

Is For
Good Men
To Do
Nothing

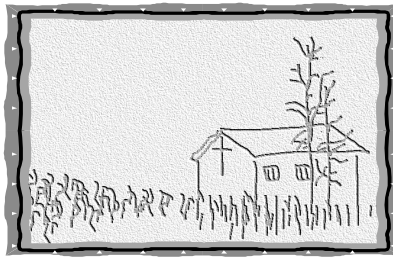
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Excerpt from Chapter 4 of
Is For Good Men To do Nothing By Chris
Verrill



Panhandler Lottery

Upon leaving home in the United States, bound for my volunteer mission in the Afghan refugee camps in the frontier province of Pakistan, my high school friend Linda snuck me a bon voyage card. I'd say she gave it to me, but in truth she sort of squirreled it into my possession as I was saying goodbye. Like many people in my life, in the card she wished me well in my travels. Here's kicker, which others didn't do. She enclosed \$58. A fifty dollar bill and eight singles. What was I supposed to do with \$58?

Linda wrote I should use the cash for two purposes. One, I should order a really good meal and think of her when I did. Thanks. I appreciate that.

Two, and more importantly, I should "ease someone's suffering."

Linda, aware of the immense poverty in the developing countries I'll be traveling in wanted to do something, anything, to help. By proxy through me, she strove to do her part to make the world a better place. I tell you, here's someone do gooder humanitarians can be proud of.

In addition to the fifty dollar bill, Linda said, "I am also enclosing all of the \$1's I have for you to give to any woman or child you find having to beg for survival." This is anathema to my way of thinking. Anathema to my modus operandi for supporting those in need.

Although many people give street beggars their spare change, a nickel or a dime or so, I long ago resolved to generously support non-profit organizations,

but not to encourage or be subjected to panhandling. There are more intelligent means of supporting those in need than handing out a few cents or a few schillings to someone who holds out a quivering hand. If everyone in the world supported non-profits and followed my lead, no one would have the need to beg on the streets. But that's my soapbox.

In deference to Linda's request however, I made a decision. I would make an exception to my rule and honor my friend's intentions. What was I getting myself into?

I started leisurely walking down the main drag in downtown Nairobi, Kenya; one of my stopovers on my way to Pakistan and Afghanistan.

This late afternoon, like many afternoons before it, I strolled along the streets of Nairobi. Today specifically, I walked four crowded blocks from my hotel to another hotel with an ex-pat bar and a band playing *The Tennessee Waltz*. I knew what was coming. I just knew it. I prepared for it in a way that would surely surprise someone.

I continued to stroll.

Linda's bon voyage card tucked into my book du jour, I headed out. Knowing full well, as a Caucasian and presumably affluent face, what this meant for Kenya's poverty stricken. Safe and probably not too secure in my book, the card stuck out an inch or two or three beyond the pages. I wasn't paying attention to the card, let alone the cash it enclosed.

Stroll, saunter. The sidewalk is crowded. People bustling about. Buildings rising six or seven floors above the thronging masses.

The average Kenyan earns \$200 per year. As per my lifelong friend's instructions, I clutched three months wages in my hand. I say "lifelong friend" for, while I know others better, Linda and her brother and I go all the way back to high school. Maui High School, which Linda and I graduated from in 1982, has a, shall we say, less than stellar academic record.

I weave in and out of the other pedestrians.

My stepfather graduated from Maui High School, too. Surprisingly, given the time lapse, we had the same biology teacher. That biology teacher was quite surprised, no shocked would be a better word, that my stepfather who was a delinquent in high school, could have a geeky intellectual stepson like me. Mr. Biology Teacher referred to all his students as Mr. Insert-First-Name-Here.

Saunter.

He must have rubbed off on me. I don't know how much biology I learned, but to this day I have an affectation of referring to people as Mr. Bob or Ms. Jane. But back then, I was Mr. Chris, and I am confident Linda was Ms. Linda.

Maui High School, with a college attendance rate lower than a blade of grass, must have produced a few good nuts. I mean Linda, not me. My sister is now the intelligent one in my family. Let me establish that. OK? Got it?

Walk and weave some more. Scan the oncoming crowd.

But the academic rigor, a word which many Maui High students would have to look up, leaves a lot to be desired. I say this knowing that my baby sister transferred out of Maui High. Oh yes, some of it was her own doing, that rotten bugger, but some of it is attributed to the environment of the school. I say this knowing that a friend of mine, who I spent lots of time with in high school but

have barely spoken to since, is now, bless him, a teacher at Maui High School. Knowing him, I bet he's a very popular and respected teacher.

