

Tales of Travel

Tales of Travel

Poetry and Essays

with an Editor's Introduction by Tyla
Maddock

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Introduction

TYLA MADDOCK

Travel is a privilege—a privilege that art of all mediums consistently captures the exceptional value of. *Tales of Travel* is a collection of poetry and short essays from writers who honor the transformative possibilities that travel presents while reflecting on how it has personally affected them. Our contributors were encouraged to take us near, far, and beyond—in both the literal and emotional sense—and they undeniably do. Through their eyes, we see the world for all its intricacies and mysteries. They shepherd us abroad and over state lines. They tell us of their dreams and where they wish to explore next. Their work is moving, humorous, authentic, and full of the humanity we oftentimes feel deprived of.

Growing up in rural North Dakota, I grasped at any bit of the outside world I could get. I dreamed of becoming an adult, traveling nonstop on funds that did not exist, and writing books, films, and articles about all that I experienced. Castles in Scotland, camels in Egypt, cafés in France—every day my mind was occupied with what awaited me if I could find some way out of the literal Geographical Center

of North America. I watched the Travel Channel with my siblings, laughed at the meerkats on Animal Planet that I yearned to see in person. Novels set in foreign countries and fantasy realms were the only ones that interested me. My heart and head agreed that I would not be happy until I was anywhere else.

When I matured and truly became an adult, I saw this dream for what it was: a dream. One cannot just up and backpack across Europe on a whim. As age moves upward, life's complications expand outward, and we are stuck.

Until... we're not.

The benefit of having a mind with an evocative imagination is that no matter where you are, no part of the world is off-limits. This collection is proof. Each piece took me somewhere: the streets of South Korea in Dakota Bond's "Seoul Traversing," the U.S.-Mexican border in Penny Schwarze's "Crossing Borders." Travel is about the sights, it's about the sounds and tastes. But it's also about the feeling. In Chris Marcotte's "No Map to Follow," I feel the complexities of grief following the loss of a loved one. I feel the pride of cross-cultural communication in Sandy Feinstein's "The Advantages of Not Speaking English" and Sarah Royer-Stoll's "Takk Fyrir." I do not have to be in Russia or Denmark or Italy to know their beauty and rich history — to imagine their architecture, their people, their weather, their traditions. These writers illustrate all of these aspects in outstanding detail, including you in their experiences.

I have come and gone thousands of miles by simply reading, editing, and compiling these pieces alongside my peers—a process that has made me a better author and collaborator. *Tales of Travel* is the culmination of months-long hard work from dozens of talented

artists and aspiring publishers. I am exceptionally proud of the improvements we made and the compromises we came to as a diverse group of creative thinkers. Writing and editing have always been my passions, and this project is the first of many I will contribute to. It holds a special place in my heart.

Thank you for joining us on this exploration of travel as an opportunity for self-reflection, growth, and discovery. We hope you enjoy this collection as much as we enjoyed bringing it to fruition. Remember to not only search for the sensations in our writing, but the feelings. *They* are what will linger in the end.

Thanks to T. Kaldahl for cover design for the paperback edition and to Brennan Hill for cover design for the hardcover edition.

TALES OF TRAVEL

Travels Abroad

TALES OF TRAVEL

London: First Fish-&-Chips

JULIE K. DANIELS

The thunder of grease in an ancient steel bin

As he poured in a

Lot of potatoes

Sounded like rain on the hot streets of home,

Pounding away the dry season.

TALES OF TRAVEL

Out The Window

T KALDAHL

March 21, 2019 – Minneapolis, Minnesota

Snow-covered ground sped past my eyes as I perched on the edge of my seat. Familiar brown trees and short buildings waved ‘goodbye’ to me.

At the airport I caught my father crying. I had never seen him shed a tear; not when he cut his tendon in a work accident or when his finger was torn off after he was hit by a semi-truck.

“Dad, are you crying?” Of course, he wiped his eyes and looked away.

“No, I have something in my eye.”

