others up should we ever be in their respective countries. We had converged, merged, and were now diverging on separate roads once more. Perhaps someday our paths would cross again.

At 10 p.m., we drove back to the main gate of the darkened fort to ask for our passports and fill our water containers. After 45 minutes and much confusion, we received our passports and water and left immediately for Tessalit, the frontier town of Mali, 75 miles to the south.

The Terrain Changes Once More

Even in the dark, as we drove toward Mali, we could see and feel that the barren desert wasteland was falling behind us. There had been bits and tufts of withered grass in the rocky country around Bordji-Perez, and small clumps of sagebrush. As we drove, the lights of the

Rover began to pick up stunted trees spaced haphazardly along the piste.

The reappearance of the sparse vegetation was comforting in a way, seeming to stand as an assurance that nature, though not softening, would be willing to accede her position as our main antagonist, leaving the physical and political factors as the major difficulties for us to overcome, as the next price we must pay for entering Africa unprepared.

We had never been so completely cut off from everything in our lives. We had 1,000 miles of desert behind us and 1,000 miles of unknown country ahead, \$50 in our pockets, and no clear reason why we were there to begin with. This insecurity generated a strange feeling of reckless determination within us, with only one concrete objective that we could cling to and strive for—reaching Lagos, Nigeria. We proceeded toward that town like the Wise Men following the star of Bethlehem.

The Daring Plan

Hermann rode between us, straddling the floor shift on the raised transmission. Since he had a Mali visa, he was only coming as far as the frontier, where he would wait until he could get another ride south the following day, or perhaps the day after. Traffic on that stretch of road was not too dependable.

Geoff and I had very little patience for Hermann. He had been nothing but self-righteous, meddlesome, lazy, and irritating. We were glad we wouldn't have to share his company any farther than Tessalit. We would leave him by the road if he started in on his holier-than-thou advice with us, and he sensed it. He sat quietly as we discussed

our plans to run the border and what we could do in case of this or that eventuality. Our first move was to be fairly straightforward.

We would drive straight to the frontier town of Tessalit and deposit Hermann, taking a look at the lay of the land at the same time. We would then return in the direction of Bordji-Perez without even inquiring into entering without visas. Hermann would tell the police, who would undoubtedly be suspicious, that we were going to wait for the convoy and make the trip to Gao with the trucks from Bordji-Perez, and that he had been in a hurry and had paid us to bring him to Tessalit, where he hoped to find another ride. The story was flimsy, but it would serve the occasion.

After depositing Hermann, we would return along the road until out of sight of the frontier post, then turn west into the open country, beginning an arc that would bring us around the border station and back to the piste about a mile beyond Tessalit. The road still ran more or less due south and with our compass to ascertain direction, we couldn't possibly get lost.

The Roads Get Worse

The truck driver had been right about the bad road. According to the map, it ran along the edge of a range of low rocky hills for the next 250 miles. Although it was still very much the Sahara, the level sand had been replaced by a stony, broken terrain through which a track had been scraped, obviously at great cost in time and labor.

No attempt had been made to keep the road in a reasonable state for the infrequent traffic. It was a mess of with gouges and potholes, narrowing to a few yards in many places, making any speed over 20 miles per hour dangerous and terribly hard on a vehicle.

Realizing full well that there was no margin for error, we kept our speed down. If anything happened to the Rover now, the jig was up.

No Comparisons

No one can appreciate the meaning of a hard drive until they have driven for many hours over really treacherous road. In the past, in our long distance trips across Canada and the United States, Geoff and I had been at the wheel for as long as two days straight. Once I even drove from Niagara Falls in the east to Vancouver in the west, a distance of over 3,000 miles, in 65 hours non-stop, alone. It took me 19 hours of solid sleep to get back on my feet after that trip. I was sure that *nothing* could be rougher than that.

But I was wrong. This trip, negotiating a buckled road, late on a moonless night, hundreds of miles from civilization, going into the fourth consecutive day without any sleep, having no idea of what to expect ahead was a “hard drive,” beyond my wildest imaginings.

Never Relax

Driving the Land Rover on this road was a process of maneuvering incessantly to avoid ruts and potholes, allowing no distraction whatever, with the road just inside the sweep of headlights taking the focus of concentration. The eyes of the driver could never leave the road without the danger of an accident. Braking, shifting, accelerating, hands locked on either side of the wheel, shoulders hunched forward to absorb the crashing, pitching motion, peering intently through eyeballs fuzzy from strain—that was a picture of the driver, hour after hour.

We were all were straining forward, elbows on our knees, eyes fixed on the road to anticipate and prepare for the next jolt. We were sweating from the taut nerves, gulping aspirins to relieve the splitting headaches that were our legacy from the heat and sleeplessness.

The only sensible thing to do was to stop for the night and rest our weary bodies, continuing in the morning when we had a little energy and could see the piste clearly. But we couldn't. We couldn't stop at all, because it was now *Sunday* morning.

This was a critical factor by our reckoning. We figured that Sunday was Sunday, even in Africa. The chances that the Mali police would be less vigilant on a Sunday were good, and if we were grasping at straws in our attempt to run the border, the tiniest straw had to be utilized.

