

At one B&B, he frantically insisted, almost before we introduced ourselves, on learning if the owner could do a load of wash for us. Mrs. Owens assured him that it would be no problem. We just needed to leave our dirty clothes in a bag they provided and by the time we returned from our stroll through the village, the laundry would be back and neatly folded on our beds. There would just be a nominal charge of five pounds per load of wash.

As I stuffed the clothes into the bag, my dad asked, "Do you think we have more than five pounds of clothes there?"

I expected some anxiety from him, his first trip abroad and all that. But the fear and trembling were more than even a saint or a philosopher could handle. And unfortunately for both of us, he wasn't traveling with either. He worried about everything.

The worst walk was when he asked to return to a shop we had ducked into earlier that day. We were still in the general area. I could have found it blindfolded. I went straight for it but stopped several times to admire the architecture or look at something in a shop window. Every time I hesitated or looked around to enjoy the surroundings, I heard his panicky voice.

"Is this it? This isn't the shop. Maybe we should ask someone."

About a block from the store, he said, "We don't have to go to the store. There's no need trying to wander around and find it."

"I'm not wandering. I know right where it is. We're a block away." More steam.

You have to understand that it wasn't an easy chore for me to try to enjoy this stroll with the constant whining from my ancient companion. While trying to soak up some of the foreign ambiance, I had to constantly watch my dad with one eye to make sure he didn't slip into the mean streets of London. It didn't matter how many times I reminded him to look down and read the message in the pavement telling the pitiful pedestrian which direction to look for the traffic. Look left. Look right. It's not a bloody foreign language!

The recurring nightmare of eating out could only be compared to being trapped in a Wes Craven sequel. I believed that with a menu, he had to be able to communicate with the waitperson. My faith was sorely tested.

"Would you like something to drink, sir?" the waiter would always begin.

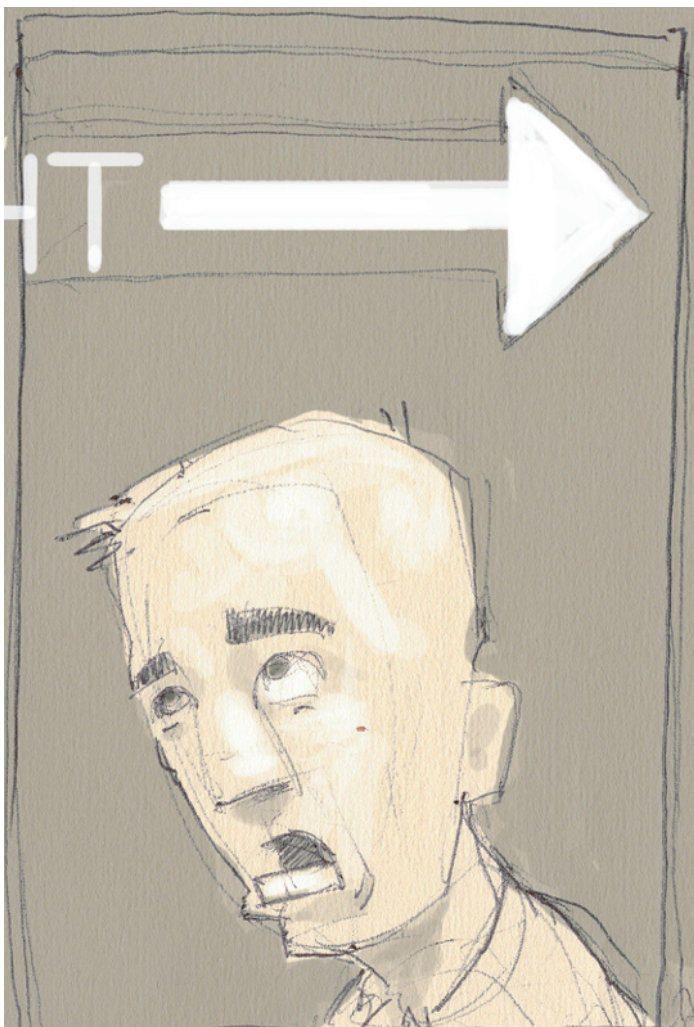
My dad would look quizzically at the waiter, at me, at the menu and then declare boldly something like, "Yes, I'll have the lamb tikka masala."

"No, no, no. Drink! He asked you what you wanted to drink."

Not a sound from my dad. Just the dumb, blank stare I had grown accustomed to. "He'll have black coffee, now please."

The waiter would nod and scribble and then ask my dad, "Would you like a starter?"

"Coffee. Black coffee," would be the reply.



The waiter would then turn to me, and sympathy would pour from his eyes. He would smile at me with the knowledge that his ephemeral experience with my dad would last only a couple of hours. Come back soon-but alone.

Near the end of the trip, we stopped in a music store. There were guitars in the window and my dad had once played the guitar. He eventually started strumming on one. The tune brought a store clerk over to circle the potential sale. My dad spotted the clerk and held out the guitar.

"Who makes this guitar?"

"Korean, I think."

"Who makes this?"

"IT'S FROM KOREA," the clerk yelled loud enough to be heard throughout the shop and the pub next door.

There was no response then from my dad. So the clerk continued, "May I help you?" Still no response from dear olde dad. He just grinned, a maniacal Jack Nicholson grin. The clerk tried once more with feeling and decibels, "Do you need any help?"

"No," I whispered while nodding yes. ●