March 22, 2019 – London, England

As soon as the verdant green grass came into view, I knew that

the hot and sweaty summer spent cashiering at a gross noodle restaurant was all worth it.

The few times I can remember being on an airplane, my mom had booked seats over the wing in hopes of avoiding turbulence. I only remember fleeting glances at the clouds below while the giant wing blocked my view of the world below.

The bus ride to the hotel was filled with excited chatter from my classmates and swears from the bus driver. First cows appeared out my window, reminding me of the five-acre land I lived on. As we approached the city home seemed to fade further away. Graffiti littered overpasses. A group of boys played football in a small fenced yard of a tall flat.

Our hotel was a converted apartment building. The layout was a little confusing, but I was able to feel like I was really living abroad. My roommate and I, a tall, opinionated girl named Sarah, settled into our room. I won ‘rock-paper-scissors’ for the bed by the window. A young woman was watering her plants on her balcony. Double-decker buses and cars with yellow license plates cruised by as I sipped tea from the tea kettle in our room. How different from the instant coffee pots in every hotel room in America.

December 20, 2006 – Burnsville, Minnesota

Mickey Mouse and his friends joked around trying to get the London guards to “crack a smile”. This was one of my favorite

childhood books. Mickey saw the crown jewels and rode on a double-decker bus. He saw Big Ben, the Tower of London, and the Watergate Bridge.

“Mommy, when are we going to see the crown jewels?” I asked looking outside on the dark winter night.

“When you’re older you can get a job and go there yourself.”

March 22, 2019 – London, England

The crown jewels were so bright I had to look away at times. On a TV monitor, a young Queen Elizabeth knelt down as the large crown was placed on her head as she held the golden scepter in her right hand. A punch bowl as big as a bathtub in the shape of a shell glittered behind clear glass on my right and a stoic silver breastplate hung solemnly to my left.

Bloodshot eyes took in the sights as we walked along a waterway to the Tower of London. The ceilings were low and, even with my average 5’4” frame, I had to duck on the winding staircases. I stood where people were beheaded and touched the same stone walls the executed lived out their last days in.

Our group of nine teachers, two tour guides, and over fifty high school juniors posed by the Watergate Bridge for a picture. Its immense statue stunned me. It was so much bigger in person than it was in my children’s book. It looked like a castle against the cloudy skyscrapers.

March 23, 2019 – Disney, Oklahoma

My mother frets and paces awaiting my call.

“Hey sweetie, do you miss me? How are you? Do you regret going?” I can hear my brother revving his blue and white dirt bike in the background as our mutt barks at him from the camper.

My wanderlust was not quenched as my mother had hoped, but instead was fueled like a spark that was doused in lighter fluid and lept out of the fireplace.

March 23, 2019 – London, England

At Covent Garden, I met a woman in a winter jacket and her baby who was bundled head to toe while I wore a light long-sleeved shirt. We were watching a street performer on a unicycle when she struck up a conversation.

“Are you from the States?” I replied yes and explained what our school group was doing in London.

“It’s so nice and warm here,” I expressed happily. She gave me an odd look.

“I’ve never heard anyone call the UK warm before.”

I laughed, “Obviously you have never been to Minnesota.”

“Is that in the States?” I had never had to explain to anyone

before where my home state was. “It’s a middle state bordering Canada,” I explained. “So, very cold.” Our grass is never green in March and snow still holds hard to the ground.

March 24, 2019 – London, England to Paris, France.

On the Eurostar dark walls hid my view of the English channel we were under. I had always thought that the train under the channel would have clear walls so that we could see the water. I switched seats with a classmate so she could study with her friend. I mostly ignored the pretty women next to me who only spoke French as the countryside met my drooping eyes. Flowers tilted in the breeze and the sky was pale blue with a few cumulus clouds. It looked like a Rococo painting — like it shouldn’t be real.

