



Video Story Transcript

The Bus: Traveling from England to India, with the Hell's Angels

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

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.

Hello, my name is Geraldine. Geraldine Buckley. And in 2007, it never crossed my mind, when I was training to be the chaplain, at the largest men's prison in Maryland, that after just a few weeks on the job, I would be sitting in my office, across my desk from the leader of the Crips, which is a largely African-American violent gang. And that I would be asking the head of the Crips for his help with a problem.

Well, when that day came, I did what I do best in those situations. After all, you've probably realized by now, that I was born and brought up in England. Well, I made him a cup of tea. But I really did have a problem. The midweek Bible service that had about 240 men and..., it had become a meeting place for the gangs, particularly the Crips. Now, the front of the service was fine. That's where men were opening themselves up to the love and forgiveness of God. And so, they were able to extend that love and forgiveness to other people. Incredible things were happening. But it was just at the back of the chapel that I had such a problem. That's where the gang members, particularly the Crips, were passing things and they were talking loudly. Well, goodness knows what they were plotting. But they were disturbing the service and I couldn't have that. And there was another level to this problem, and that is, if the correctional officers realized what a serious gang problem we actually had, they'd close down the service and we might not get it back for months.

Well, I went to the, the head of the, the inmate leaders of the chapel. Ah, we had a church of 600 people behind the walls. And, ah, the leaders, many of them, had theological degrees and I asked them for their input and they suggested that I take all those Crip leaders off the list. In other words, ban them from the service. But I didn't want to do that, because to my mind, unless they sat under the Word of God, what hope would

they have of changing? So, that's why I decided to go to the root of the problem, which is how I find myself in my office, across my desk from the head of the Crips. Let's call him El Jefe. Well, he was about thirty-three years of age. He was African-American. He came from Baltimore. And I knew, I only had him in my office for 20 minutes because he'd arrived at half past two and he had to leave by 2:50 in order to get back to his cell in time for count. And if he wasn't there, he'd be taken off to the segregation unit in chains. I thought, how am I going to establish any common ground, any mutual understanding, or any hope of cooperation, in such a short amount of time.

After all, we were so different. I mean, for a start, he was a man and I'm a woman. He'd been incarcerated for years and he's got years to go. And I'm relatively new at all this. And then, he was a Crip and I'm a Pentecostal. And then, I had an idea. And I said, "Jefe, let me tell you a story." I have, but first of all, I said to him, "Jefe, I think I have a really soft spot for gangs." Well he was, at the time, he was slumped in his chair and he was gently tapping his fingers on the edge of my desk. And he was looking at me through half-closed eyes and I knew then that he was not buying it. So that's when I said, "Jefe, let me tell you a story."

"When I was 21, I went on a bus trip from North Finchley tube station in London to Delhi, India. It was called Budget Bus. It was bright pink. It was decrepit. It was held together with duct tape. But it was cheap. Now, I went for two reasons. First of all, I wanted something on my resume the following year, that would make me really stand out from my, my fellow graduates. And the other thing is I really wanted to irritate my mother."

"Now, I was really concerned about who my fellow travelling companions were going to be because we would be travelling together for six weeks. We would be eating together by the side of the road. We'd be sleeping in tents together. So, we would in effect, be a mobile travelling capsule. And so, I was very concerned when I first stepped on the bus, and my immediate impression was one of a strong smell of unwashed bodies. Well, I tried hard to not let that show on my face but I looked to see where it was coming from. And it was a small group of men who were very thin, they had hollow eyes, and they had track marks up and down their arms. These were drug addicts. And one of them was going to die on a beach in Sri Lanka."

Well, I looked over at Jefe, and I'd noticed that he'd stopped drumming his fingers, and he was sitting up straight. Good. I had his attention, so I carried on. "So," I said, "of the other 25 or 30 other men and women on that bus, there was another man who immediately, I immediately, noticed. he was a small man. He was in his mid-20's. He had shifty eyes. And he sat right at the back of the bus. And I knew straight away, he was Australian because of his accent, And I found out later that his name was Wayne. Well, from that very first moment of getting on the bus, he kept up a loud, continuous monologue of the filthiest language I have ever heard before or since."

"And then, there was another group of men who stood out to me. They were wearing denim and leather and chains. They had shaved heads. They were covered in tattoos, and they had a really hard look on their faces. These were the Hell's Angels. Now, it must be said, that these were English Hell's Angels, so they were a little more refined than their American counterparts. But they were still Hell's Angels, and they terrified me. Particularly, their leader who was called Grila. Now, Grila was an enormous man. He couldn't read or write. He had his name tattooed on his knuckles. G-R-I-L-A. And he had this huge tattoo on his arm of a gravestone with the names of men in it. And I looked at those names and I thought, 'Are they the names of the men he's killed?' Oh, that man, Grilla, absolutely terrified me!"

