
Chapter 17

The Rescue

Finally, I made the decision that I would be going with Majid and Ghader by way of Turkey. I made it clear to my family that no one was to blame no matter what happened. But I could not tell my wife about what I was doing. She had pleaded with me from the beginning not to try anything that could jeopardize my life. Deep within my heart, I knew that she was right. I might be killed, robbed or stabbed and left in the middle of nowhere. Nevertheless, God was giving me the peace I needed about this decision, and was providing the means. All I had was my faith in Jesus Christ to carry me through these mountains. I was giving up my logic for faith. I did not want to stay in Iran anymore and experience its unexpected surprises. If I were killed, I knew I would go to heaven to be with the Father, and if I lived through it, God would use me for His glory. He had been there with me every step of the way since I had been in Iran, and I had no reason to believe He would choose to leave me now! He is a Great and Mighty God!

His promise in Psalm 91 says:

“He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, “He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust.” Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler, and from the perilous pestilence.”

So, on Friday, May 20th at 11:30pm, we left Karaj and headed toward Urumiye (previously called “Rezai-yeh” during the Pahlavi regime). Majid and Ghader rode in the front seat and their nephew, Farsheed, Ali and me in the back.

After a brief stop for a snack and some water, we traveled toward our destination while listening to some Persian music from the selection of cassettes they had.

I kept my eyes open all night as Majid drove. I felt I needed to stay alert at all times. When I exchanged my \$1,000 to Toman, it was a large stack of bills and I could not keep it all in my pockets. So, I kept it in my suitcase in the trunk of Majid’s car. This was always a concern to me when I had to leave the car for any reason.

The gauges of the car Majid was driving were disengaged, so I could not tell how fast we were going or how much gas was in their car.

After a couple of hours of driving, we stopped at a gas station for gas and a restroom break. I stepped outside of the car to get some fresh air and to stretch my legs. It was cold and breezy. I told Ali to be cautious and to stay alert, and that only one of us should leave the car at any given time since all of our belongings were in the trunk of their car.

There were many stores open all night, and they had their hot tea ready for those travelers who commuted at night.

Ali, Farsheed, and Ghader slept through most of the night but I could not close my eyes even for one minute. I wanted to know where we were going, which roads we were taking and who we might meet. I did not want to be surprised at anything. Besides, Majid needed someone to keep him company in order to stay alert and awake while driving.

After hours of traveling and right before entering the city of Tabriz, we made one more stop for the restroom and hot tea. Inside the store I saw Majid and Ghader looking at some knives. This made me very nervous. I went inside the store with the intention of keeping a closer eye on them. Majid asked me if I wanted to buy a knife to take back with me. I told him I did not need one and from that point on, I stayed very close to them wherever we went. I wanted them to know I was watching.

When we got back on the road, Ali, Farsheed, and Ghader went back to sleep until we reached a checkpoint. At the checkpoint, two road police dressed in soldier uniforms stopped our car for inspection. Majid stepped out of the car and spoke with them in his own native Turkish language. Most people in that part of the country spoke “Turkish” as well as “Farsi” including Majid and Ghader. “Farsi” is the official Iranian language which is also called “Persian” in English.

They looked inside of the trunk and pointed to a loose pair of glasses laying there. Then they told Majid that those glasses might break throwing there like that. But he told them they are fine as they were. According to Majid, this is how, in a round about way, they were asking you



to give them something. I supposed that they check some vehicles for “drugs or guns” as well as just routine inspections and question the traveler’s intention since they are going to a city located close to the border. Majid’s license tag was from that area so coming and going for him was not any problem. So they let us proceed.

We approached the city of Tabriz at about 5:30am. Tabriz is a beautiful city with many mountains covered with a lot of greenery. Trees and flowers were budding everywhere. I was surprised because the mountains in Tehran and the surrounding areas were still rocky at that time of the year.

