

STORY #5

Taxi!

PLEASE NOTE: While the following story does not include children or youth, it will provide them with a significant amount of engaging "food for thought" and discussion.

p. 294 in the book

Chicken Soup for the Soul: Stories for a Better World

Canfield, Hansen, Carter, Palomares, Williams, and Winch

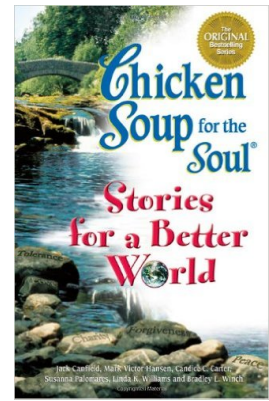
Songs:

[Another Word for PEOPLE \(2:00\)](#)

[Eyes of Compassion: A Trauma-Informed Lens Song \(1:33\)](#)

[YouTube video/ slide show of song with lyrics \[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5_7Wik2gPfE\]\(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5_7Wik2gPfE\)](#)

[The Golden Rule Song \(1:10\)](#)



I eagerly positioned my cab at the end of the taxi lineup outside the fancy marina resort hotel. It was a good location, and I was sure to get a passenger who would tip well. While I was waiting my turn to be first in line, I wondered if the other drivers in this lineup were as thankful as I was to be in this land of freedom and opportunity. I doubted that any of them had planned to be taxi drivers. I certainly had not.

My thoughts wandered over the long journey I had made to be here. I had grown up in Somalia, in eastern Africa, and dreamed of becoming a businessman. After graduating from the university, I had started an import/export business where my ability to speak Italian, Arabic and some English was useful. Soon my business was flourishing. Unfortunately, Somalia erupted in a civil revolution, and I found myself in danger. To stay in Somalia would have meant certain death. There was no choice but to abandon my business and flee with my young family to America, seeking political asylum.

We arrived with very little means. I quickly took a job driving a taxi, something I could do immediately, in spite of my limited English. We were doing all right now, with the second job I got at AT&T, and finally I was able to tell my wife to relax and stay home with our three children. I was filled with a sense of well-being.

"Taxi! Taxi!" The voice of the hotel doorman jarred me out of my reverie. I put my cab in gear and pulled up. The doorman opened the back door of my cab and held it as a fair-haired, young businessman got in.

"Good day, sir." I smiled as the man settled himself in the back seat. "Where would you like to go?"

The man looked up and stared at me. "Where are you from?" he bluntly asked.

"I'm from Somalia, sir."

The man continued to stare at me. "Are you Muslim?" he asked suspiciously.

"Yes, sir," I answered politely. "I am Muslim."

The man abruptly opened the car door, got out of the cab and called to the doorman. I was startled by his behavior, but I was interested in this man now. I wanted to talk to him, to understand him and his fear. I pulled my cab out of the drive-through line.

The doorman looked at the young man and asked, "What's happened, sir?"

"I don't want this guy," he said pointing at me. "Please call me another taxi!"

The doorman just stood there, not knowing what to do. At this point, I jumped out of my cab and approached the now visibly agitated man, saying, "Sir? May I talk to you?"

I gestured to the cabs waiting in line. "Look. All these cabbies are Muslim, sir. None of them will hurt you, but please ride with me. I will give you a free ride wherever you want to go! Ask the doorman; I am a dependable driver. You will be safe."

The man looked at me with distrust, then at the doorman for reassurance. The doorman nodded his approval. He shrugged and warily got back in my cab. "Oceanside," he directed, somewhat defiantly, but with a questioning look on his face.

"That's okay, sir. I said I would take you for free, and I will." I smiled, even though I knew the drive to Oceanside was a hundred-dollar fare and would take nearly two hours of my time. "Please be comfortable, sir. Would you like a cigarette?"

The man accepted the cigarette and appeared to relax a little. We drove in silence for a few minutes. Then I asked, "Why didn't you want to ride with a Muslim, sir?"

As I expected, the man began to talk about the September 11 terrorists' attacks and the thousands of innocents who had been killed. He concluded this litany with an emphatic declaration: "That's what Muslims do!"

Even though I had expected the response, the words still hurt. Ever since September 11, I had felt shame that men claiming to be Muslims had committed such terrible acts. I wanted this man to understand that those men were not behaving like Muslims, that they were crazy.

"Sir? You have ten fingers on your hands. Right? Each finger is different from the others. Right? People are like that. Whoever was involved in September 11 was against Muslims, against Christians, against Jews. No religion in the world says that violence is the right way." There was silence in the cab as I negotiated the traffic on Interstate 5. Then I asked, "What about the bombing in Oklahoma, sir? Was that a Muslim?"

"No."

"Where was he from, sir?"

"America."

I persisted with my questions. "What religion, sir?"

"Christian," my passenger reluctantly responded.

"Did the Christians agree with what he did, sir?"

"No!"

"It is the same with Muslims and these sick, crazy guys that did this terrible thing on September 11!" I felt triumphant. "Please, please, please don't think every Muslim would do what those crazy men did on September 11. You know that Christians do not do what that crazy man did in Oklahoma. Let's go forward with that reality."

There was a moment of silence.

"Yes. You're right, you're right," came the soft and thoughtful reply from the back seat.

"Okay! Okay!" I eagerly responded. "I'm Muslim. You're Christian. We're brothers. If you were about to die right now, right here, I would not let you die. I would help you. And you would do the same for me, right? So we are brothers! It doesn't matter what religions we are; we are Americans. We can help each other that way when we forget about the religion. We are Americans—that's it!"

"Right! Right!"

We arrived, and the man attempted to pay the fare.

"No, no, sir! I told you that this would be a free ride, remember? Here is my card. I am Nur Ali. Please call me when you need a ride. You can pay me back that way!"

About three hours later, I got a call from the man to pick him up and bring him back to his hotel. The fare was \$98, and the man gave me \$128. He was staying at the hotel for three days. For all three days, he faithfully called me to take him wherever he needed to go.

The last day of his stay, I took the man to the airport. As he got out of the cab and paid me his fare and a tip, he said, "Good-bye, Nur. I am sorry. Please forgive me."

"Of course, of course," I told him. I couldn't stop smiling, which I'm sure left no doubt in his mind that my forgiveness was sincere. "We are brothers. We are Americans. We must forgive each other."

I was still smiling as I returned to the resort hotel and maneuvered into the taxi lineup. I was glad to be in America. I was free. I was at peace.

"Taxi! Taxi!" It was my turn. I looked expectantly at my next passenger.

Nur Ali
As told to Barbara Smythe