Four Trouble Spots

This was our plan. To reach Gao without being stopped, we had to pass police posts and roadblocks at Tessalit, then Aguelhok, Anefis, and Bourem. These four trouble spots were spaced in distance in such a way that we could just make it, if our luck held out.

We would circumvent Tessalit in the dark of early morning, while everyone was asleep. We would drive around the town of Aquelhok just after dawn, before anyone was up. We would slip past Anefis in the midday heat, when everyone was asleep. And we would get by Bourem at dusk, in the dark, just after nightfall.

With this strategy, we would run the least possible risk of detection by those police still working on Sunday. After Tessalit, and sunrise, the advantage of being able to see clearly where we were

going when we left the road was another consideration. It wasn't much, as plans go, but it was all we had.

The Border Running Begins

The half-obscured road markers kept us informed of our proximity to Tessalit, and as the distance diminished, the tension built. Just at 3 a.m., we passed several stone huts off to one side of the road, and came seconds later to a barrier across the road with the sign, "TEESALIT-ARRET POUR DOUANE" (Tessalit – Stop For Customs).

The road was clear on one side of the barrier and without thinking, I swung the wheel over and drove past it before stopping, dousing the lights and cutting the engine simultaneously. The silence of the dark night fell over us.

The police post, to our right about 20 yards, was completely still. There was no sign of life anywhere.

"They must all be asleep," whispered Geoff nervously.

"Are you getting out or are you coming with us?" I asked Hermann, also in a low voice.

"Make up your mind," urged Geoff tensely, "We're not staying here all bloody night."

The night was suddenly pierced by the angry barking of a dog, coming from the same direction as the police building.

"I will come! I will come!" sputtered Hermann anxiously.

I punched the starting button and released the clutch in the same motion, sending the darkened Rover tearing down the uneven road. After 100 yards of near-blind driving, I switched on the lights, stepping on the gas even harder and keeping it to the floor, despite the

careening motion. It was five kilometers before I cut the engine and lights once more and coasted to a stop.

Geoff was already out and in back of the Rover when it stopped, and I joined him there, standing without a sound, staring into the dark toward Tessalit for any sign of pursuit. Five minutes of listening for any sound satisfied us that our passing had gone unnoticed. Cursing that damn dog, we started the engine again. The illegal crossing of Mali had begun.

Washboard Roads

If you can imagine a road constructed entirely of eight-inch diameter logs, packed closely together, then you can imagine the same road with countless logs removed and others spread out and broken irregularly. If you can then picture driving over this surface in a light vehicle with a solid steel frame, and the bone-jarring, teeth-rattling effect of it, you can have some idea of what it was like being a traveler in Northern Mali. Now add a dash of numbness, a touch of fear, two cups of exhaustion, a layer of tension, sprinkled with dust and grime, and you get the glorious sensation of traveling without visas in sub-Saharan Africa.

When the dawn came, we were bumping through a broken, jagged country strewn with black boulders. It looked like an abandoned graveyard of the devil. It was a cruel, unfeeling landscape, bits of scraggly sagebrush attesting to its ability to sustain only the barest forms of life. There was an air of silent violence hanging in the stillness, the rocky piste being the only sign that men had claimed a partial victory from the land. This track was the only route a vehicle

could possibly take, and according to the map, it led straight into Aguelhok.

Aguelhok At Sunrise

We first saw Aguelhok that morning at 5:50, half an hour after sunrise, from a small hillock by the piste four kilometers out. It was a cluster of stone buildings facing what had been, hundreds (or thousands) of years before, a large lake. Now there was only a flat expanse of white sand bordered by small dunes, sparsely dotted with stunted, scrawny trees.

We examined the entire area with binoculars from atop a boulder, each of us taking a look. Our only way around the town was along the far perimeter of the old lakebed. We would still be in sight of the buildings, though over a mile away, but since it was still early morning, we hoped that no one would be looking.

It was a good bet and we had to take it. Shifting into four-wheel drive, Geoff steered the Rover along the lake edge, keeping as far from the quiet village as possible without getting into the powdery sand around the dunes. We were over halfway through the wide arc that would take us back to the road when the firm, flat sand ran out. To follow the perimeter any farther would take us back toward town, so we took a chance in the silt.

The wheels started to spin and churn immediately, clawing for traction and finding none, slowing our forward motion to a crawl. The Rover slowly began to sink. Hermann and I jumped out quickly and put our backs into shoving while Geoff kept the wheels turning slowly. Thank heavens, that was all it took. In another 50 yards of

arduous straining, we were through the dunes and curving back toward the piste, out of sight of the town.

We had no way of knowing if we'd been seen, so once we'd regained the road we drove for another five kilometers, then pulled off to listen and wait. Again we had been lucky. There was no sound of a pursuing vehicle from Aguelhok, and after 10 minutes, we backed onto the piste again and set out for Anefis, 193 kilometers farther south.

The Desert Wadis

The road still ran through parched, withered country, and although the dry, cracked ground was rocky, signs of life, in the form of ragged trees and bushes, were increasing with the miles. The sparse areas of greenery and trees were centered in the arid basins, unique to the lower Sahara regions, called wadis. A wadi is a shallow depression, like a huge dinner plate, usually several miles across, and so gradual in its slope to the center that unless one is aware of its existence, it is almost indiscernible. They are, however, one of the most dangerous physical features of that land, despite their innocent appearance.

