

The Stranger

By Bruce Butler



The year was 1973, and I was outside on the sidewalk near the corner of 4th Street and Broadway, in the city of Santa Ana, California. I was just starting to head into a building there, when I suddenly stopped, and looked over to my left.

I immediately noticed a man, who, in some indiscernible way, stood out from the rest of the pedestrians, and appeared to be looking right at me. He was somewhere in his thirties, about 5' 10', athletically built, with blond streaked hair and blue eyes, dressed casually in jeans, and carrying a back pack.

This stranger proceeded to make a beeline straight towards me, set his back pack down, and started asking me for directions to a part of town that he was having some trouble locating. He said his name was Joseph, and that he came here from Canada, to show his auto design work to a local exotic car manufacturer. He spoke with a French-Canadian accent, was very polite, and had an unusual presence about him.

The next thing I knew, I was asking him if he needed a place to stay for the night, and he said that he did. I told him he could sleep on my sofa and I'd share whatever food I had, and we agreed to meet back there at that same spot, later in the day. I must admit, after all these years, I don't remember picking him up, or driving to my place, but I do vividly recall us sitting at my kitchen table and eating chicken pot pie for dinner. I proceeded to steer our conversation toward the subject of Jesus, and gave him my best version of the gospel story, and asked him if he wanted to pray.

He said ‘go ahead’ and I prayed, expecting him to pray along with me, but he just bowed his head and kept quiet. A short time later, an old friend of mine unexpectedly dropped by, who just happened to have an interest in automobiles.

So, I said ‘Joseph, why don’t you show my friend your plans’, so they could have something of interest to discuss. The evening passed, my friend left and I said goodnight. When I went into my room, I immediately started to have serious concerns about allowing a stranger to spend the night.

I mentally went through a list of potential ‘what if’s’, but eventually dozed off, and in the morning, awoke unscathed. I dropped Joseph near a freeway on ramp so he could hitch a ride, drove off, and that was that. Or, so I thought.

The year was now 1974, and my girlfriend asked me if I would like to accompany her to a friend’s place in Garden Grove, California, for dinner, and said I could invite someone to come along. The person who came to mind was the guy who had dropped by the night Joseph came to town, and he said he’d like to go, as bachelors always like a home cooked meal.

Neither of us had ever met the hostess, or even heard about her, prior to that evening. While she was finalizing the meal, she said there was a photo album on the living room table, and feel free to look at the pictures from her trip to Europe, which she’d taken the year before.

You know how it is sometimes when everyone is trying to be polite, so you go along to get along, and I opened the album, and we started perusing the photos taken from the various spots in Europe she had visited. It was kind of what you’d expect from a tourist on vacation, lots of shots of her, and her traveling companions, in various group poses.

Then, my friend and I both spotted a photo that startled us, and we turned to each other with our mouths hanging open. It was our hostess, standing on a corner in Brussels, and right over her shoulder was a man who just happened to be walking by, at the precise moment the photo was taken.

It was Joseph.

Hebs 13: ²Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.