But high school is, I'm sure he and other educators would argue, what the student makes of it. Fair enough. But there are many kids on the margin. Those kids get left behind in a program that doesn't have the resources to help them. I won't jump on the education soapbox now, but suffice it to say, I think a quarter of the kids will flourish even in a bad environment. Another quarter of the kids will fail even in a good environment. The remaining half, like my baby sister, are up for grabs. That's where a solid education system makes a difference. My statistics—quarter/quarter/half—may or may not be accurate, but the principle is very accurate.

And for all you legislators out there, remember it. Investing in education, as Thomas Jefferson would say, is the best investment any community can ever make.

You know it. I know it.

Glance at the faces of children living on the street.

All right, I said I wouldn't get on my soap box and did. But I minimized it. Believe me, I could have gone on and on about the importance of education in a free and democratic society.

So, where was I? Ah yes, sauntering down the main drag of Nairobi, Kenya, Africa. Clapsed in my grubby paws a well-intentioned greeting card. Enclosed in the card is \$58, US greenbacks, three month's wages for the average Kenyan. Perhaps more than the average beggar on the street collects in an entire year.

Saunter.

Stroll.

Saunter some more. That rip in my jeans has gotten bigger.

It's bound to happen.

It happens all time. Today won't be any exception.

Stroll along, with purpose, card carrying book swaying in my hand.

Sure enough the inevitable happened. A little girl, perhaps about six, big pleading eyes, scraggly hair, dirty torn clothes, desperate demeanor, clutched my hand. Not letting go of my hand, seizing it like a line to a better life, followed me. Like a con artist who had either mastered her craft or child in genuine need, she clasped my hand, weaving with me in and out of hundreds of other pedestrians, yet not releasing her grip on me; unrelenting with her pleading. In Swahili I presume, I don't know. I didn't understand her spoken language. Her physical language however was universal.

Walk, walk.

Pleading for about 20 paces. Thirty paces. I don't really know. Forty.

"Please mister," she pleaded in English. She wanted a schilling. Half a schilling. Anything. More hand to mouth motions as if to say, "Is food such a bad thing to ask for?"

I don't want to break my own no-panhandling code. I don't want encourage this child that panhandling is a worthwhile option.

Keep walking. Eyes straight ahead as usual. Almost.

Except this time, instead of eyes straight ahead, I look. At her. At her pleading face. More importantly, I look around.

Ah, that's what I'm looking for.

My stomach knots to see it. But as I suspected there it is. A little boy. Clearly her younger brother. A not-so-old woman. Clearly her mother. The mother staring at me. Watching her child. Successful con artist or someone genuinely in need? The boy hurries to catch up. I've established Linda's required parameters.

"Ease someone's suffering," she instructed. "Any woman or child you find having to beg for survival."

If this doesn't fit, my heart doesn't know what does. I figured she satisfied Linda's requirement for who she wanted her donation to go to.

I stopped.

Walking no more. Nairobi's thronging masses maneuvering around me and a homeless six year old girl in tattered clothes—a little girl who still has not released her grip on my hand.

Holding my breath, I opened my book. Removing Linda's card—everything, the envelope, Linda's personal note to me, and the \$58—I handed it to her. At this point I spoke the only words I ever spoke to her.

"This is from my friend," I said.

I quickly, hastily, maybe perhaps guiltily, resumed my focused walk down the crowded sidewalk toward the ex-pat hotel. *The Tennessee Waltz* would sound good, grounding, comforting right about now.

I mean, who I was I to think this pretentious act was even at all significant? Pious? I don't know. Pompous? I don't know. Perhaps there's a fine line between the two. This gift, this—I don't know what to call it, but gift is not at all right—violated my no panhandling credo. It was a good deed yet a bad deed.

Or, more accurately, perhaps it just wasn't as good a deed as I hoped it should be.

The six year old in the tattered clothes looked confused. Handing her the envelope, for the first time she released her death grip on my hand. But you could see the confusion in her. A schilling she would have recognized as success. I'll wager my lunch she would have recognized a dollar or even a euro as success.

But there she stood, befuddled, her prey for the afternoon walking away purposefully, with an envelope in her hand. An envelope?

I just walked on. *The Tennessee Waltz* was calling my name. Anything to get me away from this child I had, I want to say helped, but that really sounds too arrogant. Away from this child whose panhandling habit I had in a lottery like fashion significantly encouraged.

Besides, I had to keep walking. She presumably dug into the envelope. I don't know. I didn't look back.

I firmly believe that true kindness is anonymous and doesn't require acknowledgement.

