

A high-angle, close-up photograph of a cobblestone street at night. The stones are illuminated from the right, creating a strong contrast and casting a long, dark shadow of a person walking across the stones from the upper right towards the center. The overall mood is mysterious and evocative.

A GIFT
FROM A THIEF

Writer's Digest Award Winning Story

KATHY B. DEMPSEY

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This story is dedicated to the
thousands of AIDS orphans in Africa.
They have taught me the true meaning of JOY!

Amsterdam - the perfect place to rest and break up the long 10,000 mile trip to Africa. Or so I thought! I planned to spend a month in Zambia helping orphans who had lost their parents to AIDS.

After visiting the famous Anne Frank house I roamed the city, canal after canal. Thinking this may be the last time I'd be able to check email for weeks, I darted into an Internet cafe, shrugged off my backpack, carefully placed my bags under my chair, and sat down to work. Totally engrossed in a Google search, something made me look down. My backpack was gone!

My heart sank into the pit of my stomach as my mind registered what had vanished: my passport, money, credit cards, traveler's checks, medications, itinerary, plane tickets, keys, cell phone, even my precious 2005 journal.

With horror, I realized the unthinkable: I'd been robbed. The culprit had even stolen my map of Amsterdam along with the name of the hotel where I was staying, which I could no longer remember.

I immediately ran to the counter and pleaded with the cafe clerk to call the police. He grunted and refused, snarling, "They won't come! There are too many pickpockets around here. You'll have to go find the police yourself."

Stunned at his indifference, I wandered outside into the dark, cold night. I didn't even have any money to make a phone call. Panic swelled inside me and questions flooded my mind. What do I do? Where do I go? How do I find the police?

Feeling unhinged from everything and everybody on Earth, I stood in the middle of

the dark street and struggled to stop the tears from flowing. I was alone, lost in Amsterdam, with nothing but the clothes on my back. And in 24 hours my flight to Africa was leaving but I didn't have my passport or my ticket.

I faintly remembered the cafe clerk saying something about the police station being about 15 minutes down the road, three blocks down and on the left. Confused about what to do, I just started walking. Trying to protect myself from the cutting wind, I pulled the hood up on my jacket. If only I had my gloves — but they were in the backpack, too.

I knew I had made a wrong turn when I found myself smack in the middle of Amsterdam's famous Red Light District. Then I stumbled into a small corner store and discovered it was a marijuana house.

I stepped back outside and, from a distance, saw a large Police Station sign at the end of the block. Finally, after two hours of searching, I'd made it.

With a renewed energy, I ran to the door and grabbed the handle, but it wouldn't open. Thinking it was stuck, I jerked the handle back and forth, but it wouldn't budge. I pounded on the door. Finally I let go, stepped back and read the sign on the door. It read: "Closed."

The Police Station was closed?! How could a police station be closed? (Well, think about it — just about everything in Amsterdam is legal, so why do they need police?)

"What should I do now?" It was dark, 10 p.m., and nobody was around. I convinced myself to keep moving, keep walking, and to keep looking for help. As I headed back down the street, a beggar approached me. Having

been bombarded by beggars several times that day, I snapped back with disgust, “I have no money. Leave me alone!”

I was parched and craved water. The more I watched people at the sidewalk cafes drinking, the more consumed I became with quenching my thirst.

Finally, I stumbled into a restaurant. The waitress greeted me. “Table for one?” she said. “No, I have no money,” I said. “Can I please sit down and rest for a minute and have a glass of water?” As the words blurted out from my cotton-tongued mouth, I realized that I had become a beggar!

Despite the fact that the restaurant was packed like a can of sardines, the waitress smiled and listened while I explained my terrible plight. Then she said, “The chef is from Amsterdam and knows this city

inside and out. Let me see if he can come out and help.”

Two minutes later, my hero in a white chef hat and apron magically appeared before me. Based on my description, he immediately pinpointed my hotel. In less than 15 minutes, the chef’s crudely drawn napkin directions led me right back to the elusive hotel that I’d left 15 hours earlier.

I charged up to the front desk sobbing, “I need help!” Shocked, the desk clerk responded, “The closest police station that is open is about 15 minutes away. You need to take a taxi.” With the salty taste of tears lingering into my mouth, I blurted out, “A taxi? But I don’t have a penny to my name!”

This kind soul proceeded to place a 100 Euros – about \$120 dollars — in my hand and said, “I hope this helps.” Overwhelmed

by his generosity, I thanked him and hopped in a cab.

When I finally arrived at the police station, the officers let me use a phone. I called my sister, Virginia. I called my pastor, Fred. And then I called and left a message for my dear friend, Grace, who wasn't home. After hours of filling out forms, the police drove me back to the hotel. It was 3 a.m.

Safe once again in my hotel's lobby, the front desk clerk stopped me and said, "I have a message for you, Ms. Dempsey." He handed me a sheet of white paper. It was a fax from Grace. The sparse message had only three words to it: GOD IS ENOUGH!

I took a deep breath and slowly absorbed those three words. As I stood there unable to stop the tears I thought, "I had to be stripped of all my valuables to really

understand what that statement I've heard so often truly means.”

I was pensive as I walked back to my room. I collapsed onto the bed still clutching the fax in my hand. I nodded off for four hours. I jumped out of bed when I realized it was 7 a.m. and the sand in the hour glass was quickly running out. I used my last Euro to take a bus to the U.S. Embassy where dozens of people were gathered outside the gigantic 20-foot tall, black iron gates.

I pushed through the crowd and hit the call button at the gate. A guard in full military dress arrived and asked, “Can I help you?” So thankful to see him I replied eagerly, “Yes! I need help. I'm on my way to Africa and my bags were stolen. I need a passport.” His mechanical voice inquired, “Do you have an appointment?”

