***Showdown at Shinagawa: Tales of Filming from Bombay to Brazil***

**By Bill Zarchy**

* Introduction by Larry Habegger
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Introduction

Larry Habegger

Executive Editor, Travelers’ Tales

One of the first stories I ever read from Bill Zarchy was “Showdown at Shinagawa,” the title track of this book, and I remember at the time marveling at how he could transform a blue-collar sport like bowling into a cultural crossroads. About the same time I read “Wrecks and Pissers,” and I remember thinking that he was just about to run off the figurative road when, with a deft change of tone, he righted himself and made me smile.

From then on I looked forward to whatever he presented to our writers group, Townsend 11, because his stories were always entertaining, often thoughtful, usually informative, and invariably a pleasure to read.

Bill’s writing has the quality of a warm beverage on a cold day: smooth, comforting, welcoming. Reading his work makes you feel you’re engaged in a conversation, that he’s talking to you and bringing you into his world and gauging your responses. His words flow, his stories build, and before you know it you’re laughing along with him or feeling his pain.

In this volume of tales about his filming experiences around the world, Bill takes us along behind the scenes of international film production. Everywhere he turns he encounters cultural illuminations or obstacles (sometimes literal ones, as in his story, “Singapore: No Worry, Chicken Curry,” where he takes his six-foot-four frame into a land of more Lilliputian proportions, or in “Gigantic in Japan,” when a restroom’s low doorway knocks him flat). He learns how compromising it can be to live a lie in New Zealand, how challenging the true face of globalization is in Hong Kong, and just how far he should push to accommodate a client in a Tokyo high-rise.

Most people know that the film world isn’t all glamour, and Bill doesn’t gloss over the difficulties in getting what the crew needs. Boredom can be a regular companion, but they always find a way to manage it. How? By playing games. “Wrecks and Pissers” is just that, an impromptu game to endure an interminable ride on one of India’s most dangerous roads. The consequences are unpredictable but the lesson worthwhile. The “Showdown at Shinagawa” begins as a way to bond with each other and their clients but turns into a fierce competition and a surprising cultural tonic. And in “Brazil: Some Days the Bear Eats You,” we learn how to manage when things just don’t work out.

What about the challenges of getting the job done when you have to improvise? In Taiwan, he reveals the importance of an effective local connection and knowing how to speak the same language, even when you don’t. In China, during his “Shanghai Lunch,” we see the importance of clear communication, even when you have a fixer. And in “The Big Break: Malaise in Manila,” he takes on a huge shoot outside his comfort zone at a crucial time in his career and wonders, could this be the break he was looking for?

But it’s not all fun and games. “21st-Century Village: Telemedicine in Rural India,” and “Uganda: A World Together” inspire us with what one person can do to make the world a better place. “Health: Our Most Important Product” draws moving portraits of medical patients that help us see past the corporate sponsors or medical products. “Steve Jobs: Consuming the Apples” gives us a sneak peak into the first Apple Store and the Apple founder’s genius.

Bill’s stories are peopled with characters, whether his production team cronies, the subjects of their shoots, local hires, or people met along the way. Bill brings them all to life and treats them fairly, allowing us to enjoy their company or sympathize with the difficulties they face. He even makes a personal connection with Bill Clinton over the loss of their dogs.

In the end he brings it all home. During a brief moment of glamour in Cannes he finds a familiar face in the crowd, and when he’s working a tedious job in Shenyang, China, a hotel house band of Filipino entertainers plays his crew a special tune to ease their homesickness. Never mind that it’s far off the mark, the point is that people the world over care about each other and find ways to connect.

Bill shows us how, behind the scenes.