It certainly doesn't require gratitude.

When she gets the card open she'll recognize the George Washingtons, I'm sure. But Ulysses S. Grant? Who's that?

The personal note on the personal card to me from my old high school friend will probably be lost on her. That's okay. That wasn't Linda's objective. But I hope, as I'm sure Linda does, that this unfortunate girl's life for the next little while will be a tad better. Even if she can't read the card or understand Linda's

motive in having me do what I did, I hope she benefits from my old friend's generosity.

Ten seconds later, the little boy, her brother, chased me down and unsuccessfully attempted to grab my hand.

"Can I be your friend?" he boldly asked.

Chris Verrill is the author of the international travel biography Is For Good Men To Do Nothing, now available on Amazon and over 200 other online booksellers.



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About the Author

Do I really need an About the Author section? I mean, weren't you subjected to me enough in the book itself? Oh, so you didn't read the book. I see. Well, in that case, the author is an amazingly brilliant, devilishly handsome multimillionaire. I am a non-profit director, e-commerce pioneer, and global humanitarian. I was born in California in 1964 and graduated from UC Davis with a great degree that has nothing to do with international volunteerism. I'm single, never married, no kids, no pets, one dying plant. How else could I take off for a year long adventure? I don't know where I live, but in my heart, I will always call Pacifica home. On the back cover, that's me in the Khurasan Refugee Camp shaking hands with the little boy. I am available for lectures, panel discussions, and children's parties.



Summary: *Is For Good Men To Do Nothing* Why Did September 11 Happen?

On September 11, 2001, like everyone, the author awoke to a different world. In addition to taking up a collection at his Rotary club meeting that morning, he

What motivated the terrorists?

decided he wanted to do more. What caused this tragedy? What motivated the terrorists? These questions

sent him on a journey. Not simply a physical journey to the Middle East and beyond, but a journey of discovery.

The Western world wrung its collective hands in response to a new survivalist fear of traveling following that fateful fall morning. Suicide bombers breathed their last in the West Bank. SARS contaminated the air. War ravaged Iraq. Or war

“Americans go home,”

said a university student in India.

“And take me with you.”

liberated Iraq, depending on your perspective. In as lighthearted a way as was possible under the circumstances, the author sets

out to explore these troubled hot spots and figure out why America continues to be sometimes loved and sometimes hated. Sometimes by the very same people. “Americans go home,” said a university student in India. “And take me with you.”

Is For Good Men To Do Nothing chronicles the author’s trek from the USA to Afghanistan, and 27 countries along the way, on a quest to try and figure out why this tragedy occurred; and maybe even do something about it. Along the way he is interrogated by Israeli security, enjoys the breathtaking views of Liechtenstein, stomachs the poverty of Ethiopia, gets abducted by an angry bus driver in Greece,

Interviews former Mujahedeen fighters in Afghanistan

meets with UN officials in New York and Geneva, gets his pocket picked in Rome, says goodbye to his aging grandfather on Maui, talks politics in Kuwait, visits the

last of the white rhinos in Tanzania, crosses from Pakistan into India in a motorcade under full military escort, and finally interviews former Mujahedeen fighters in Afghanistan. All the while trying to make a small difference in the world by creating a vocational education program to aid Afghan refugees. International politics with a human touch—and a human mission.

Praise for *Is For Good Men to do Nothing*

“A balanced reflection upon the events and the aftermath of September 11th and the Iraq conflict.”
—**Mark Sykes**

“Constructively critical of the Bush administration, Verrill doesn’t just complain, he suggests solutions.”
—**Jennifer Gusman**

“A natural ability to conjure up vivid images with the written word.”
—**Eric Jackson**

“This is just a tremendous read from a human chronicler of an historic venture and adventure who happens to be a Rotarian—that is, a humanitarian in the trenches—who decided that his personal life paled in comparison to what he might do in the real world after 9-11 in America. And then he went and did it. This book is a testimonial, a monument, a recognition of the power of a single person to make a change.”
—**Steve Wright**

“Instead of taking a walk in the woods, Chris Verrill travels to the world’s hot spots. He’s the next Bill Bryson.”
—**Linda Monden**

“Witty, colorful, always entertaining. It’s *The New Yorker* magazine meets *National Geographic*.”
—**Heidi Davis**

“*Is For Good Men To Do Nothing* will awaken the spirit of travel in all those who read it.”
—**Courtland Grove**

“From April to December I had a lot of time on my hands. But I still didn’t read this book. My spider hole lighting wasn’t very good.”
—**Saddam Hussein**