

Aboard the Orphan Train

It was 1917. Eli Porter gripped his small satchel and followed the other children onto what he'd heard called the "Orphan Train."

He'd been told that the ride would be long. The train would leave New York City filled with orphans, looking for a new home. At stops along the way, men and women from the towns would gather. Some would be eager to welcome a child into their family. Others sought a child who could help on the farm or with housework.

When Eli's own parents had died, he'd been sent to Saint John's Orphanage. Heartbroken, he'd run away more than once. Each time, he was found and sent back.

"That boy's a runner, isn't he?" the gardener said to Sister Maria.

"Eli misses his parents. He needs time to adjust to life without them," Sister Maria said.

A few months later, Sister Maria told the children about the Orphan Train. The children were excited about the opportunity to meet new parents. Eli however, was wary.

"What if they're cruel? What if all they want me for is work?" he worried.

As the train rolled through the countryside, Eli fidgeted, his stomach in knots. "I'm not taking chances," he decided. "When this train stops, I'm running away."

A few days later, the Orphan Train slowed to a halt. Eli saw a crowd waiting at the station. He grabbed the satchel from under his seat, and waited for the train doors to open. "With this crowd, it'll be easy to escape," he thought to himself.

Just then, Eli glanced out the train window and noticed a man and woman looking at him. The man tipped his hat and the woman waved. Both smiled at him, and their eyes were kind. Eli swallowed, shuffling his worn boots.

The train door opened, and the youngest children were ushered out. Eli hung back, last in line. He scanned the fields and woods where he could hide out, but then he saw the man and woman walking toward him. In their hands they held a small Roosevelt teddy bear with a red ribbon around its neck.

When Eli saw the stuffed animal he knew in his heart that everything would be okay. Eli, still holding his satchel, started walking down the aisle of the train towards his new family.

Megafisherman

Arun San pulled in his father's tattered fishing net. "Every day is the same on the Mekong River," he said. "My nets are empty and my belly is, too."

Laughter and teasing erupted from the crowd on the shore. "This river is full of fish!" a buyer scoffed. "And you could not catch one?"

Arun's face burned. He had borrowed money to buy his boat. If he didn't make the payments, the lender would take his boat away.

"How will I ever provide for my mother?" Arun wondered. He tethered his boat and grabbed his camera, his most prized possession. It had been a gift from his father before he died. "I didn't catch fish today, but at least I caught images," Arun said.

Before dawn, Arun went to a secluded spot and let down his net.

"Maybe I'll have better luck here," he said. While he waited, he snapped photos of the tangerine-colored sunrise and the rolling hills covered in morning mist.

After adjusting his net, his boat gave a hard lurch.

"I've caught something!" Arun exclaimed, pulling up the net. With each tug, the boat rocked and took in water. Sweat poured off Arun's forehead, and his muscles shook.

Then, the tension in the net eased. Gliding to the surface of the river was the most massive stingray Arun had ever seen. Arun drew in a sharp breath, and grabbed his camera with one hand.

As quickly as he could, he snapped photo after photo. Arun had heard of the mega fish in the Mekong River, but no one he knew had ever seen one.

Arun opened the net and set the stingray free. With a few graceful movements, it vanished.

Back on shore, Arun ignored the laughter and pointing fingers of the other fishermen. He ignored the threats of the lender. He ignored the growl of his stomach. On his camera, he had proof that he had just caught and released the largest, heaviest stingray in the world. And with the photos, he now had a way he could provide.