We drove slowly through the town. The streets were busy with traffic, even though it was still very early in the morning. The guys were hungry, and began looking for a restaurant, but could not find many open. After making a couple of circles around the town, we finally stopped at a shop where they were serving “Kalleh-Pacheh” which is a soup made with the head and skin of sheep. Just thinking

about that kind of Middle Eastern food was not pleasant, but the fact was I wasn't hungry at all. But they insisted on me trying it. So, I tasted a small piece of the brain poured in a bowl of soup with a piece of wheat bread. The soup and bread tasted good but the brain was slimy. One of the things that I was struggling with was trying to find a clean restroom, so in order to avoid having to use one I needed to refrain from eating much!

After breakfast, we continued our trip. Ghader decided to drive so Majid could rest. We had not gotten very far outside the city limits when I noticed there was a red light on signaling there was something wrong with the car. I pointed it out to Ghader and about the same time, the car's power started to reduce. Realizing that the car was having mechanical problems, we stopped on the side of the road to figure out what to do. Majid got out, popped the hood open, and immediately spotted a broken fan belt. I looked to my right and to my left, and saw nothing but miles of bare land. Since we were not far from the city, I figured that we might have to go back in order to repair the car. I did notice a few very old buildings made out of clay about a quarter of a mile ahead of us. However, from that distance they did not look like stores or shops that would have what we needed.

I started to pray, asking God for his help. I knew that something good would happen. I just did not know what it could be, and was anxious to see what God would do next.

We drove the car on its battery to where the old buildings were. Fortunately, and to my surprise, one of them was a mechanic shop with many belts hanging from its side walls! But the shop was not open yet since it was still too early in the morning. I figured that we might have to stay

there for an hour or two before the owner came, but suddenly, we spotted a private car nearby which was being used as a taxi. Majid approached the man and asked him if he happened to have a spare belt. He had one! Jesus was trying to tell me with little but important signs that He was with me and I thanked and praised Him nonstop for the way He was watching over me. Majid paid the man for the belt and repaired the car himself and we continued our journey.

We still had several hours to travel to get to our destination, but since Majid was familiar with the area, he knew a quicker route where we used a ferry to go across the calm Orumieh Lake. It took only thirty minutes to cross the lake and that saved us a few hours. We were in his territory, and he knew all the side roads as well as the main highways. He told me that there would not be any more checkpoints on the route he was taking us, even though we were much closer to the border of Turkey.

Before we left Tehran, Majid and Ghader had told us that they were in the business of buying and selling sheep and goats. They told us that someone was tending their herd for a sum of money, so they needed to get home as soon as possible to prevent having to pay them extra. This was their livelihood, buying and selling livestock, but I never saw any sheep or goats that belonged to them.

Majid also told us that when we got to the city of Orumieh where he lived, we would meet his wife and children and rest a while in his home while he contacted his sources to make arrangements for the rest of our trip. That did not happen, but it was okay because I was not worried. I knew God was guiding every one of my steps!

Saturday May 21

At about 10:30am, we arrived in Orumieh. We stopped at a café for more hot tea. While we were sitting there, Majid and Farsheed quickly told us that they were going to go buy some chickens, make some phone calls and would be back in about 10 minutes. They did not give us time to object, and I must confess that it made me a bit nervous to see them leaving suddenly and with all our belongings in the car, including my suitcase with all the money! Ali and I looked at each other, trying to hide our concern from Ghader who had been left behind with us. Since Ghader stayed behind, it gave us some comfort to know they would most likely be back. But we couldn't help but be concerned at their hasty move!

We sat there at the café drinking more tea and tried to keep the conversation going among ourselves to ease our mind. I was relieved when I saw them back within 15 minutes. They had purchased two whole, uncooked chickens! Then we all hopped back in the car and headed toward the village.

The landscape and view of the mountains was breathtaking! We saw some Kurdish people dancing on the side of the road, a few local country shops, and the beauty of God's perfect creation. We finally arrived at a large house, not far from the mountains, with an enormous living room and several bedrooms.