"Well, that bus was far worse than I could have ever imagined on that first day. Wayne and his new group of friends discovered that down the aisle of the bus, there was a trap door that went down to the road. And when the bus was moving, they would have urinating contests. And if anybody objected, they would turn the flow on them. And then, for some reason, Wayne thought it would be great fun to pick on me. And so, for

hour after hour, he kept up another loud monologue describing, in vivid detail, what he imagined I did as extracurricular activity.”

“Well, I was only 21 and this went on for day, after day, after day. Well, one of those days, I was sitting near the back of the bus... back of the bus, playing Scrabble with Wayne's new girlfriend. She and I shared a tent for the first few days of the bus. Well, he said something really crass to her. Really revolting. And, stupidly, I defended her. So, he pushed me back in my seat. And then, he picked up his big fist to hit me. When all of a sudden, over my shoulder, came an enormous hand and it grabbed Wayne's wrist. And a voice said, ‘No, you don't. You're not hitting women. Not on my turf!’”

And Wayne just crumbled and he said, ‘No!’ He said, ‘Don't hurt me! Don't, don't hurt me! Don't hurt me.’”

“Well, I looked around to see who he was, who'd come to my help. It was Grilla! Grilla had come to help me. Well, that night I was sitting on the bus by myself. All the others were setting up the camp and, and Grilla came to find me. And he was shuffling his feet a bit, and he had his cap in his hand, and he was twisting it, and he kept his eyes on the ground, And he said, ‘Geraldine, I'm really sorry I didn't do more to help you on that bus today.’ He said, ‘But if we men start eating each other, someone's going to get killed.’”

“Well, several things happened from that incident. The first thing, was that Wayne kept really quiet at the back of the bus, which was wonderful. And then, that was the first time that I realized that, although it's best for men and women to work together, sometimes you need a man to stand up and do what's right. And when that happens, it's like a key turns in a lock and evil turns to good. And then the other thing that happened was, that Grilla and his group of Hell's Angels friends, they took me under their wing. And I became the little sister the gang. All very innocent.”

Well, at that moment I looked over at, ah, at Jefe and his eyes were as big as the bottom of s... of buckets. And I said, “I know, isn't that incredible, Jefe, that a woman who was not long out of a convent boarding school, would end up being the little sister of a gang of hens... Hell's Angels. But what that meant was, that I got to spend time with them. I got to see who they really were. And I saw that they, they really cared for each other. They had each other's backs. They were family.”

“So, one day I asked Grilla about that enormous tattoo on his arm, the one of the gravestone with the R.I.P. and the names of men. And he said, “Oh, Geraldine.’ He said, he said, ‘They're my fallen comrades. They're my dead friends. If we don't look out for each other, who will?’”

Well, at that moment, a shadow came across the glass in my office door. It was the correctional officer. And he opened the door. He said, “Chaplain, you've got three more minutes with this man, and then he's got to get back to his cell in time for count.”

I said, “Thank you, officer.” Three minutes. How was I going to get my last point across in such a short amount of time? Tick...tick...tick...And then, I had another idea. I said, “Jefe, you and your, your Hell's Angels, your, you and your, your Crips friends. You've been teaching me such a lot since I've been here. You've been teaching me about gang warfare and streets and, and gangs. Now, tell me if this is right or not, but from what I understand, you'd never let another gang come in and take your street corner. Is that right?”

He said, “Oh, that's right, Chaplain.” And he said, “That's never gonna happen. Never gonna happen.”

I said, “Well, Jefe, this mid-week Bible service, this is our land. The leader of these, this chaplain and mine. And if you continue what you're doing with your Crip friends, you're going to draw the attention of the correctional officers. And if you carry on doing it, they're going to take it away from us. Now, it would break

my heart to take you and your fellow gang members off the list. In other words, ban you from the service. But if that's what I've got to do, I'll do it. Because no one is taking this land away from me.”

And we just stared at each other. Tick, tick. A shadow came across the door in the office and then, and then, Jefe said, “It's all right, Chaplain.” He said, he said, “I get it. There'll be no more trouble. I give you my word.”

And you know something? Jefe kept his word from that moment 'til the time I left, two and a half years later. There was no more gang trouble in the Protestant chapel. No more trouble on my turf.