Every two or three years, a rainstorm blows in from the Niger River, drenching the land in a sudden cloudburst before dissipating. Because the ground has been baked solid by many months of pounding sun, the water from these infrequent storms is not absorbed, but runs instead into the centers of the natural depressions, the wadis, with frightening speed, filling the larger ones to a depth of 15 feet in a matter of minutes. Many travelers over the years, who had been passing unsuspectingly through a wadi when the storm broke, suffered

the most cynical fate of nature—drowning in one of the driest lands on earth.

The French built their roads across the wadis on dikes of earth and stone, as high as 15 feet above the arid ground, so traveling was no longer dangerous, as in the old days. These land bridges look downright silly in their barren context, but the high-water mark, 12 feet up their sides, quells any tendency to laugh.

Getting Around Anefis

We passed no one on the roads that morning, and stopped only once to refuel and eat. Hermann managed to drag himself out and gather a little brush for our cook fire before wandering off to socialize with two Taureq children who had appeared in the scrub, standing about 20 yards off, eyes wide and sucking their fingers. As Hermann approached them, they vanished, only to reappear in another place, still watching silently. It amused us no end, Hermann's penchant for meeting people, and we agreed that he would make a perfect host for a boy's camp on parents' day. Geoff and I were just too tired to care.

At noon the temperature was only 105 degrees, and at 1 p.m. when we were approaching Anefis, the mercury was touching 115 degrees—hot enough to keep most people inside, and too hot to drive safely, but we had no choice. We had to get while the getting was good.

Scouting the terrain with the binoculars as before, we made another wide arc to avoid the eyes of the police in the small post. The uneven ground was blanketed by thin wispy grass and clumps of dry brush, but the terrain proved no obstacle to our Rover. Because of the flatness, we had to swing out about three kilometers, a time-

consuming operation, and it was an hour before we safely circumvented Anefis and got back on the road. But we made it. That left only the fort and police post at Bourem between us and Gao.

Black Market Transactions

Late that afternoon, we met a heavy truck going north. It was the first vehicle we'd seen since Bordji-Perez, 250 miles before, and we stopped to chat with the driver. After the usual pleasantries and a vigorous round of handshaking, the driver asked us if we had any Algerian money to sell. For some reason he seemed quite eager to buy it and offered us, what he swore to be, its equivalent in Mali francs. We still had 200 dinars (about \$46) from Algeria and reluctantly agreed to part with half of it for 5,000 Mali francs.

At that time we had no knowledge of the black market and its influence on national currencies. We believed that you could change any money, from any country, in any bank, for approximately what you paid for it. It wasn't until much later that we learned that in many countries the official bank rate on foreign currencies is much lower than its actual value, and once you've changed your money, you're stuck with the foreign cash. You must either spend it all in that country, or exchange it on the black market when you leave.

These same countries forbid import or export of their currencies to force unsuspecting travelers to buy the money they need through the bank, at the lower rates. After we left Algeria, unbeknownst to us, our Algerian money became worthless to anyone but a person traveling to that country, and after that truck driver, we never met another such person.

Hapless Hermann

The driving was rough on Geoff and me, but at least we had youth on our side, and were physically very fit from years of clean living and good sport. Hermann, on the other hand, was not strong. He was half bald, flabby, and completely unsuited for hardship. Yet, despite his physical shortcomings, and the terrible pounding he was suffering from the road, he refused to utter a word of complaint.

About 6 p.m., we stopped to refill the tank, not far from two goatskin tents set up in a gully between two mounds of sand. Hermann, his eyes glazed and his body dripping with sweat, struggled out of the back and fell on the road, prostrate and breathing heavily. Whether he lived or died was inconsequential to our getting past Bourem by dusk, and we paid no attention to him, beyond feeling a vague pity. There was nothing we could do in any case.

A Desert Mirage?

As I opened the gas tank and Geoff dragged out the last jerry cans, I had a sudden feeling of being watched and turned quickly to examine the landscape. A flash of blue caught my eye from off to the right about 50 yards, and I forgot all about the tank and the semiconscious Hermann.

Standing there was a Taureq girl, her bearing erect and proud, like a queen in exile, unafraid, almost defiant. She was simply beautiful, about 18 years old, with high cheekbones under a smooth dark olive skin that set off her dark, piercing eyes. Her jet-black hair, pulled tightly back on her head, was almost completely covered with a light blue scarf, with long flowing folds of the same turquoise material embracing her slender figure.

She stood perfectly still, watching us, half turned into the breeze that caused her robes to ripple in the afternoon sun, her arms hanging straight by her sides, relaxed, one bare, the other partially covered by a fold of the shimmering blue. There in the quiet of the day, against the background of sand and dusty bush, she looked like a delicate flower, a shining jewel in an arid setting.

Geoff brought the jerry cans around and set them down, following my gaze without commenting, studying her lovely features as though she would vanish at any moment. She never flinched from our staring, never moved, never took her eyes off our faces. Finally she turned, as though satisfied, floated lightly across the sand, moved behind the tents, and was gone.

The spell was broken. We turned to the business at hand, and as I poured the last of the petrol out of the jerry can, Geoff helped Hermann to his feet and back into the Rover. When I started the engine, we both looked for the girl once more, but there was no sign of movement around the quiet tents. We drove away slowly, still looking, and were well down the piste before I stepped on the gas and shifted through the gears.

