



Video Story Transcript

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

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Link to YouTube Video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wixpPFzJlgA>

Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

I'm Barb Schutzgruber. The summer of 1964, mom and dad packed the five of us kids, ranging in age from 14 down to 6, into the 9-passenger station wagon and we traveled east going from Michigan to New York City. Now there were some folks in the small town where we lived who thought mom and dad were nuts. Stories of gangs, crime plus all the wild reports that spring of how dozens of New Yorkers stood by and did nothing to stop the brutal murder of Kitty Genovese, who was a young woman simply walking home from work one night. Why would you even think of going to New York? New Yorkers are cold and heartless. They'll take advantage of you or worse.

But for me, I was nine years old and all I knew was that we were going to stay with mom's Uncle Ed in Brooklyn. We were gonna go to the Empire State Building, the Statue of Liberty, the United Nations and we were going to the 1964 New York World's Fair. For three days, we explored the city because seven of us could not fit into one cab and taking two and, most likely, three was way too expensive, so out of the question!

All of us walked the streets of New York, miles and miles of cement, buildings that blotted out the sun and even the sky sometimes, noises and strange smells. People, saw many people rushing about, no one looking at anyone. And we rode the subway. Once we were huddled in a crowded subway car next to an older man and he took the time and told us all about how those subway tunnels were built. He even complimented us kids on how polite and well-behaved we were. As my sisters and I looked on, he handed my brothers each quarters because he had no sons. And then with a wink and a smile, he handed quarters to us girls too because how could he leave out such lovely young ladies.

The day we went to the World's Fair, it was after midnight by the time we got back, much to Uncle Ed's worry and apprehension. At \$2 a ticket, mom was going to make sure that we saw every inch and got our money's worth. So, we did see every inch of the over six-hundred-acre complex. We stayed right up till closing and barely caught the last ferry that would take us from Queens back to Brooklyn.

After a long day of heat, humidity, crowds, overstimulation, we made our way to the deserted upper deck of that ferry. It was so nice to be somewhere quiet and no one else around anywhere. My two older sisters and older brother collapsed, each on their own bench. My little brother fell asleep with his head on mom's lap. Dad leaned against the rail, smoking a cigarette. I sat with my back against the bulkhead, the vibration of those heavy diesel... em... vi... ah, engines vibrating in my bones. There was the gentle rhythm and sway, comforting as that boat pulled out onto the water. The smell of sea water with just the faintest hint of diesel fuel was on the breeze. I looked out over the dark waters off in the distance, the city lights twinkled. New York City has its own set of stars.

The spell was broken, suddenly, by voices coming from below deck, loud and boisterous. Half dozen or so teenage guys, pushing and shoving, stumbled up the stairwell, spilling out onto the deck. They took one look at us and said, "Tourists."

Slowly they divided, forming a half circle around dad. Forty, bald, wearing a Cornell University T-shirt and dark blue Bermuda shorts, arm in a brace, Dad was a contrast to those city boys with their slicked back hair, blue jeans, white T-shirts, cigarettes neatly rolled up in the sleeve, with a swagger. One of them stepped forward and as the others laughed, he taunted, "Hey, old man! All those kids yours?"

Dad exhaled slowly, stood up, turned and said with a smile, "Yeah, isn't it great?"

The voice took a step back. "Well, yeah, I guess it is."

Dad continued, "We're from Michigan. New York is a great city. What borough are you fellows from?"

There was a moment of awkward silence and then those boys began to talk. I watched as Dad asked questions and listened intently to whoever was speaking, and the posture of those teenagers changed. They relaxed and soon they were shifting easily from one foot to another, interrupting each other to get a word in, laughing, gesturing as they spoke. Even the one who stood awkwardly at the back of the group was brought in and became part of that conversation.

A movement off to the side caught my attention. A crewman had come up on deck. He stopped dead in his tracks. He looked at mom, the five of us kids, dad leaning against the rail surrounded by a group of young men who were gesturing as they spoke. Without saying a word, he walked away. A few minutes later, he was back, this time, with some of the other crewmen. These men all looked like my uncles who worked construction, thick arms folded across broad chests. They stood like a wall with feet planted.

One of the teenagers noticed the men in the shadows watching them. He nudged the guy next to him. They both turned. They now stood taller, straighter. They planted their feet, eyes narrowed, fists clenched. Mom looked from the crewman to the teenagers and shifted where she sat. Dad looked, up over the heads, gave a nod to the crewman but did not move.

He stayed, leaning relaxed against that rail and continued his conversation with those teenagers. They talked the entire trip. Finally, the horn blew, which called the crewmen back to their stations because we were coming into the dock. Mom got us going with, uh, "Get your stuff together! Come on, let's go."

Dad said, with a smile, "It was nice meeting all of you. You fellas take care."

“Yeah, you too,” was the reply. And those teenagers headed down the stairwell and we made our way off the boat and back to Uncle Ed's house. That summer of 1964, my family traveled east and we met really nice people. They're called New Yorkers.