After dinner, in a country where food is part of the culture, I had a stomach ache. The French wait staff seemed insulted that some members of our group, me included, had food allergies and blatantly ignored them. A girl from my class offered me a Benadryl that made me so sleepy that the twinkling lights of the Eiffel Tower became stars to me. I never knew that at night the tower’s lights sparkle in a programmed display every thirty minutes. I took a shower in a bathroom with no shower curtain or door. Water sprayed everywhere and I fell asleep in slightly damp pajamas.

March 25, 2019 – Paris, France

In Paris everyone dresses up. I was warned that we didn't want to stand out as tourists anywhere, but especially in Paris where pickpockets are common. I had to wear the best warm clothes I had packed. It was a warm walk to the Eiffel Tower, but at the top, stepping off the elevator, I understood why the tower was often referred to as a wind tunnel. I stuck my phone out over the edge to capture a video of Paris in the morning despite protests from Sarah. Water sparkled below us as we walked down to the gift shop. Sarah had to translate all of the signs for me because, while I took Spanish in high school, she took French. Macarons in the tower were cheaper than the ones my classmate bought at McDonalds in Paris.

Vanilla flaky sugar coated my tongue as I ate my treat on the way to the Louvre. Our teacher pointed out specific art pieces we should look for in the paper guides we were given at the entrance. We only had two hours to wander freely. For how massive the museum was, people were everywhere, crowding for pictures of (or with) the art. Many statues were missing body parts. The famous "Winged Victory of Samothrace" was without a head or arms. According to my guide, many statues were destroyed by Catholic raids around the world. Sadness wrapped around my heart just thinking about how much has been lost to war.

Next we were able to walk through Notre Dame while a church service was being held.

April 15, 2019 – Apple Valley, Minnesota

My classmates and I gazed at the pictures displayed on the smartboard in our classroom. Fire lit up the screen as we watched the top of Notre Dame burn.

“Isn’t it amazing that we were just there?” My teacher asked me with wide eyes. “We got to see it just in time,” he smiled and shook his head in disbelief. I could only nod in response.

March 26, 2019 – Normandy Beach, France

I woke up with my right eye puffy and purple. I knocked into walls on the way to breakfast as my vision was blurred. The night before, my contact had fused to my eye. Some of my shampoo had leaked into my contact solution without me realizing. Three hours later, after many phone calls to my parents, and numerous visits by my teachers, I was finally able to remove it. Thankfully, as soon as I got on the coach, I had four hours to sleep.

We had two coach drivers. In France it is law that bus drivers can only drive for two hours at a time before needing to take a break. When the drivers switched, everyone was awakened, even our tour guides, to stretch our legs at a petrol station. I bought a brioche donut and stuffed the gooey-chocolate goodness into my mouth before reboarding and falling immediately back to sleep. About twenty-minutes away from our destination, I woke up and saw vines growing up the sides of every home we passed.

Walking through the graves of young men was a humbling

experience. Seeing the hiding areas, the statue, the broken pieces in the sea caused tears to fall on many faces. The beach was blocked off and people lived not 100 feet from the hill where the people were buried. I gazed out at the beach where so many Americans lost their lives at the battle of D-Day. I had to wear my sunglasses over my glasses because my eyes were still sensitive to light. One of my classmates posed with a grave of one of his distant relatives before we left for lunch.

At Normandy beach Sarah and I ate on a big stone by the water. A boy from our class jumped into the water in his underwear. A group of teens from London sat near us and started laughing.

“Look at those wankers with their tits and totes hanging out,” one said as another boy dove into the bright blue water. It was the most British sentence I heard on our trip and we laughed so hard I almost dropped my canned juice in my lap.

March 27, 2019 – Flight to Rome, Italy

The flight was cramped. I tried to sleep but a crying baby kept me up. The window shades were down. Nothing to see.

“It’s so weird hearing the safety instructions in three different languages,” I told my teacher when we deboarded. “Especially because English was last.” Having never left the country, it was weird to have the realization that America isn’t the center of the world slapped in my face.

Our hotel was just outside of Rome and was a converted

convent. I lost the coin toss for the window bed, but I was able to see so much from the window. The gardens were flourishing on the 65-degree day. The boys in the next room were so loud that we could hear them freaking out over clogging their toilet.