There are many things that I will never forget from that journey through Africa, and surely one of them will always be that Taureq girl in the lonely land below the Sahara.

It often happens that, even in the remotest of places, you can come upon the loveliest of creations. Like the delicate desert flowers, those apparitions appear and then vanish in a moment. You may think you have just seen a mirage, but no, it was real. And you are left to wonder about the miracle of life—and those magical moments that stay with you forever.

Breaking the Rules

There are two types of rules: laws and conventions. Laws are passed by governments and enforced by police. Conventions are standard or common ways of thinking, only enforced by your natural tendency to do things the way they've always been done.

To succeed in a tough, competitive, fast-changing society, you have to be willing to defy convention, to try something new or different when the situation calls for it.

Sometimes the ideal solution to your current problem is the opposite of what everyone else is doing. Often, to survive and thrive in your business or career, you have to offer something that is better, cheaper, newer, and more convenient than anyone else—all at once.

Be prepared to innovate, to break out of the mold, to “go boldly where no one has ever gone before.”

Thomas Watson, Sr., founder of IBM, put it this way: “Do you want to succeed faster? Then double your rate of failure. Success lies on the far side of failure.”

Or, as Dorothea Brand wrote, “Decide what you want. Then act as if it were impossible to fail, and it shall be.”

“The difficulties you meet will resolve themselves as you advance. Proceed, and light will dawn, and shine with increasing clearness on your path.” (D’Alembert)

Chapter 25

A Very Close Call

“Do what you can, with what you have, right where you are.”

(Theodore Roosevelt)

The crossroads at Bourem is shaped like a tree, the trunk being the road on which we were driving, with the branches being the road on the right leading northwest toward Timbuktu, and the one on the left going south toward Gao. To get onto the Gao road, our goal, was a matter of approaching the crossroads, then turning off and cutting across the angle of which Bourem was the center. Then it would be just 59 miles to Gao.

Two hours before dusk, the terrain had become a sea of rolling dunes, with just enough silt in the sandy soil to sustain a covering of dark green, tangled clumps of narrow-leafed bush. The sun was touching the horizon when we came out of an S-bend onto a wide sandy expanse flowing half a mile, straight ahead, to the base of a looming hill. Crowning this hill, huge and shadowed by the setting sun, was the high-walled fort of Bourem.

Not Paying Attention

In our exhausted condition, not paying attention, we were halfway across the open plain before it registered on us that we were perfectly visible from the fort. A uniformed figure had already come out of a building at the base of the hill and was standing, hands on hips, watching our approach. I swung the wheel around and headed

toward the road for Timbuktu, my heart thumping and stomach fluttering sickly.

A shout came from the uniformed figure and he started waving, motioning us in his direction, but I only increased speed to get away. Suddenly we hit a ridge of sand that tore the tailpipe loose from the muffler, bringing a deafening blare as we lurched onto the Timbuktu road and sped northeast out of sight of the fort.

One Thing After Another

If things weren't confusing enough with the policeman shouting at us from behind, the muffler roaring, and the three of us trembling with fatigue and fear as we turned off the piste to circle back to the Tessalit road, one of the tires started going flat on the front.

Without stopping, we wended our way through the dunes until we came out on the road, crossing it into the sand hills beyond before cutting the engine. We had made a complete loop, and even if a vehicle had been sent in pursuit of us from the fort ahead, there would be no reason to suspect that we had turned off the Timbuktu road and had, in fact, regained and recrossed the same road on which we had appeared.

Working frantically, Geoff changed the flat tire while I removed both ends from a condensed milk can, split it down the seam, and bound it around the noisy break in the tailpipe, cinching it fast with spare radiator hose coupling. Our hearts were pounding a mile a minute, our mouths dry, and our hands sweating from the nearness of the escape.

The Fort At Bourem

We could have guessed that Bourem was a fort, but we had had no way of knowing that because of its strategic location the danger of detection was greater than it had ever been. We would now have to pass in the choppy country under the very eyes of the fort. If we used our lights, the police would have no difficulty intercepting us. And the sun was now gone.

The lack of light in the unpredictable terrain was one problem. The loose tailpipe was another, since the muted sound traveled a long way. And our exhausted, stumbling condition was yet a third. But we had no choice. We had to get out of there before the whole Mali army was down on top of us. In the murky dusk, keeping the motor revs low, we started snaking our way through the dunes under the fort.

Lights in the Night

From the first moment we turned off the road, the sand was loose and treacherous, forcing us to use four-wheel drive to creep along the twisting, tortuous terrain. Unable to see clearly, we were steering in the general direction of south and west by keeping the looming fort always on the right. Soon, it was too dark to see anything, and so Hermann and I got out and floundered ahead with flashlights to find a way. Twice we got trapped in blind pockets and had to back out, pushing to keep the Rover moving in the clinging grit.

The one thing we had dreaded finally happened. Lights appeared from the fort and people began moving down the hill toward us. When we cut the engine for a moment, we could hear voices shouting and see the lights spreading out as they moved. We were panic-stricken, sweating coldly and trembling all over. Keeping

the lights off and disregarding the roar of the engine, Geoff stepped on the gas. The Rover churned forward, winding in and out in a switchback pattern in the rough country toward the southbound road somewhere ahead.

