

TELL ME WHAT HAPPENED

Season 5 - Episode 3

Rescued From a Ravine

Torah Kachur:

It's a hot and humid night in the town of Ubud, a mountain village deep in the jungle of Bali.

Stacey Eno:

The restaurant's loud, the food is amazing. Let's keep this rolling.

Torah Kachur:

Stacey Eno and her friend Mikey are having dinner. They haven't seen each other in a year so they're catching up, playing pool and making new friends.

Stacey Eno:

But mostly just chatting with people from around the world.

Torah Kachur:

When it's time to head back to the resort, they hop on their rented scooter and ride out into the darkness.

Stacey Eno:

The roads are primarily hard dirt, very bumpy. This is a very rural area.

Torah Kachur:

They come around a bend and see the headlights of an oncoming vehicle. That's the last thing either of them remember. Seconds later, they are both lying at the bottom of a ravine, covered in blood, unable to move.

I'm Torah Kachur. This is season 5 of *Tell Me What Happened*, true stories of people helping people, an original podcast by OnStar. Every day when you wake up, you don't know if you'll be a person who needs help, or if you'll be a person that helps someone else. It's important to remember that it's in all of us to be either one of those things every day.

Pretty much everyone you meet will tell you they like travelling. But some people, it's not just that they "like travelling," they are travellers. They thrive on being in new places, having new experiences, and most importantly, meeting new people. Stacey

Eno is a traveller.

Stacey Eno:

I've been a teacher since I graduated college, and I have used that career to travel and just explore. Being from Michigan, Canada is pretty much everybody's first. In high school, I went to Mexico, and I've traveled quite a bit of the United States. And then my third biggest and most impactful would be probably Peru. I traveled there in college for a month.

Torah Kachur:

By the age of 25 she'd been to 15 countries. Number 16 was Indonesia. Stacey lands at the airport in Bali...

Stacey Eno:

I think it's called Nura Rai International Airport. It's like the main airport.

Torah Kachur:

She goes through customs then steps out of the air-conditioned terminal and into the street.

Stacey Eno:

It's very hot. As soon as you step out the doors, you're whipped in the face with that hot humidity.

Torah Kachur:

There was a time that Bali was an untouched gem. But these days — especially around the airport — tourism is big business.

Stacey Eno:

It's very loud. There's lots of voices. Everybody, there's a lot of taxis trying to get you to hire them. They have the best rate. It's just a lot of in your face.

Torah Kachur:

The taxi stand is where she meets up with Mikey. Mikey is another traveller and while Stacey has just flown in from South Korea, where she's teaching, Mikey has come from Portugal.

They first met a year ago in Thailand. Kindred spirits, they had both wanted to check out Bali, so they've timed their trips so they can travel together.

Stacey Eno:

Most of the time I think I try to fit in as much as I can in one day. So I'm not the easiest person to travel with, but I know that Mikey was going to keep up because I had met him before and that's just the way that he was.

Torah Kachur:

And there is a lot to see and do on the island. Incredible beaches, friendly people, all

with a hippy surfer vibe.

Stacey Eno:

So, the center of Bali is where yoga paradise is and it's all jungle. And then you go south and there's a coast, a coastline with very dramatic sunsets, views and all the pretty ocean stuff that you would want.

Torah Kachur:

Stacey haggles with the taxi drivers and eventually settles on a car to take them into the interior of the island. They wind their way to a town called Ubud, about two hours away. There, they find a resort for the night. It's a little more upscale than their usual hostel accommodations, but having just arrived, they figure they'll splurge.

Stacey Eno:

So we get there, super nice, super beautiful. We had our private villa with two king-size beds. It was super luxurious and beautiful, and it was like nothing I'd ever stayed in before. So we get in and we freshen up and we're hungry and we wanted to go into the town.

Torah Kachur:

The options for that trip are either a shuttle bus that runs every 30 minutes or renting a scooter so they can come and go as they please.

Stacey Eno:

So I was like, I don't know the area, I don't know how to get to and from, so it's dark, so let's just take the shuttle.

Torah Kachur:

But Mikey prefers the scooter option.

Stacey Eno:

And I said, all right, but you're not drinking because we have to come back and it's gonna be dark and we don't know the land. He said, "Yeah, sure, sounds good, deal." So, we get the bike and then we head into town.

Torah Kachur:

It's a 15-minute ride on hard packed dirt roads.

Stacey Eno:

I wouldn't say mountainous, I would say hilly. There were some valleys that had a lot of waterfalls. The center of the island is all waterfalls.

