

Getting the Shot...
Moments of Grace

In the intersection of humans and the wild, where people and animals occasionally sojourn in the others' habitat, magic sometimes happens. Mike Price and fellow cameraman, Dieter Plage, were witness to an extraordinary exchange of trust and kindness.

Billy Arjan Singh, a former hunter and farmer, was one of our hosts and often helped us transport gear in his boat. He lived on the edge of Dudwa National Park in northern India. Someone brought him a leopard cub that they found abandoned by its parents. He raised the cub and called her Harriet.

As an adult, Harriet went off into the jungle, where she was impregnated by a wild male and produced cubs. She turned up one day carrying one of her cubs. The river was rising, and Billy conjectured that wherever she had these cubs was being threatened by the river. Harriet simply got into Billy's little boat with a cub as if asking him to take them across the river. It was a remarkable communication between a leopard and a person. He ferried her across – the river was about a hundred yards wide – and she went off into the jungle and obviously sequestered the cub somewhere.

Harriet then came back down the bank, got in the boat, crossed back over the river with Billy. On the other side, she got out, went off in the forest and came back with the other cub! And Billy ferried her across to the other side again. Dieter and I had cottoned on to what was happening, so we were able to film and photograph the sequence.

Billy later built a machan, a kind of enclosed tree platform, for them. I actually went up there with this leopard and her cubs, but it was too dark in there to photograph. Foolhardy enterprise perhaps!