Running Out Of Time

If each of those dozen lights approaching us represented a soldier with a weapon, our time was just about up. They were no more than 300 yards away, the bobbing line changing direction to follow the sound of the Rover. But the road couldn't be much farther, and the Rover was finally clawing its way ahead without our pushing. Running along with it, Hermann and I jumped back in just before Geoff roared it up over and over a large sand bank.

My heart stopped dead, and our jaws went slack with despair. Only 50 yards ahead the way was blocked with a semi-circular row of what appeared to be lanterns. The other lights were coming over the dunes to our right and behind us, and to the left was a steep ridge of brush backed by a clay bank. We were trapped.

Fortune Favors The Brave

"Go like hell and keep your lights off!" I shouted at Geoff, but he had already stomped on the gas, and the Rover surged forward. Five yards from the first light, he gave a blast on the horn and snapped on the headlamps, swerving to one side.

We almost died with relief at the sight. We were in the middle of a tent camp, heading for a row of cooking fires, while the frightened figures of running Tauregs streaked across the glaring beams, children being snatched frantically out of the way. Without slowing, Geoff steered toward a hole in the row of tents and we roared out of the

camp. The Land Rover bounded along a wide footpath for another hundred yards, and suddenly we bounced onto the Gao road. We had made it.

Moving South

Shifting the Rover quickly out of four-wheel drive, Geoff wrenched the wheel over and once more stepped on the accelerator, taking us lurching and bouncing down the rutted track. After 15 minutes of hammering along, we turned sharply off the road and parked 50 yards away behind some trees, waiting tensely in the dark. After 10 agonizing minutes had ticked slowly by, we knew we had made it. No one was following.

Nothing Left

But, we had made it with nothing left. After 20 mind numbing hours of non-stop travel, we had no smiles, no satisfaction, no strength, and no energy. We felt as if a plug had been pulled, and the last drop of nervous energy—or whatever it was that kept us going—had drained away. We were completely wiped.

After a few more minutes of waiting in the silent blackness, we got back on the road for Gao and drove as if in a trance, eyes blurred and heads ringing. Geoff finally stopped the Rover in the middle of an open stretch and slumped over the wheel.

“No use,” he mumbled. “No use at all. I can’t see any more. You’d better drive.” A few miles later, I also gave up driving. The last shred of energy was gone, and I couldn’t see the road clearly either. I was dizzy, blind, driving down a flashing tunnel with hallucinations leaping and screaming from every shadow.

Vaguely remembering the river to be on the right somewhere, I turned off the road and drove straight for it, until we came to the bank of a muddy tributary. Geoff and Hermann were slumped forward, almost unconscious, and as I stopped by a clump of palm trees, they jerked awake and looked around to see what had happened.

“We’re there.”

Without a word or question about the location of “there,” we dragged the sleeping bags out of the rear and threw them on the ground. Then everything went black.

“You become a champion by fighting one more round. When things are tough, you fight one more round.” (James J. Corbett)

SECTION 7:

THE SUMMING UP—REFLECTIONS

“Before the reward, there must be labor. You plant before you harvest. You sow in tears before you reap in joy.” (Ralph Ransom)

You are wiser than you know. You have already had so many experiences in life that, if you could extract from them every precious lesson you have learned, you could make your life into anything you want.

You should develop the habit of looking upon every experience of your life as a building block, handed to you at the right time and place, just when you needed it to take the next step.

Earlier, I said that the key to success is for you to set a clear goal and then to persist through all adversity until you achieve that goal. The intense emotions of pride and self-esteem that accompany any great achievement will burn a pattern for success into your subconscious mind. Forever after, you will be internally motivated to repeat this pattern. You'll be set for life!

Take some time to analyze and evaluate your experiences. Write down the valuable lessons you have learned. Then think about the wonderful experiences you have ahead of you.

Then, "Act boldly, and unseen forces will come to your aid."

Chapter 26

Lessons for Life

We had made it! We had crossed the Sahara Desert. We had not really slept for four days, from Adrar far to the north, to the banks of the Niger River. But we had done it. The first major test of our lives was over. And we had passed.

There was much more to come, but I won't go into that now. I won't tell how we eventually got out of the country of Mali and into Niger with an all-points bulletin out for us on all roads and with the army and police under orders to shoot to kill the "spies" and "arms smugglers" who had illegally entered the country and evaded all attempts at apprehension.

I won't give you all the details about everything that happened as we ran the next border illegally, evading police checkpoints and capture, and traveling deeper and deeper into West Africa.

I won't talk about the other countries we passed through and the experiences we had, not even the time we spent with Dr. Albert Schweitzer at his hospital in Lamberene in Gabon. I won't tell you how we were almost killed under the boots and truncheons of Congolese police and how we escaped death to finally make our way to South Africa, our ultimate goal.

Instead, I'll end this story by telling you what I learned about life and success in the Sahara crossing.

Seven Principles For Lifelong Success

Most of our important lessons in life happen in retrospect, as afterthoughts, like backing up and hitting something, and then getting

out to look, or looking in the rearview mirror to see what just happened.