Torah Kachur:

In town, Stacey and Mikey look for a place to eat. It's 10 o'clock at night so the options are limited, but they find some fresh vegetables with fried noodles — a local staple known as Mie Goreng.

Stacey Eno:

He and I were just excited and catching up. Just super jazzed about our upcoming itinerary.

Torah Kachur:

After they eat, they wander down the street in search of some nightlife. Ubud after dark is a truly unique place. There are people from all over the world. All ages and nationalities. All eager to meet and connect with like-minded souls.

Stacey Eno:

You're in an environment where there are a lot of other expats who are just excited for a night out in the town. Who knows what day of the week it is? We don't know. It doesn't matter because we're all here to have a good time.

Torah Kachur:

Eventually though, the long day of travelling across time zones catches up with them. They decide to call it a night.

Stacey Eno:

It was around three or a little bit later.

Torah Kachur:

Mikey starts the scooter. Stacey buckles on her helmet and hops on behind him. She wraps her arms around his waist, and off they go.

Stacey Eno:

As we were driving home, it was obviously very dark. There's a lot less bikes on the road.

I do remember a light coming at us. I think it was a singular or I don't know specifics, but there was headlights coming at us. And then that's kind of my last memory.

Torah Kachur:

It was her last memory because at that moment Mikey, Stacey, and the scooter go careening off the road. They fall 60 feet down into a ravine to the edge of a river. Slowly, Stacey regains consciousness.

Stacey Eno:

I was on my back and I was looking up and I was just saw tree tops and I was shocked and I couldn't move and I just remember thinking I want to go home.

Torah Kachur:

But she can't go home, in fact, she can't even sit up.

Stacey Eno:

But I knew that at that time when I opened my eyes, I was like, obviously something's not right because I can't just like hop up and move. But like, I thought, why, why am I here? Then I heard Mike, and Mike had said, "Hey, you're thank God

you're like 'awake. Can you get up and go get help?" And I said, I can't get up. I don't know where my bag is. I don't know where my phone is. I don't have anything.

Torah Kachur:

It's the middle of the night and they're in a country where they don't know a soul and can't speak the language. But what really matters right now, is that no one even knows they're there. Mikey's bag was torn from his shoulder in the crash. In the dark, he has no idea where it is.

But with his one good arm he reaches into his pocket and finds his phone. He has 16 percent battery power left and one bar of signal. He dials 911. But it doesn't work. That's a North American emergency number and this is Indonesia. So, he opens up his Facebook app and makes a new status update. He punches in the words "Help. In Danger. Call Police." Then, he blacks out.

This is Tell Me What Happened, a podcast created by OnStar to showcase how important a human connection is when you need help, whether you're facing a storm at sea, a wildfire in the mountains, or lying in a ravine in a foreign country 10,000 miles from home.

Aimee Spevak is a freelance medical writer.

Aimee Spevak:

I grew up outside of DC. I lived in Seattle for six years. I spent nine years living in Chicago and now I live in Brooklyn.

Torah Kachur:

But today she's chilling in the Poconos.

Aimee Spevak:

I had booked a cabin in Pennsylvania for a few nights, just as a place to kind of rest and relax.

It was small and rustic. Just really when you think about like a small cabin up in the mountains, it was kind of like that. I work from anywhere and everywhere. So, you know, it was kind of a working trip for me. It wasn't a true vacation. But I was sitting on the couch, getting some work done. And I had Facebook open, as I often do.

Torah Kachur:

It's about four in the afternoon.

Aimee Spevak:

I was just scrolling and I saw the big red square that said, "Help. In danger. Call police."

Torah Kachur:

It was a post from a guy named Mikey.

Aimee Spevak:

Mikey's just somebody that I, you know, for the last at least 15, if not 20 years, I've just known him. I've known of him. So, you know, we stayed in touch lightly over social media.

Torah Kachur:

One year they were both in Nepal and they did some hiking together.

Aimee Spevak:

I would say that Mikey is compulsively outgoing. He is just one of the nicest and friendliest guys that I know. He just kind of fearlessly approaches people and says, "Hey, now, where are you from? Where are you traveling?" He loves to get people's stories and, definitely, I think is good at staying in touch with people.

Torah Kachur:

Good enough that Aimee is just one of more than 5,000 friends on Facebook.

Aimee Spevak:

He knows so many people that, you know, he might have friends that he travels with that he knows for a few days. He might be traveling with somebody that he knows very well. And, you know, I might see his posts or see his pictures.