March 28, 2019 – Rome, Italy

Walking into the Vatican was like stepping into another world. We missed the Pope's morning prayer by five minutes, but the beggars outside kept our attention. We weren't allowed to take pictures of the almost 3D-looking art inside, but as soon as we were back on the coach, a boy yelled that he secretly took pictures and would airdrop them to anyone that wanted them. He was really lucky he wasn't escorted out (like a woman I was near had been escorted out earlier).

Our group was able to sit in the sun while the tour guides figured out our tickets for the Colosseum. The inside honestly wasn't too much to look at, but inside our guide, Esmerelda, told tales of the epic battles that took place there in 80 AD. Apparently so many plants grow in and around the massive structure that weren't originally native to Italy. People would capture panthers and lions from Africa and bring them to Rome to fight the gladiators. Plants would be stuck in the animal's paws and end up taking root. I later wondered on the ride to the airport if I could take root in a new place too.

March 29, 2019 – Rome, Italy to Minneapolis, Minnesota

On the way home I was in the center row. I couldn't look out the window and I didn't want to. Yes, I was tired, yes, I missed my family and friends. But, I was mostly sad. I didn't want to go back to America and its large opening bathroom stalls. I craved to be back in the sunlight of Rome, to feel the sand in France, or to gaze up at the casts in the London art museum. I cried thinking that I couldn't get on a bus and see the shine of the building in London called the cheese grater, the mighty columns of the Colosseum, or taste the warm chocolate of the donut at the gas station. No more would bus drivers be required to switch out after a two-hour drive, no more meals made, no more freedom to roam the streets and meet people different from me.

I stayed awake the entire trip back. I wrote in my travel notebook so I wouldn't forget a single detail. But how could I possibly write down everything? Every new piece of information, every new sight and piece of art, every feeling that caused my heart to swell with joy.

I didn't look out the window.

Venice

MILO BEYER

Teal maze of waterways

Laid atop is another made from cobblestone

warm bodies suffocating narrow alleys

but cold is the blood of the fish whose

odor permeates picturesque

crossing bridges

Their presence is glossed

over in the posing

tourists perched on the guardrail

gleaming white smiles

holding up traffic

TALES OF TRAVEL

Pesaro

MILO BEYER

the beach!

Sand sprinkled on the wooden boardwalk

drilling into the white paint

Plasticky chips piled like cigarette ash

Vague foot imprints

Silky white,

dunes evident of tourists

the sea!

A dark blue piece of opaque glass

thinned into froth as it nears

TALES OF TRAVEL

Innocently lapping at feet but

drilling sea salt into skin pores

Solar glare drilling

ultraviolet

Trepanation

via eyeballs

Rainbow umbrellas

(tilted at a useless angle)

are more desirable at a distance

the hotel terrace

two blocks away & five floors up

warmed by the sun

but cooled by the breeze

Crossing Borders

PENNY SCHWARZE

“Though it’s fashionable nowadays to draw a distinction between the ‘tourist’ and the ‘traveler,’ perhaps the real distinction lies between those who leave their assumptions at home, and those who don’t.”

– Pico Iyer

It was the summer of 1960. My two sisters—six-year-old Judy and two-year-old Mary—and eight-year-old me were traveling with our parents in our new light-blue Falcon station wagon toward Southern California. The farther south we drove, the hotter it got. Our sweaty skin would stick to the vinyl upholstery, giving rise to exaggerated squeals of pain whenever we unpeeled ourselves from the seat.

This was not our first drive through our home state. Our parents did not have much money, but they gave us rich experiences, including many road trips. We had visited Pacific beaches, redwood forests, Sierra Nevada mountains, Central Valley plains, California missions, foggy San Francisco, and smoggy Los Angeles. These excursions,

along with school and home life, contributed to my developing assumptions about how the world worked and how people lived. An eager learner, I relished these experiences and looked forward to someday knowing as much as my parents and teachers, which I figured was just about everything.