Aristotle once wrote, “Wisdom is a combination of experience plus reflection.” Without taking time to reflect, we fail to glean the wisdom that becomes available to us from dealing with a difficult situation. When reflecting on your experiences, learn to extract all the lessons and the wisdom that your experiences contain.

People who merely have experiences but do not learn from them tend to make the same mistakes over and over. But, if you have a single intense, important experience and you extract from it every lesson that it offers, you can often learn an extraordinary amount from it and use that new understanding to accomplish great things in the future. As Emmet Fox once wrote, “Great souls learn large lessons from small experiences.”

Here are seven principles I learned in the Sahara crossing that you can apply to any challenge you face in achieving anything you desire.

Lesson Number One: The most important step for you to achieve great success in any endeavor is for you to decide upon your goal and then *launch*. Take action. Do something. Move! Your willingness to take the first step, to step out, to move forward toward your goal with no guarantee of success, is the critical first step that separates the winners from the losers in life.

We set out at the ages of 20 with \$300 each. Our goal was to cross North America from one side to the other, to sail across the Atlantic Ocean, to travel the length of Europe from London to Gibraltar, and then cross Africa from Morocco to South Africa, a

distance of more than 17,000 miles—and we made it in 12 months. But the most important step was the first one. All the rest followed from that.

Lesson Number Two: Once you've launched toward your goal, never consider the possibility of failure. The Germans have a saying, "*Immer vorne, nie zuruck.*" Always forward, never backward. Never consider the possibility of failure.

Every person who achieves any success does so because he or she refuses to quit when the going gets rough. Your ability to persist in the face of setbacks and disappointment is the true measure of the person you really are, and of the character you have developed to this point.

Your level of persistence is your measure of your belief in yourself and in your ultimate possibilities. Your willingness to persist is vital to all great achievement. And persistence is always a decision that you make personally, within your own heart. It is not what happens on the outside that counts. It is always what is happening on the *inside*.

Lesson Number Three: The biggest goal in the world can be accomplished if you just take it "one oil barrel" at a time. Thomas Carlisle once wrote, "Our great business in life is not to see what lies dimly at a distance but to do what lies clearly at hand." If you go as far as you can see, you will then see far enough to go further.

If all difficulties and problems must be first solved and resolved, nothing will ever get done. If you wait for everything to be "just right," you will never do anything, because things will never be just right.

The only time you will ever have is now, the present moment. It is what you do with this moment that determines your entire future. If you live every day, every hour, the best you can, the rest of your life will take care of itself. As the Bible says, “Sufficient unto the day are the cares thereof.”

Lesson Number Four: Avoid the *naysayers*. Watch out for the negative people around you who are always telling you that you will fail, that you will lose your time or your money, that you will “die in the desert.”

Associate with positive people. Get around men and women who are optimistic and ambitious. Refuse to listen to objections and reasons why you can’t succeed. Only work and live with people who encourage you and want you to succeed. Remember, the people you choose to surround yourself with, and listen to, will have more of an impact on your life than perhaps any other factor.

Lesson Number Five: Welcome obstacles and difficulties as valuable and unavoidable steps on the ladder of success. Remember that **difficulties come not to obstruct, but to instruct**. Within every difficulty or setback lies the seed of an equal or greater opportunity or benefit. Your job is to find it.

Our trip to Africa was one problem after another. We ran out of money over and over again. We strained every muscle of our bodies trying to ride bicycles across France and Spain. Our Land Rover broke down again and again. We suffered from dysentery, heatstroke, and exhaustion. But when it was time, we were ready for the Sahara crossing.

Without the lessons that we had learned from our mistakes, we would surely have died in the desert. When you look back on any great achievement, you will find that it was preceded by many difficulties and many lessons. The difficulties are the price that you pay for your success, and the lessons are what makes them possible. As Seneca, the philosopher wrote, “Fire is the test of gold; adversity of strong men.”

Lesson Number Six: Be clear about your goal but be flexible about the process of achieving it. Be willing to change, to try something new. Keep your mind open and fluid and flexible. Be willing to accept feedback from your environment and correct your course.

This flexibility is a key quality of peak performers. They are not rigid or fixed on a particular course of action. They are always willing to consider the possibility that they could be wrong. They are always willing to consider alternative ways to reach the goal.

In life, it's not what you have, but what you do with what you have that determines success or failure. It is not what happens to you, but how you respond to what happens to you that counts. Your ability to respond and adjust to the adversities of life is the real measure of who you are and what you are likely to accomplish.

The Greek philosopher Epictetus once said, “Circumstances do not make the man; they merely reveal him to himself.” You find out who you really are only when you face a great setback or disappointment and you are tempted to quit and to go back. This is the true test. And the only question is whether you will pass or fail. The decision is always up to you.

Lesson Number Seven: Nobody does it alone. At every step of the way on our journey, people helped us with advice, with food, with assistance, and with money, but especially with warmth and kindness and generosity. Likewise, at every key turning point in your life, someone will be standing there with an outstretched hand, offering advice or assistance or an encouraging word. As George Shinn wrote, ***“There is no such thing as a self-made man. You will reach your goals only with the help of others.”***

We never forgot the kind people who helped us in our trek across France and Spain, the family that fed us, and the café owner who befriended us. We will not forget the people in Gibraltar who helped us prepare for Africa. We won’t forget the mechanics in Morocco and Algeria who helped us with our repairs. We will never forget the generosity of Monsieur Tourneau of Michelin who gave us that precious map that saved our lives when we were deep in the desert.