Torah Kachur:

They haven't seen each other in person in five years, but his updates always make her smile.

Aimee Spevak:

Mikey is always somewhere amazing, having adventures.

Torah Kachur:

This post, however, is clearly not about an amazing adventure.

Aimee Spevak:

It's pretty intense, right? I saw it and had like confusion and concern to say, my gosh, what is this and what's going on? And I mean, a little bit like, why is he reaching out to Facebook?

Torah Kachur:

The comment section under Mikey's post starts filling up. People from all over the world are asking for more details.

Aimee Spevak:

Mikey, what's going on? I hope you're OK.

Torah Kachur:

Aimee figures it will be hard for Mikey to respond to everyone in the comment section – so she decides to direct message him. But when she goes to do that, she

stumbles on a feature that lets you phone someone.

Aimee Spevak:

So I just thought, you know, that'll be much quicker, much easier to just call him and say, hey, you know, what's going on? And I was just hoping that he would be able to even answer.

He did. He picked up right away. And I just said, "What's going on?" He said, actually, at that time, he didn't know. He didn't remember what even happened. He said, "I'm in the middle of the woods. I can't move. I'm hurt. My friend is here with me. She can't move. We need help. Like we need somebody to come and help us."

Torah Kachur:

Mikey tries to describe his location, but Aimee has never been to Bali. She's never heard of Ubud, and she certainly doesn't know what dirt road runs between the town and the resort.

Aimee Spevak:

And so I asked him, can you send me a pin drop? Because I know that there's like an option on the map to send somebody basically your live location. And that's how I got his exact location.

Torah Kachur:

Lying in the darkness, drifting in and out of consciousness, Stacey is oblivious to all this.

She's wet, covered in mud from the jungle, and her hair is soaked with blood. Meanwhile, Mikey's online connections are scrambling to help.

Aimee Spevak:

So, he has a lot of friends on his Facebook friends list who have traveled, and we're a little savvy of like, OK, contact a consulate, contact the local police, contact, who do we get in touch with who's going to be able to help him? And other people on the post had already been saying, here are some numbers to call.

Torah Kachur:

Aimee calls the number for the local police station.

Aimee Spevak:

I called somebody in Bali, one of the numbers that was listed on the Facebook post and no one seemed to speak English and I don't speak any other language so we couldn't really communicate and I ended up hanging up

Torah Kachur:

All the while, the clock is ticking.

Aimee Spevak:

He's posting saying my phone is at 13 percent; my phone's at 6 percent. And we

know eventually we're going to lose contact with him.

Torah Kachur:

Her next call is to the US Consulate. Their office is in Jakarta, Indonesia's capital city — 600 miles west of Bali.

Aimee Spevak:

A woman named Christine answered and I said, "My friend, Mikey, he's in trouble". And she's like, "Yeah, I'm getting a lot of calls all of sudden about somebody who's lost in the woods." She was very kind, but she said, "We're not a search and rescue. We don't have helicopters, you know. We're the consulate."

Torah Kachur:

Aimee explains that they don't need a search party — that she has a pin drop — so she can share his exact location. What she needs is someone in that area to go help them.

Aimee Spevak:

One thing she asked me was, "Are you sure that he made this post on Facebook? Are you sure his page hasn't been hacked?" And I was able to say to her, "I called him, I talked to him. He's definitely in trouble and needs help."

Torah Kachur:

With that confirmed, Christine starts reaching out to people in Bali. But she also tells Aimee to call Mikey.

Aimee Spevak:

She said, "If you can call him and ask him to go up to the road. If he can get himself and his friend up to the road that is really their best chance."

Torah Kachur:

She hangs up with the consulate, and dials Mikey's number.

Aimee Spevak:

And I said, "Is there any way you can crawl up and get yourself to the road?" And he said, "Aimee, I'm broken. I cannot move. There's just no way." And I knew that his friend was also in a really, really, bad state. It's just terrifying. You hear your friend on another continent saying, "My body is too broken for me to even try to move." But again, that just led me to my resolve of "I am not stopping." It was just, have to keep working on this until I know that he's safe.

Torah Kachur:

Aimee calls the consulate with an update, and Christine has another request.

Aimee Spevak:

She said, "Can you please post on the Facebook thread and ask people to stop calling and emailing me? Like, we're doing everything that we can and it's actually just at this point starting to get in the way." And so, she's like, "I need the phone line

open. I need to be focusing on these other things and I'm just getting this deluge."