This trip was special. We were accompanying my father on a business trip to Phoenix, which meant my sisters and I would be leaving California for the first time in our lives. On we drove, past motel courts, past pumps bobbing up and down in oil fields, past Burma Shave signs, all while the sun radiated heat into the unairconditioned car. To cool off, my sisters and I shared bottles of orange soda—a rare treat, except for the cracker crumbs that flushed from our mouths back into the bottle and expanded into mushy blobs. We tried to find ways to pass the hours. Sometimes we read, or sang, or looked for out-of-state license plates. Sometimes we crawled into the back of the station wagon to peer and make faces at people in the cars behind us. Often we squabbled. Once, we foolishly tried to get tan by lying in the sun in the back of the broiling hot station wagon.

Would Arizona be very different from California? Having only vague ideas of what to expect, I could hardly wait to see how the reality compared. My parents had told us about the desert and saguaro cacti. I had seen desert before, but not saguaros. On the second day of our drive, we finally crossed the border into Arizona. And there they were: saguaro cacti sprouting up from the flat, dry landscape in sharp relief against the azure sky. My father stopped the car by a small cinder-block building along the highway, the only semi-private spot we could find for a pee break. Two saguaros stood nearby. From a distance they looked like pictures I had seen, but up close I realized

that they were much taller than I imagined—as tall as trees, with clusters of long, dangerous-looking spines. For several moments we stood gazing in awe at these magnificent plants before climbing back in the car and resuming our travels.

I had assumed correctly that Phoenix would be hot, even hotter than California. We settled into our small room at the Travelodge Motel for the week. While my father spent days doing whatever business he had, my mother, sisters, and I cooled off in the tiny motel pool and played shuffleboard. When afternoon temperatures grew unbearable, we retreated to the darkened, air-conditioned room to read and take naps. Upon my father's return, we would eat in the motel diner, then venture out for a stroll along the deserted city sidewalks. "What a lovely, balmy evening," my mother would say. *Bomby?*, I thought. That didn't make sense. I learned a new word—*balmy*.

The high point of our time in Phoenix was a lovely—*balmy*—evening in Encanto Park. There we saw green lawns, palm trees, and, to our surprise and delight, a large lagoon. My father rented a canoe. We glided gently with the ducks along the channels, their soft quacks mingling with murmurs in Spanish and English from families picnicking along the banks. I was delighted, wishing the evening would never end. Phoenix was more than hot—it was enchanting.

After my dad had wrapped up his meetings, we ventured off for a few days of sightseeing before returning home. Our destinations in Arizona included the Grand Canyon, Sunset Crater, and Montezuma Castle. They offered more opportunities to test my assumptions against reality. I had heard about the Grand Canyon before, and it resembled pictures I had seen, but the reality of being there was overpowering. The canyon was *huge*. And *deep*. I inched as close

to the edge as I dared—no closer, lest I get sucked into the abyss. Neither words nor pictures could convey its grandeur. The reality of Sunset Crater was less overwhelming. My parents told us a volcano had erupted there, but I didn't see anything that matched my assumptions: no ash-streaked pointy mountain. Instead, an undulating expanse of rough, black rock surrounded us everywhere we looked. The starkness of the lava field surprised me, as did the combination of excitement and terror I felt when thinking about the volcanic eruption that created it. My awareness of the immensity of geological forces was certainly expanding.

Then we went to Montezuma Castle. No, my mother explained, we would not see a story-book castle, but a cliff dwelling built by native people 600 years ago. I understood what a dwelling was, but wondered how and why a cliff was involved. Then we saw it—a multi-story stone structure nestled *into* the side of a 150-foot-high cliff for protection from enemies. I had never seen anything like it. How on earth did the ancient inhabitants construct such a substantial building in that location? What would it be like to live there, to climb home on ladders from 90 feet below? How did kids go outside to play? Or did they? Having had no preconceptions about Montezuma Castle, I was intrigued and impressed.