When life is over, we will treasure most the memories of the people with whom we lived and laughed and loved. These are the true components of wealth—the true accomplishments of our journey.

So don’t be afraid to ask others for help. It is a mark of strength and courage and character. And don’t be reluctant to give of yourself to others generously. It’s the mark of caring and compassion and personal greatness.

Summing Up

The reason the Sahara crossing was so life changing for me was because, after the Sahara, I never felt that there was anything I couldn't do. I felt programmed for success for life, although it took me many years to understand what had really happened and why I felt this way.

In addition, I believe that *everyone* has a Sahara to cross, perhaps more than one. *You* may be crossing your own personal Sahara right now.

Everyone goes through periods of great difficulty—their own private hells, their dark nights of the soul—but it is by facing whatever life sends you with courage and determination that you grow more surely toward the stars.

Let me end this story with the final verse of “Carry On”:

*There are some who drift out in the deserts of doubt,
And some who in brutishness wallow,
There are others I know who in piety go,
Because of a heaven to follow.*

*But to labor with zest and to give of your best,
For the sweetness and joy of the giving,
To help folks along with a hand and a song,
Why there's the real joy of living!*

*Carry on! Carry on! Fight the good fight and true;
Believe in your mission; greet life with a cheer;
There's big work to do, and that's why you are here.
Carry on! Carry on! Let the world be the better for you;*

And at last when you die, let this be your cry:

Carry on, my soul! Carry on!

If you resolve that whatever life hands you, you will carry on, there is nothing that can stop you from achieving the greatness for which you were created. Never give up!

Appendix

Becoming Unstoppable

Here are some of the best thoughts on courage, persistence and daring, by some of the best thinkers of all time:

“Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.” Calvin Coolidge

“Before success comes in any man’s life, he is sure to meet with much temporary defeat, and perhaps some failure. When defeat overtakes a man, the easiest and most logical thing to do is to quit. That is exactly what the majority of men do.” Napoleon Hill

“Some men give up their designs when they have almost reached the goal; while others obtain a victory by exerting, at the last moment, more vigorous efforts than ever before.” Herodotus

“Austere perseverance, harsh and continuous, rarely fails of its purpose, for its silent power grows irresistibly greater with time.”
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

“Few things are impossible to diligence and skill. Great works are performed not by strength, but by perseverance.” Samuel Johnson

“Never, never, never give up.” Winston Churchill

“Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.” Confucius

“There is no failure except in no longer trying. There is no defeat from within, no insurmountable barriers, save our own inherent weakness of purpose.” Elbert Hubbard

“The rewards for those who persevere far exceed the pain that must precede the victory.” Ted W. Engstrom

“The most essential factor is persistence, the determination never to allow your energy or enthusiasm to be dampened by the discouragement that must inevitably come.” James Whitcomb Riley

“If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew to serve your needs long after they are gone, And so hold on when there is nothing in you, except the Will that says to them, ‘Hold on!’” Rudyard Kipling

“I know of no such unquestionable badge and mark of a sovereign mind as that of tenacity of purpose . . .” Ralph Waldo Emerson

“No, there is no failure for the man who realizes his power, who never knows when he is beaten; there is no failure for the determined endeavor; the unconquerable will. There is no failure for the man who gets up every time he falls, who rebounds like a rubber ball, who persists when everyone else gives up, who pushes on when everyone else turns back.” Orison Swett Marden

“Do what you can, with what you have, right where you are.” Theodore Roosevelt

“Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed is more important than any other one thing.” Abraham Lincoln

“A man can rise above his circumstances and achieve whatever he sets his mind to, if he exercises unshakable persistence and a positive mental attitude.” Samuel Smiles

“Many men fail because they quit too soon. Men lose faith when the signs are against them. They do not have the courage to hold on, to keep fighting in spite of that which seems insurmountable. If more of us would strike out and attempt the ‘impossible,’ we very

soon would find the truth of that old saying that nothing is impossible. Abolish fear, and you can accomplish anything you wish.” Dr. C. E. Welch

“Men who have blazed new paths for civilization have always been precedent breakers. It is ever the man who believes in his own ideas; who can think and act without a crowd to back him; who is not afraid to stand alone; who is bold, original, resourceful; who has the courage to go where others have never been, to do what others have never done, who accomplishes things, who leaves a mark on his times. Don’t wait for extraordinary opportunities. Seize common ones, and make them great.” Orison Swett Marden

“Nothing can resist a human will that will state even its existence on its stated purpose. The secret to success is constancy of purpose.” Benjamin Disraeli

“I am not discouraged, because every wrong attempt discarded is another step forward.” Thomas Edison

“We will either find a way or make one.” Hannibal

“Life is either a daring adventure or nothing.” Helen Keller

“Experience is not what happens to a man; it is what a man does with what happens to him.” Aldous Huxley

“Obstacles are necessary for success because victory comes only after many struggles and countless defeats. Each struggle, each defeat, sharpens your skills and strengths, your courage and your endurance, your ability and your confidence—and thus each obstacle is a comrade-in-arms, forcing you to become better.” Og Mandino

“To get profits without risk, experience without danger, and reward without work is as impossible as it is to live without being born.” A. P. Gouthey