Torah Kachur:

On the ground, Stacey falls completely unconscious and then Mikey's phone goes dead. Their last connection with the outside world, gone. It's three hours later. The sun is up but the bottom of the ravine is still in shadow. Finally, all of Aimee's efforts pay off.

Three men who have come from Ubud at the urging of the consulate make their way down to the two motionless bodies.

Stacey Eno:

I am pretty sure it was around 7:30 that we were scooped up. I don't remember that much. Only reason I do is because I've seen pictures of me being in someone's arms, putting me in the bed of a truck. My hair is blonde, but it was red. It was so, so much blood in my head. But the next clear thoughts that I had, we were in the village small hospital, which is complete chaos. I remember coming to and thinking, where the hell am I?

Torah Kachur:

From the hospital, Mikey is able to get a message to his sister, who writes a comment on the original Facebook post saying they have been found and are getting medical care. Much to the relief of Aimee and hundreds of others.

Aimee Spevak:

When she posted that, it was like every muscle in my body I realized had been tense for the last four hours. And I was like, I can finally relax and breathe a sigh of relief.

Torah Kachur:

Later that day, Stacey and Mikey are taken to a larger hospital. Both of them need extensive surgeries.

Stacey Eno:

Mike and I have matching wrist scars because we tried to stop ourselves by putting our wrist hand down. But my face had the most damage and my cheeks had collapsed. My nose is broken. My jaw was broken. The shield of the helmet had broken off and entered my mouth, exited my mouth, but didn't take any teeth out.

Torah Kachur:

She eventually needed facial reconstruction surgery, including putting metal plates in her cheeks. Mikey meanwhile, was in a room down the hall. He had a fracture in his skull and damage to the vertebrae in his neck, as well as a perforated abdomen. Eventually they both recover enough to fly home. Their story is a testament to how much good can come from social media and online connectivity. Because without that community, this would have been much worse.

Stacey Eno:

I've always thought that and like that because of how much I was bleeding out, like who knows what scenarios would have happened? But, like, I always just think I could have died.

Aimee Spevak:

To me it's the power of connectivity. I also very firmly believe that you get back from the world what you put into it. Mikey has spent his adult life being genuinely interested in others and meeting people and making and maintaining connections. He was able to go on social media when he was in need and people from all over were dedicated to helping make sure that he, you know, got rescued and that Stacey got rescued.

Torah Kachur:

Three years later, Stacey and Mikey travelled back to Bali. They even followed the same itinerary they had planned for their original trip. And when they came to that bend in the road — the spot where they had tumbled into the ravine and almost died — they took some photos and posted them online as a way of saying “thank you” to the community that saved them. The unanswered question, of course, is what caused the crash. In the weeks and months that followed, Mikey tried to figure that out. Had they hit another vehicle? Did the brakes on the scooter fail? He even looked into the possibility that the accident was caused by an earthquake.

Stacey Eno:

He had sent me a couple different seismic readings of earthquakes during that time.

I remember looking at those times and if it was even possible. And it just, was too much for me and I didn't want to look at the science of did this tremor happen at the same time of this accident? I think it was just too much to find a reason why it happened and I didn't want to dwell on it anymore.

Torah Kachur:

Stacey, Mikey, and Aimee all have pretty impressive travel resumes but Jessica Nabongo tops them all: She has literally been to every single country in the world.

Jessica Nabongo:

I've been traveling internationally since I was four. And I, when I was in country number 60, that was when I decided I wanted to finish visiting every country in the world by my 35th birthday. So, I did 135 new countries in two and a half years. Every country is so different and offers like unique access to their culture and things like that. I've actually been to 60 countries more than once.

Torah Kachur:

How do you choose to go back to ones and not others?

Jessica Nabongo:

A lot of it is just how much I like it, or I have friends there, or like now I'm working on a new book. So a lot of it right now is going back to taste recipes for my new book.

Torah Kachur:

Jessica is writing a cookbook based on her travels. She also has a wealth of information for travelers who want to get out there but also stay safe.

Jessica Nabongo:

I think my number one tip is “go with an open mind.” You know, I would also say do a little less research. I think that sometimes the beauty of travel is the novelty of it. It’s those little experiences that you can’t plan for. I also think there’s so much fear mongering in the world today that you can, you know, become paralyzed researching a trip that you were so excited for because you’re seeing, you know, maybe one or two negative stories here in a sea of 1,000 positive stories.