On our last day in Arizona, my parents surprised us with the news that we would stop in Mexico on our way home. We would spend an hour or two there, they said. Just enough for us to get a taste. Our first trip to a foreign country, the grand finale of my first travels out of California. I was thrilled. Our destination was Mexicali. My parents must have chosen it for its proximity to our route home. They also may have thought that this capital city of Baja California would offer sites of historical and architectural interest. Maybe the 1930s song

“Mexicali Rose” influenced their decision. Is it my imagination that I heard my mother sing, “Mexicali rose, stop crying, I’ll come back to you some sunny day”?

In the absence of details specific to Mexicali, I filled in the blanks with stereotypical images of Mexico. Visions of mariachi bands, floppy-brimmed sombreros, and colorful *serapes* danced through my mind as we rode through the desert. I also recalled images of Mexico City that had entranced me on our View-Master slides at home. Perhaps we would see a spacious central plaza, a grand cathedral, a city park abloom with flowers, streets teeming with cars and pedestrians.

As we neared the border, Judy and I scooted up next to the windows. We did not want to miss a thing. My first impression was of non-descript buildings at the border crossing and drab desert. Then, my jaw dropped. What on earth was that? A neighborhood? Were those houses? Did people really live there? Sheets of cardboard, flattened tin cans, irregular pieces of corrugated panels—a variety of materials in mismatched shapes and colors had been tacked together to create small shacks. A strong wind would surely flatten them. There were no yards, no greenery or flowers, no trees to shade residents from the fierce sun. The whole area looked like a geometrically arranged landfill.

Judy and I did not know what to think. Safe in the car with our parents, we were not frightened so much as shocked and puzzled by this glimpse into a different reality. We had thought Montezuma Castle was strange, but at least we could almost imagine living there. Not so much these flimsy shacks made from trash.

And what did our parents think? I assume they had had no idea what lay beyond the border, for they gave no satisfactory responses to our

questions: “Why?”; “What is this?”; “What does this mean?” They were entirely occupied with finding a way out of there. Instead of searching for a more “normal” part of the city, my father nervously sought the quickest way back into California. After our twenty-minute visit to Mexico, we arrived back in California, safe but with minds reeling from the shock of what we had seen. Whatever assumptions I’d had about Mexico and how Mexicans lived were cracked wide open. I also began to suspect that my parents might not know everything. Did anyone?

However brief our time in Mexico, its impact on me has been long-lived. In the face of such an uncomfortably disorienting event, I might have resorted to denial or dismissal or reinterpretation. Thankfully, though, I somehow understood that what we had seen did not negate everything I thought I knew. Instead, it amplified, corrected, and raised questions that may or may not ever be answered. The unexpected sight of Mexicali shanties helped me learn to hold expectations lightly, to be prepared to be jarred into letting go of assumptions. I had passed a major milestone on a traveler’s journey. The world was vast and there was more to learn than one could ever know.

Tilting at Windmills

GAIL TROWBRIDGE

During the third year of the pandemic, my husband and I took a trip to Spain and Portugal. We scheduled the two-week trip for late fall 2022, returning in November. The trip was billed as a heritage tour, and after we returned home, I thought about that word. One of the definitions of heritage is “something transmitted by or acquired from a predecessor.” Throughout the trip, we were brought face-to-face with the harsh reality that the Spaniards and Portuguese are dealing with, their legacy of global warming.

We were seeing a glimpse of the future, and it was going to be *caliente*.

Back in 1973, during my junior year in college, I spent a semester abroad in London, England. I got to know London well enough to take the subway alone anywhere I liked, even at night. I romanticized everything, even the greasy smell of diesel exhaust, the smoky fog, and the glow of candles, which would appear at the windows of

businesses late in the afternoon. *It's just like a Dickens novel!* I was thoroughly charmed.

If my seventeen-year-old self had paid more attention to the news, I would have learned of a national coal miners' strike that resulted in planned blackouts, limited to commercial use of electricity to three days every week as well as cutbacks to power in residences. No wonder the big Victorian house we students lived in was so cold and drafty that we fought over spots to sit on the radiators, bundled in blankets.

