

# Toothache in California

On Friday June 13 2014, a stunning sunny morning, Bernd and I leave San Diego with our dear American friend, Fran.

We are not superstitious and, yet we jokingly ask ourselves what surprises might await us on such a day?

Our destination is Yosemite National Park, where we plan to stay for a good week. Since the park is very popular, Fran had already booked our accommodation a year ago.

The park covers an area of over 1187 square miles and is internationally known for its gigantic Granite Rocks, waterfalls, and Sequoia trees.

With this knowledge, we set off in good spirits, full of anticipation about what we will experience in the days to come.

Our rental car, a luxurious CMG brand, is comfortable and easy to handle.

Fran navigates me through the dense traffic in the jungle of this city, which is quite annoying.

Finally, we make it and leave San Diego behind.

Now on State Highway 5, I can relax and drive on leisurely. Only then do I notice:

"Oh damn, there it is again, my toothache" without saying it out loud. I just wanted to ignore it. The pain intensifies and throbs incessantly in my lower jaw.

I say quietly, "I have toothache." "You've got to be kidding" comes the prompt reply from both of my fellow passengers' mouths.

And now? What do we do now? We look at each other helplessly. It's quite clear I have to see a dentist before we enter the park, as we know, there isn't one in the park.

We nervously study the map.

The next bigger town is Bakersfield, still miles away, and it's doubtful whether we'll find a dental practice quickly on a Friday afternoon, before everything shuts down for the weekend.

So, I press my foot on the accelerator and exceed the speed limit of 65m without feeling guilty.

It comes as it must come! And it doesn't take long.

A siren wails behind us and the flickering blue light overtakes us. The motorbike stops directly in front of us. The cop dismounts and plants himself wide-legged in front of us.

I don't foresee anything good and am curious to see what will happen now.

Bernd in the passenger seat, wanting to be polite, opens the door and wants to get out.

"Stay seated and don't move!" he says to Bernd irritably, in a sharp commanding tone; and to me, "Keep your hands on the steering wheel!"

We are startled and remain seated, almost paralysed.

Now it's Fran's turn and she takes the initiative. Sitting in the back seat, she opens the window. In a quiet and charming voice, she explains to the officer:

"My German friends are not familiar with the rules of conduct here in this country. Please believe me. They are friendly people. Besides, we have a big problem. The driver has a toothache and really needs to find a dentist, probably he was driving too fast."

It seems the police officer has been listening.

Now he asks me to give him my driving licence and passport.

I think now it's going to get exciting.

My papers are in the boot. I am not allowed to take my hands off the steering wheel nor to move.

I look helplessly at the policeman. He is uncertain and hesitates for a while.

Finally, with a nod of his head, he lets me know that I am allowed to get out.

I hand him my papers and put my hand on his arm reassuringly. He flinches and shouts at me:

"Don't touch me."

It is only at this moment that I realise. He is afraid for his life.

In the US, many citizens own a firearm. Often police officers have been attacked and injured, some fatally, during such traffic stops.

I apologise and take two steps back.

I sense he is impressed by my behaviour.

He gives back my papers and I dutifully get behind the steering wheel again.

Our friend Fran continues telling him more about us and our different cultural background. His mood is changing, and he softens under the spell of her 'golden tongue.'

Finally, he pulls out his mobile phone. He makes several phone calls. He writes something on his notepad.

I'm afraid I'll get a report and a hefty fine.

He hands the note to Fran through the open window.

Fran can hardly believe what she reads.

On the note is the address with the telephone number of his girlfriend's dental practice in Bakersfield.

Fran dials the number and explains the urgency.

The practice is fully booked but refers us to a clinic in the same town that is actually willing to see me that same afternoon.

We thank him for his generous help.

He is friendly and escorts us until he turns off at the next exit.

In less than two hours we are at the clinic.

We were already expected, and I was treated immediately.

The diagnosis: gum inflammation. Antibiotics help.

I pay \$68 and am allowed to leave.

Delighted at such good fortune, we continue the drive to the park, thinking that Friday the 13th doesn't really mean bad luck.

The moral of the story?

If you have a toothache in California, drive at high speed on the highway. A saving angel will be on the spot and will solve your problem.

I am only kidding!