

I write this to share with friends of Angela, who are at home in Germany, and friends of ours, who are at home in South Africa. I write this to hopefully, cast a net and, hold what we have in common. I write this for those who haven't had the pleasure of traveling with Angela!

'Angela; the Angel of the Wayside'

Harry and I meet Angela at the Jungle Junction in Nairobi.

The Jungle Junction is not a nice place. It's a campsite with no 'local' flavour. Here, overlanders stream in and stream out. They dish out, and gobble up, gigantic portions of information. You are a fool not to do time here. The freshest advice is on tap about visas, routes, places, contacts and ... most importantly ... the condition of the infamous Marsabit Road to the north.

We three 'careful' souls meet here and our guts run true. Our Ethiopian visas materialise, our bike repairs synchronise, our traveling temperaments and styles crystallise and we rise, to face the uncertain surface of the Marsabit road, together.

It's an 'absolutely fabulous' match made at the Jungle Junction. It lasts for 8 weeks and 2,5 countries! North Kenya, Ethiopia & the Sudan!

Angela is Astonishing.

She travels on her motorcycle (!) solo (!!) though some of the most remote places on earth (!!!). And, kilometer by kilometer, day by day, we uncover a quirky set of charming principles that stick to her like glue. We salute these principles that set her apart. We call them; 'ridiculously honest', 'absurdly brave' and 'painfully principled'. Here are the stories that bring them to life.

She is 'ridiculously honest':

We all need a letter of invitation or a hotel reservation to apply for a Sudanese visa. We don't fret. At the Jungle Junction, waiting for us, is a good pro-forma on a genuine letterhead and the latest version of photo-shop! Here, around a coffee table, the Swede, the Frenchman, the 2 South Africans, Harry and I, plot and plan, and copy and paste. Angela hesitates. She explains, kindly, that she prefers not forge a document. Authorities eventually become suspicious, introduce more red tape and make it harder for travelers that follow us. We nod with admiration, and start forging a little slower. She calls, in front of us, the only contact-able hotel in Khartoum, the expensive Acropolis. She speaks with a George and explains her need for a hotel reservation to be able to visit his beautiful country, the Sudan. The rest of us stop, listen, look at each other, shrug and think, 'oh dear, don't say too much Angela, just make a reservation'! Angela explains she may not be able to afford his hotel. We drop our heads in horror, 'you've said too much, Angela, you'll never get it'! Then, Angela confirms the Hotel Acropolis is too expensive for her! We throw our hands up in the air; 'opportunity blown for sure, say good-bye, Angela'! But George is eager to assist Angela with a hotel reservation!! He finds her honesty refreshing!!! He is fed-up of the countless phony bookings made for the sake of the elusive Sudanese visa!!!! Angela grins from ear to ear and promises George to pop in, for a lunch at least. An hour later, Angela receives confirmation of a hotel booking. A month later, Angela, Harry & I have a lovely meal at the Hotel Acropolis in Khartoum.

She is 'absurdly brave':

The Marsabit road is notorious. Motor-bikers speak of it in hushed tones! It cuts through the north of Kenya, an area forsaken by God. Its 500km are made up of endless corrugations, round volcanic rocks, sandy surprises and deep muddy ruts. It's dry and hot. It's totally desolate except for the occasional group of nomads and an even more occasional trucker. These 10 ton + trucks power past with sheer madness. They leave behind them deep tracks, often a third of a meter high, wedged into the slippery marble rocks that are the road.

Angela is ahead and leads our group of 5 motor-bikers. We stop with German precision every 20 km to rest ourselves and cool our shock-absorbers. At one stage we all, in single file, commit to the single tricky rut on the wrong but better side of the road. The gravelly walls of the rut squeeze our tyres tightly. It's impossible to power through them. Ahead of us a distant rumble reveals a truck in a thunderous cloud of dust. It hurtles at full speed towards us also on the better side on the road.

Our eyes strain, on Angela, and a weak point in the rut to let us break through to the other side. But the rut just becomes deeper and stronger. And the upcoming truck just looms larger and louder. Should we stop and scrap a route through the walls of our rut. Time is running out ...

*Then Angela stops her bike. She rushes to stand in front of it. She forms an impenetrable **X** with her legs and arms. She faces down that truck. She brings it to a near halt! She smiles (!) gratefully and lightly gestures the truck over to the other, and worse, side of the road. The rest of us only hear our own heartbeats and see each others' loud, hysterical laughter.*

She is 'painfully principled':

A foreigner turns into golden goose in a poor country. We hand over a beautiful golden egg for a simple bottle of water, for a cup of tea or for a bag of dates. It's an ordinary egg in our own hands. It turns to pure gold as it drops into the hands, and currency, of the poorer person.

We know this. So we quibble and squabble and beat down a price. Down, down, down to four, three, two times the local price. Our haggling gusto depends on how much we want it and how tired we are.

But our Angela tackles this with an extra-ordinary vigour. She doesn't tire, even if it is late at night, the place is busy and she is thirsty and hungry. Angela only pays in ordinary eggs!

*We enter this tiny shop in Mekele (north Ethiopia) to buy a 2l bottle of water. We make the acquaintance of the owner, a lady called Urut. She places the 2l bottle on the counter and asks for 20 birr. Angela thunders '**NO!**' The tennis match begins. Urut – 18 birr! Angela – 8 birr! Urut – 16 birr! Angela – 8 birr! Urut – 15 birr! Angela – 8 birr! Urut – 15 birr! Angela places 8 birr on the counter and firmly takes the bottle of water.*

Urut giggles.

I exclaim, 'Angela, you just told this lady what her water must cost!'

Angela's 'painfully principled' oomph comes from a distressing experience. Once, an elderly lady is hauled out of a tuk-tuk to make way for Angela and her inflated tourist price for the taxi ride. Needless to say, Angela doesn't lay golden eggs anymore!

In the next days we buy many bottles of water from Urut. Angela always places 8 birr on the counter and receives from Urut a cool bottle, a deep nod and a broad smile. They clearly respect each other.

There! Just three of countless stories that make up an unforgettable experience. The memories just linger on and on and on Angela.

! nkosi kakhulu sisi ! asante sana ! amaseganallo ! shukran !

Linda van der Mey
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