Majid told me that it only took 30 minutes to go across to the Turkish side. When I looked at the mountains up close, it appeared they would not be hard to cross, but I would soon find out that was not true at all! For some

unknown reason, they did not tell me the truth about how long and hard it would be to make this journey. Maybe it was because they thought I would back out if I knew. But at this point, nothing could have changed my mind. I had to get home to my family.

I had not slept for the last thirty hours and was not feeling the best, so in order to refresh myself I took a hot shower, which made me feel much better. I also shaved off my beard so my appearance would be much neater. I tried to sleep, but for some reason beyond my control, I could not make myself go to sleep peacefully. I would close my eyes, but any movement would trigger my eyes to open. I suppose it was because of the uncertainty of which I was with, where I was, and what was to come.

The women of the house prepared lunch with the chickens we brought, along with white rice and homemade bread. We were waiting for the rest of the family to come in, but they told us they would come when they were hungry, so we should go ahead and eat. It had been quite some time since I'd had a good meal, so needless to say I was very hungry! So, we sat down and enjoyed a wonderful meal.

Later, I met Jamsheed and the rest of the people who were working outside on the farm. Jamsheed was interested in hearing my story since he was the one who was planning the rest of my trip. He seemed to be a very compassionate person or perhaps it was because of the money, or maybe he did not care for this religious government. Either way, he told me that he was willing to help me.

Majid distributed the first payment of the money among them. Then Jamsheed told me to rest there at the house while

he was going to meet some people who were going to help us make the rest of this trip possible. Ali went along with him in case they needed to use his cellular phone.

I was exhausted to say the least! Everyone was gone except me and Majid. We laid down to rest, but I had one eye open. While we were resting, one of the farm workers whom I had not seen before, tip-toed in and came toward me. He quietly tapped me on the shoulder and whispered for me to get my things together because we may not be coming back. I found out later that they wanted to leave Majid behind because Jamsheed had some bad dealings with him in the past. Majid had told us that he and Ghader were brothers but that was not true. I already knew that Majid would not be going across the mountains with me. He had told me this earlier and he said it was because he had a wife and children to take care of, but that Ghader would be with me the rest of the trip. So I was not surprised when he did not come along.

At any rate, we got in the car and left the village house, heading closer to the mountains. In the back of my mind, I was still thinking about what Majid had said about the distance we would be traveling to get to the village in Turkey. He had said it only takes about 30 minutes, so I figured the border was right behind that first mountain. It looked like only a hill and not hard to cross at all, but I was about to find out the truth!

As we approached the mountains, the paved road turned into a dirt road. We continued on into the mountains for a little while, and soon I saw Ali and Jamsheed sitting down on the side of a hill, waving us to where they were. To their left stood two horses, and with them were Ebi and

Javad who were going to be my guides through the mountains. After a short visit, we said our goodbyes. Ali and Jamsheed were planning to drive across the border and meet us on the other side. They both had their passports and were carrying my suitcases. We were to eventually meet at the home of one of Jamsheed's relatives across the border.

We got back in the car, including some young men who came along to help if needed, and Ghader drove up the hill, deeper into the heart of the mountains. The road was not made for cars but for tractors, and was not in the best condition. The bottom of the car sometimes would hit the rocks on the road, but he did not seem to be bothered by that at all. We had to cross a small creek at one point, so we all got out of the car and pushed it to the other side. If they had tried to drive across, it would have made a lot of noise, especially if it got stuck, and they did not want to alert anyone living nearby. After about 300 yards of going upward we stopped. The men gave me a bag with homemade bread, cheese and mashed potatoes for our trip. Ghader stayed with me while the rest of the guys drove the car back down.

We found a small spring of water on the side of the mountain and sat down. I splashed some of the cool water on my face to refresh myself and to help keep me awake. Soon, we spotted Ebi and Javad riding their horses towards us. It was time to continue my journey to freedom.