

49 Vulnerable

During my life, in God's strength (Philippians 4 verse13) I have managed to fend for myself. In the last few years of my schooling I even attended karate lessons and although never becoming that good. my reactions have always been excellent. Due the blessing of my mind not being affected too much by my strokes. I think that my thought pattern has changed very little but I am slowly beginning to realize that I am now more vulnerable. It was during a trip to Brussels in August 2013 with a friend that an incident triggered off this realization.

On the last day of our trip we had to make our way to the Eurostar terminal which was at Gare Du Midi (south station) When looking at the Metro (Brussels' underground) map in the hotel reception I mistakenly wanted to go to Gare du Nord so the receptionists showed us a suggested route which involved taking the Metro to Rogier for the first leg of the journey and then changing to a tram for the last leg. Once we arrived at Rogier we had to take a lift to the tram level. My friend noticed a young man sitting on a nearby railing and seconds before the lift door closed he slipped through the door and reached for the lift control buttons. I said aloud 'Oh! We have an operator!' After the doors shut I realized that he did not really know what he was doing so leaned forward to press the button to the tram level. The lift fortunately did not go anywhere so next I quickly pushed the 'open door' button and we all got out. I thought nothing more of the incident. Once we alighted from the lift we went up an escalator to the ground floor and on arrival at the tram platform I said to my friend aloud 'Which way now do you think?' The same young man then pointed across the tracks to an obscure looking exit. I thought this was strange and my friend firmly said 'This way!' I followed my friend and we sat down on a bench to wait for the tram which was due in 18 minutes. My friend said 'See the guy sitting on the stairs behind us?!' I looked back and it was the same guy!. My friend's suspicions had been aroused when she noticed his hands shaking and knowing from her street pasturing experience that he was a drug addict. My friend said to me 'You need to be more aware of your surroundings especially when carrying a camera' As there were several people on the platform I did not in any way feel threatened and as I wanted to take a photo of the tram coming in I got up and moved to a position that was not obscured by waiting passengers. My friend stayed behind on the bench with our suitcase. I went forward to take my photo. Apparently shaking hands is the sign that the effects of a drug is wearing off and the addict needs another fix.

I got a great shot of the tram coming in and we boarded. At our destination station, Gare du Nord we had to go down an elevator. I looked back and up and sure enough, there at the top just getting onto the elevator was the same guy but when he realized we were looking at him he made strange gestures with his arms as if to indicate to us he was lost. He must have got onto the same tram and was following us! My friend then firmly suggested we go for a cup of coffee

so we quickly walked across the huge hall way and straight onto a coffee shop. In this way we shook of our pursuer and did not see him again!

I was carrying an expensive camera around my neck and not walking normally. My friend had her hand full dragging our suitcase. Was this drug addict perhaps thinking that we would be easy picking? This incident has firmly entrenched in me that I am now more vulnerable and I thank God for placing my friend with me making me aware and so keeping us from a possible bad situation. By this, what my friend called an 'exciting time', I hope that I have learnt the need to be more aware of my surroundings especially when out in public.