An appointment? I was shocked to think I needed one. “No, I wasn’t planning on needing an emergency passport,” I blurted. He responded sternly, “We can’t help you if you don’t have an appointment.”

Stunned by his heartless response, I’d spiraled from hope to the depths of despair in seconds. (OK, I had a meltdown!) Grabbing the cold, black iron bars and rattling them for dear life, I started screaming, “What do you mean you can’t help me?! I am an American! You’re the American Embassy! I’m all alone — stranded in a foreign country with no identification or money! I BEG YOU — PLEASE HELP ME!”

The American Embassy now had a hysterical woman right outside the front gates. It was amazing how quickly they responded to this potential PR crisis. Soon the guards opened the door. “Come in Ma’am. Please, calm

down and stop crying,” says a guard. “We will help you.”

In less than three hours, I had an emergency passport and was on my way. American Express (it’s true, don’t leave home without them) immediately gave me replacement traveler’s checks and a credit card. Then Delta’s frequent flyer system electronically located my ticket. With just minutes to spare, I caught my scheduled flight to Africa.

When the plane touched down in Africa ten hours later, I literally cheered. I hopped off the plane and proceeded to the immigration line. I stepped up to the counter and handed the official my emergency passport. “Your visa will be \$25,” he said. I handed him my credit card. “No good,” he responded. I handed him a traveler’s check. “No good,” he repeated. So, I asked him where I could exchange money. “There isn’t anywhere,” he

said firmly. “Step aside,” he commanded, then walked away.

I didn’t realize what was going on, but later discovered that the South African immigration officials were making arrangements to deport me back to the U.S. I thought, “Oh no! Here we go again in less than 24 hours I’m going to have my second meltdown!”

Then I tried pleading with him. “No! You can’t put me back on the plane. All my valuables have been stolen. I’m here to volunteer my time to help your people and work with your AIDS orphans.” But nothing I was saying or doing was making any difference. The officials stood firm in their decision: They were not going to let me into the country.

After an hour of crying and questioning about how I could have come 10,000 miles only to be sent back home, the unexpected

happened. I spotted a man with my name on a sign on the other side of the immigration window. I realized the hotel must have set this up for me when I made reservations months ago.

The gentleman walked up to the station and whispered something to the officer. The immigration officer looked at me and said, “Proceed forward.” Surprised by his sudden change of heart, I asked, “What happened?” In shock, I was told a taxi cab driver – a complete stranger — paid my way into Africa!

I spent the next 30 days in Zambia unable to access money. Yet, I was taken care of by the people around me, who had so little of their own. Each day the lessons flowed. I realized how I depend on money more than I depend upon the faithful presence of the One I call my God. I realized that my expectations and the standard of living I’ve grown accustomed

to can rob me of experiencing the pure joy of living. I realized that an abundance of things can often get in the way of having an abundant life.

Somewhere in Amsterdam, there is a thief who has used or sold all the contents of my backpack. I, however, have more than my backpack ever held – the understanding that God is truly enough.



As Paul Harvey would say...and now for the rest of the story: After I returned from Africa, I felt compelled to do something. I started a non-profit organization 501 (c)(3) called The Keep Shedding Educational Foundation. Since 2005, we have been privileged to send over 300 African AIDS orphans to school.

The true heroes in this story were not the powerful government authorities or big companies; they were average people - the waitress, the chef, the hotel clerk and the taxi cab driver.

You might not be in a position of great power but you can make a powerful difference in people's lives.

How can you help?

Consider sending an African AIDS orphan to school by making a donation to The Keep Shedding Educational Foundation.

Visit www.KeepShedding.com and click on the foundation page.



REFLECTION

Personal Reflection

- How attached are you to your worldly possessions?
- How would you respond if your possessions were all suddenly stripped away?
- How do your expectations get in the way of experiencing the pure joy of living?
- What does the phrase God is Enough mean to you?
- What do you need to do to strengthen your faith so you'll be better prepared to navigate through life's unexpected challenges?

Life Reflection

- How compelled would you be to help someone else in need?
- How much time or money would you be willing to give?
- How might you disregard people in need (like the American Embassy did) because it's an inconvenient time for you?
- How can you be more mindful of others in need?
- Have you ever discounted your ability to make a difference due to your position or lack of formal authority?

KATHY B. DEMPSEY

Kathy B. Dempsey, award winning author, keynote speaker and change expert is President of Keep Shedding! Inc. She ignites people and organizations with the skills and motivation to lead and manage change.

Her most popular book, *Shed or You're Dead®: 31 Unconventional Strategies for Change and Growth* is the recipient of a Writer's Digest International Book Award. Her newest Survival Guide books, *A Fast Acting Change RX for Every Employee & Manager and for Healthcare Professionals* have just been released.

Kathy is also a contributing author for two of the best selling *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series. She is the editor of *60 Seconds of Shedding*, a monthly online newsletter read by over 8,000 people all over the world.

She has achieved the highest earned speaker's designation in the world, the Certified Speaking Professional (CSP).

A few of Kathy's clients/sponsors include Johnson & Johnson, Mayo, Johns Hopkins, Verizon Wireless, Walmart, Disney, Honeywell, Delta Air Lines, Pfizer, SHRM, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan and the National Association of Healthcare Quality.

A native of Washington D.C, Kathy now resides in Scottsdale, Arizona.

For more resources or to sign up for
60 Seconds of Shedding, visit
www.KeepShedding.com

Experience Kathy Dempsey's gripping true story of having all her bags stolen in Amsterdam on her way to Africa to care for AIDS orphans. She lived 30 days without any access to money and was taken care of by people who had nothing. The thief's actions caused a surprising revelation...



Award winning author,
keynote speaker and
change expert.

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