“You must be courageous, and courage is the capacity to go from failure to failure without losing any enthusiasm.” Winston Churchill

“The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spends himself on a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement; and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly.” Theodore Roosevelt

*“It’s easy to cry that you are beaten and die;
It’s easy to crawfish and crawl;
But to fight and to fight when hope’s out of sight;
Why, that’s the best game of them all.”*

Robert W. Service

“Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear—not absence of fear.” Mark Twain

“Nothing splendid has ever been achieved except by those who dared believe that something inside of them was superior to circumstance.” Bruce Martin

“Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers. Pray for powers equal to your task.” Phillips Brooks

Carry On

It's easy to fight when everything's right,
When you're mad with the thrill and glory.
It's easy to cheer when victory is near
And wallow in fields that are gory.
It's a different song when everything's wrong,
When you're feeling infernally mortal.
When it's ten against one and hope there is none,
Buck up little soldier and chortle,
Carry on, carry on! There isn't much punch in your blow
You're glaring and staring and hitting out blind,
You're muddy and bloody but never you mind,
Carry on, carry on! You haven't the ghost of a show.
It's looking like death, but while you've a breath,
Carry on, my son, carry on.

And so in the strife of the battle of life

It's easy to fight when you're winning;
It's easy to slave, and starve and be brave,
When the dawn of success is beginning.
But the man who can meet despair and defeat
With a cheer, there's a man of God's choosing;
The man who can fight to Heaven's own height
Is the man who can fight when he's losing.
Carry on, carry on. Things never were looming so black;
But show that you haven't a cowardly streak,
And though you're unlucky, you never are weak.
Carry on! Brace up for another attack.
It's looking like hell, but you never can tell.
Carry on, old man! Carry on!

There are some who drift out in the deserts of doubt,
And some who in brutishness wallow,
There are others I know who in piety go
Because of a heaven to follow.
But to labor with zest and to give of your best,
For the sweetness and joy of the giving,
To help folks along with a hand and a song,
Why there's the real joy of living!
Carry on! Carry on! Fight the good fight and true;
Believe in your mission, greet life with a cheer;
There's big work to do, and that's why you are here.
Carry on! Carry on! Let the world be the better for you;
And at last when you die, let this be your cry:
Carry on, my soul! Carry on!

—Robert W. Service

About Brian Tracy

Brian Tracy is one of America's leading authorities on human potential and personal effectiveness. He is the Chairman of Brian Tracy International, a human resources company based in San Diego, California, with affiliates throughout North America and in 31 nations worldwide. Brian has had successful careers in sales and marketing, investments, real estate development and syndication, importation, distribution, and management consulting. He has consulted at high levels with many billion-dollar corporations.

As an internationally renowned business consultant and motivational speaker, Brian addresses over 250,000 people each year on leadership, management, sales, strategic planning, success, personal and career development, goals, time management, creativity, self-esteem, business development. His exciting talks and seminars bring about immediate changes and long-term results. He is a dynamic and entertaining speaker with a wonderful ability to inform and inspire audiences toward peak performance and higher levels of achievement.

Brian has produced and narrated more than 300 audio and video learning programs, which have been translated into as many as 20 languages. These include *The Psychology of Achievement*, *Fast Track to Business Success*, *The Psychology of Selling*, *The Power of Clarity*, *Master Strategies For Greater Achievement*, *The Psychology of Success* and *24 Techniques for Closing the Sale*. These programs are considered to be among the most effective learning tools in the world. They cover the entire spectrum of human and corporate performance.

Brian is the author of 28 books, including several best sellers, such as: *Maximum Achievement*, *Advanced Selling Strategies*, *Focal*

Point, The 100 Absolutely Unbreakable Laws of Business Success, Eat That Frog! Victory!, and Create Your Own Future.

Brian has traveled or worked in over 80 countries on five continents and speaks four languages. He enjoys a wide range of interests and has a Bachelors degree in Commerce and a Masters degree in Business and Administration, as well as a black belt in Karate.

He is extremely well read in the areas of management, philosophy, business, economics, metaphysics, and history. Brian is an avid believer in controlling one's own destiny, setting daily goals, working hard, and persevering to the end.

He is active in community affairs, serves on the boards of non-profit organizations and travels worldwide. He is married with four children and lives in Solana Beach, California.

Brian Tracy International

Brian Tracy is one of the most popular professional speakers in the world. His fast-moving, high-content talks, seminars and presentations—full of ideas, insights, and practical strategies for greater personal and professional effectiveness—make him one of the most sought-after speakers in the U.S. and around the world. In the past 20 years, he has delivered more than 2,000 speeches, seminars, and courses for more than two million people.

Brian is a successful businessman who has started, built, managed or turned around 22 businesses. He has worked with more than 500 businesses as a consultant and trainer, including companies like IBM, MacDonnell Douglas, Northwestern Mutual, Deloitte & Touche, EDP, Federal Express and Ford. Brian speaks more than 100 times each year for corporations, associations, conventions, and public seminars on the following topics:

Counter Attack – Applying the 12 Principles of Military Strategy to
Increase Sales, Cut Costs and Boost Profits in a
Tough

Economy

High-Performance Leadership—For the 21st Century

Advanced Selling Skills—For the Top Professional

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