My awareness of air pollution in those days was limited to what the news media was calling smog. Fog was a tradition in England, I thought, recalling Sherlock Holmes stories. What I didn't know was that less than two decades before my semester abroad, a famous deadly smog had enveloped London, killing thousands. At that time, nearly all of its 8 million inhabitants used open coal fires, creating a blanket of sulfurous smog so dense that visibility was less than half a meter. (I didn't learn about this event until 2016.)

Since my youth, I've been fortunate to travel in Europe a couple of times. But my recent trip to Spain and Portugal felt different, unsettling. Like many, our trip was delayed for two years while Covid raged. My husband and I followed the news from Spain, which, at 117,000 deaths, suffered the second-highest mortality rate after Italy. I worried about intruding upon a country that had undergone such loss and suffering.

It's my tendency to sponge up other people's moods like an extra-absorbent mop, and that was especially true on this trip. I was hyper-aware of the spirit of *España*, as if I were visiting a friend who was recovering from a serious illness.

I sensed not everyone on our tour was obsessing over these things the way I was. After all, our group of seniors had been double or triple-boasted and were enjoying the freedom of forgoing face coverings. Things back home were improving; we'd been out to restaurants and were eager to finally take our trip. Even I lightened up; the unusually warm and sunny days in Spain's late October evoked summer, not fall, and I wished I'd packed my sandals.

"Why are you wearing a mask?" a woman in our group asked of our young guide in Toledo as we walked along cobblestone streets. Her voice was challenging. At that moment, I was reminded of Jean-Paul Sartre's comment, "Hell is other people." So far, we had avoided any mention of politics or Covid controversies during our social times.

"To protect you," the young Spanish man answered politely, quickly moving on to point out the features of an ancient church. Couldn't she feel the grief that was trailing along the quaint streets of this historic town?

Yet there were signs of another kind of plague, a manmade sickness that was affecting the landscape. As we traveled by bus, we passed through parched landscapes, desert-like landscapes studded with shriveled vineyards, the flow of rivers reduced to a trickle. Everywhere, the effects of the climate crisis were begging for attention.

Outside of Ronda, we visited the rolling hills of a winery located on the edge of one of Spain's recently designated national parks. The owner led us into the rows of gnarled and twisted grape vines, dormant until next season, the umber soil beneath them packed and dry. In 2022, heat waves of over 100 degrees caused his grapes to ripen too quickly, resulting in a total loss of his harvest. 2022 was

also a record dry year, a worsening of the country's ongoing drought. He showed us how he was beginning the process of removing every other vine to give the remaining plants more room to access water in the soil. His son Jorge is being trained to carry on the business when his father retires—his picture even appears in the winery's advertising—but left unsaid was the question: will there even be a business in ten or fifteen years?

When we paid a visit to the Prado Museum in Madrid, we needed to pass through extra security checks because of what had happened the day before. Climate activists had glued their hands to the frames of two famous works by Francisco de Goya and wrote "+1.5 C" on the wall in between the two paintings, in reference to the Paris Agreement target of capping warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. Across Europe, there was coordination between climate activists for attacks like this at other art museums to coincide with the COP27 Climate Conference in Egypt.

In the U.S., we broke all records for heat in 2022. The topic came up tangentially in our tour group. A woman who lives year-round in Arizona complained that during the summer, the water that flows out of her cold-water tap is so hot that she's taken to adding ice cubes to her washing machine when she runs a load. What a nuisance! In a few years, she's not going to have enough water to wash her clothes.

I had heard of these art gallery attacks, but it was startling to come so close to being there to witness one in person. While I disagree with their actions—attacking a great work of art is unlikely to change minds or move people to action—it does emphasize the desperate situation we're in. My thinking is art is a part of our heritage we need to treasure, not use to make political statements. Why ask poor Goya

to make your point when the problem is there, outside the gallery, for those who have eyes to see?

