

Curbing Cabs

By: Robin Pascoe

A white, hysterical-looking middle-aged expatriate woman stood at the end of her nameless street one day trying to hail a taxicab. Almost two hours had gone by since she had first set out from her home, freshly dressed and ready to tackle her day's events. By her count, no less than a hundred cab drivers had slowed down, looked her over, and burned rubber as they quickly took off in open rejection of her as a potential passenger.

"I don't smoke!" she yelled at one driver who had turned her down.

"I make friends easily," she screamed to another. "I'll get along with everyone else riding in your taxi!"

"I just took a bath!" was her final, humiliating effort at trying to stop a cab with words. It was time to use her body.

Brakes squealed as the woman threw herself into the middle of the road, offering the next driver the choice of picking her up or running her over. He chose neither. He managed to drive around her, much to the annoyance of the traffic coming from the other direction.

A local resident had been standing across the street observing her for almost half an hour. He crossed the street and approached her.

"You are taking this much too personally," advised the local.

"You speak English," said the woman. "Do you think you could help me get a cab? None of them apparently will stop for me."

"It's because you look too desperate."

"I AM desperate," she said. "I was supposed to be somewhere about an hour ago. Do they have something against white middle-aged expatriate women? Do we pose some kind of risk? None of the guidebooks mention this. Please tell me how to stop a cab." "Act like you couldn't care less if he stopped. Don't even make eye contact. Just stand there as if you are not waiting for a taxi. Then they will stop."

She thought about his idea for a minute. "OK, let's test your theory."

The woman stood close to the curb and looked anywhere but in the street. She bent down to tie a shoelace. While her eyes were on the ground she heard a car pull up beside her. "I don't believe it!" she thought. "The man is right." She quickly looked up to discover it was a taxi. She headed for the door. The driver got a look at her and sped away.

"See? I rest my case," she said to her so-called helper.

"You made eye-contact. Try again."

She pulled a newspaper out of her bag and began reading the business news, seemingly oblivious to her surroundings. She sensed a car had stopped. Without taking her eyes off the newspaper, she shouted her destination. She thought she heard something approximating “hop in, lady” but knew she must have imagined in.

Nevertheless, she put the newspaper away and reached for the door handle, only to find it suddenly gone.

“What did I do wrong that time?”

“He saw you.”

The expatriate woman was exhausted by now. She looked over at the man who was trying to help her carefully. “Why are you so interested in my plight? I would think I am providing good entertainment for you.”

“I wouldn’t want you to get the wrong idea about my culture.”

“And what idea would I be getting?”

“That our taxi drivers are rude and drive like maniacs.”

The woman bit down hard on her tongue. She was, after all, a temporary resident in this man’s country and did not wish to offend him.

“What makes the taxi drivers different from bus drivers or ordinary drivers for that matter?” she asked politely. “When I’m not being rejected by taxi drivers, I drive myself around. It just so happens my husband needed the car today. It seems to me,” and she moved slowly with her words, “that when I’m in my car, everyone around me, and especially the taxis, drive like irresponsible maniacs.”

“I never said anything about irresponsible. I merely used the word maniac,” said the stranger.

“Stopping suddenly in the middle of the flow of traffic to pick up a fare is not irresponsible?” she asked.

“What if he was stopping to pick YOU up?”

“Is that the secret?” she cried, side-stepping the ethical question he had put to her. “I am standing in the wrong spot. This street isn’t busy enough. That’s it! If a driver has had to stop suddenly and practically cause a four-car pile-up, then and ONLY THEN will he stop for passengers. Am I right?”

The man just smiled at her. “Why don’t you try it and see?”

“Not today. I’m too tired now. Tomorrow perhaps I’ll go out and cause an accident.”

“But thanks for the advice,” she added.

He didn’t hear her. He was closing the door to a taxi that had just stopped to pick him up.

This article is reprinted with the kind permission of Robin Pascoe from the archives of www.expatexpert.com