

TAHIR AND THE HOSTAGE
Judith Grace
Wildomar Senior Apts.

The emergency radio squawked, and then I heard the voice of Tahir, the Consul's driver, advising that the jeep had been sideswiped by a schoolbus. No one was hurt, but the paint on the jeep was scratched. In Peshawar, Pakistan, where I was assigned to the American Consulate, traffic accidents frequently were settled on the spot without recourse to the police. Tahir assured me that he and the bus driver were "talking only." Although Tahir, a strapping, six-foot two inch Pathan, certainly was able to defend himself, I was relieved an hour later to be told that he was waiting to see me in the Consulate reception room.

The bus driver had admitted fault in the accident. After negotiating an amount for repairs to the jeep, Tahir had returned to the Consulate to await the arrival of the bus driver with the money. Happy with this peaceful ending to the incident, I suddenly noticed a small man, dressed in the rough clothes of a Pakistan laborer, seated in one of the chairs. The following conversation ensued:

"Who is this man?"

"He is the sweeper who was on the bus."

"Why is he here? Is he hurt?"

"No, I am keeping him here until the bus driver comes with the money."

"Tahir, we have to let the man leave. We cannot keep him here."

"But, memsahib, if we let the sweeper go, the driver will not pay the five hundred rupees for the repairs to the jeep."

"I am sorry, Tahir. The U.S. Government does NOT take hostages. You must return this man immediately to his school."

With an incredulous glare at the idiocy of Americans and much grumbling about "We'll never get the money," Tahir complied with my order. The bewildered man, apparently content to spend a quiet afternoon in the air-conditioned comfort of our reception room, was bundled unceremoniously into the jeep and returned to his employer.

In spite of the fact that the U.S. Government no longer had a hostage to exchange for the ransom, the chollbus driver arrived shortly with the promised money.

GRANDMA AND THE SAPLING

My sisters and I grew up listening to the stories my paternal grandmother told about her childhood on a west Tennessee farm in the late 1800's. As the eldest daughter in a family on nine children, she did not have much time for play. From the time she was six years old and had to stand on a box to reach the kitchen counter, her job was to make the family's biscuits each morning. But we learned that children of any century are basically the same when Grandma related some of the mischief she and her siblings cause. For example, their mother insisted that she and her older brother play with some neighbor children whom they did not like. So, they would "play nice" by putting the kids in their wagon, but would dump them into mud puddles, sending them home crying.

Grandma's experience with hard work stood her in good stead in later years when her husband died at an early age, leaving her a widow with three young children. With the help of family, she farmed, even going to the fields to plow when it was necessary.

Feisty and independent into old age, she lived alone in our small hometown. Once when my father and sister were visiting, they noticed that Grandma was moving slowly and had some bruises. After some prodding, she gave the following account:

Grandma and Mrs. B., who lived on the other side of their duplex, sat daily on the front porch to await the arrival of the postman – the highlight of the day. A young tree about fifteen feet tall was growing in the front yard. Grandma and Mrs. B decided it was obstructing their view of the postman's approach, so the decided to cut the "sapling" down. Mrs. B. (age 91) sawed the tree while Grandma (age 81) help onto the trunk. When the tree hit the ground, so did Grandma. Fortunately, she did not break any bones, but certainly was sore for awhile, but she and Mrs. B. were very proud of removing the pesky tree from their front yard.

**Judith Grace
Wildomar Senior Apartments
Wildomar, CA**