Torah Kachur:

How do you stay safe when you’re adventuring on your own?

Jessica Nabongo:

One of the biggest lessons that I learned traveling to every country in the world is that most people are good. So, I really rely on strangers to keep me safe in their countries because they know more about their country than I ever will.

Torah Kachur:

Do you have any tricks when you’re navigating a country when you don’t speak the language?

Jessica Nabongo:

So, one thing I always tell people, if you’re in a country and you can’t find someone that speaks English, look for like a 12- to 15-year-old, because typically in any country around the world, they’re going to be studying English, and those kids can generally help you. That has saved me many, many times while traveling.

Torah Kachur:

One of my favorite phrases to learn in a new country where I don’t know the language is, “I’ll have what he’s having.” Because in any restaurant, that means I can order.

Jessica Nabongo:

That’s so funny. I’ll just, like, point. That’s so funny though. That’s clever. You can also just grab the local paper in the local language and just sort of keep it under your arm. So even if you obviously are a foreigner, people will think that you understand the language. So that can help to reduce you being a target.

Torah Kachur:

And do you find that the fact that you are a foreigner makes you a target?

Jessica Nabongo:

I mean, it can, of course, because people think you don’t know what’s going on. When I lived in Italy, I lived in Rome. I definitely, like, caught someone with their

hand in my bag on a bus.

Same thing in Paris. Someone tried to steal my phone out of my hand. So yeah, of course things happen, but I think so many people don't travel to certain countries because they think they're scary, like maybe in the Middle East or Africa. But when I think about places where I've almost been the victim of theft, it's always European countries. So, I hope that people also sort of you know, decolonize their mind in terms of which countries are safe and which aren't.

Torah Kachur:

I've traveled a bit and I know that I'm quite tall. I stick out like a sore thumb in a lot of places in the world. What are your advice to not blend in — I'm never going to blend in in Thailand — but just be a little bit more subtle about like where you're from?

Jessica Nabongo:

Yeah, I hear you. I also stick out like a sore thumb in many, many countries in the world.

I'm dark skin; I'm also tall. So I, again, typically don't fit in and I'm never trying to, but I'm definitely trying to mitigate risk to make sure that I'm not as much of a target. And to that I would say, you have to remember, you're not at home. So that means that making adjustments to the way you dress is not an infringement on your freedom. You know what I mean? If you're going to a country that's more conservative, cover up. You'll be alright. I think a lot about jewelry. I love jewelry. I have a lot of fine jewelry. There are certain countries I go to — it's all staying home. It's fine. I get to wear it when I'm at home. I don't need to take it on the road. I think if you're going into a country that definitely has a lower economic status, be aware of that. Don't carry your designer bag.

Torah Kachur:

How about while you're traveling, are you still pretty connected on your phone and to your family and friends?

Jessica Nabongo:

Yeah, for sure. I mean, I will say I try to be where I am. So, I'm less in touch while I'm traveling because being present is incredibly important for me, because I really want to enjoy the experience that's at hand. So, I'm not as in touch and I'm not giving updates all the time. But you know, I always have my phone on me and if anything goes wrong, like it's always at the ready.

Torah Kachur:

Do have any tips for jet lag?

Jessica Nabongo:

Ooh, yes. I think the first thing is what I kind of mentioned. Be where you are. A lot of people get jet lagged because they're trying to live in multiple time zones. You're trying to live in the time zone where you physically are, but you're also focused on whomever's at home. So that might mean you're up late to talk to someone or you're

up early to talk to someone. And that really is going to disrupt your pattern.

Second is, when you get on the plane, look at what time it is at your destination and act accordingly. If you need to go to sleep, take something to help you go to sleep. Get to sleep and try to stay asleep through the flight. Also staying hydrated is really important. And then when you land, if you land in the morning, no matter how painful you think it will be, you have to stay up the entire day. Stay outside, go for a walk, do whatever you have to do. Because the moment you lay your head down at like 1 p.m. and you sleep for three hours, it's over. It's just, it's over. And it's gonna be a struggle for the rest of your vacation to get back on the schedule. So, you know, so much of that is just, you just have to push through.

Torah Kachur:

Jessica, thanks for joining today.

Jessica Nabongo:

Thank you so much, Torah.

Torah Kachur:

That's it for this episode of *Tell Me What Happened*, true stories of people helping people.

We share a new story every other week. Please take the time to subscribe or follow us so you'll know when the next one drops. On behalf of OnStar, I'm Torah Kachur. Please be safe out there.

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