Perhaps one way to get tourists' attention is to adapt their travel experiences, to encourage visitors to talk to people who are being affected by climate change, such as the grape farmer. I believe that the expectations and assumptions we have about travel, especially travel outside of our own countries, will change, whether we want them to or not. More and more, it's going to be impossible to escape the realities of global warming—we can't take a vacation from it. Beyond photographing antiquities left by past civilizations, we need to see what our civilization is bequeathing to the next generation. When we travel, we need to see the whole picture, not crop out the ugly parts, the parts that are crying out for our attention.

TALES OF TRAVEL

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Church in North Dakota by Julie Swanson, 2017

TALES OF TRAVEL

Takk Fyrir

SARAH ROYER-STOLL

You, whose core rose up to greet me

Orb of glowing opal

Emerging from shivering salty sea

You, whose sulphur crust

Broke open to guide me

Spatters of pungent yellow and eerie green

Across canvas of billowing crimson

Hashed charcoal

Jagged edges peppering a planetary landscape

TALES OF TRAVEL

You, whose wise ones moved to meet me
Stoic and silent, cautious and kind
No frivolities but cordial glances
Grain in mouth, earth caked upon wooly back

You, whose crevices unlocked
Themselves to lead me
Omniscient fforður
Ceaseless cascades of cool blue
Waves cast lavender
Emerald legacies and magnetic twilight
Along Þjóðvegur 1

You, whose ancient souls
Granted mercy and kindness
Along my eager journey
Dancing eyes, impish smiles, melodic laughs
Warm hearts allowing me to lean in a bit closer

For you, my core rises to meet you here

Hjarta mitt open wide

With flowing thankfulness

A benediction to hold you safe

To sustain all love and reverence, fire and ice

Smoky bay which watches me

Keenly on the horizon

I softly call to you

My love unending

My soul broken open to embrace a new canvas

Planes of lava billow, fold, and buckle

As the spirit of my saga to your heart

Song of purest water

The mightiest glacial wind

TALES OF TRAVEL

Waiting for white iris in Giverny

KONNIE ELLIS

I am waiting for the white irises to bloom
along the old dirt road in Giverny
where we walked last spring
before breakfast, not quite awake
ambling with the newly risen sun
I picked up stones from the dusty road
and dropped them further on while
you noted apple blossoms and an old stone house
and wondered who lived there
long ago who might have walked this way
and is the nightingale hidden in those lilacs

TALES OF TRAVEL

the one who sang us awake?

I knew the iris would be all white

by the delicate lace of their tall unfurled cocoons

and we would be gone

when they bloomed beside the dark stone fence.

*



Fountain in London, England, T. Kaldahl, 2019

TALES OF TRAVEL

February in Venice

KONNIE ELLIS

Who owns the footsteps of Venice
whose owners disappear around corners
or float off in boats
black coated
small shouldered
old women in fur
going home rock confident
with cheese
and olives in oil
floating away into the waters
while the goat hoofs traipse over bridges

TALES OF TRAVEL

past mask shops
of a hundred empty eyes
and years
past the lapping of water
and the dripping of oil
from the tongue of the lion
who entices the lamb
while the moon rises high
above the sound of water
and footsteps

*



Normandy Beach Coastline, T Kaldahl, 2019

TALES OF TRAVEL

European Tour 101

VICTORIA LYNN SMITH

In the spring of 1976, when I was seventeen, I brought home a brochure from my German class that showcased a thirty-day trip to six European cities in five countries. I had studied high school German for two years and middle and high school Spanish for five years, and Austria and Spain were two of the countries we would visit. I had no illusions about my ability to chat in German or Spanish with the locals, but I longed to visit Europe. I gave the brochure to my mother, who after reading it told me I could go. There was never a discussion of “maybe” or “we’ll see.” The trip cost around \$1,400 in 1976, a lot of money for my parents who were on the lower end of the middle-class ladder.

Mother never said it in so many words, but she believed in learning about other cultures. She had encouraged me to study a foreign language. While I was in high school, she signed up to host foreign exchange students for Milwaukee Week. During this time, exchange students from all over Wisconsin spent a week in Milwaukee. I

enjoyed meeting the exchange students, learning about their countries, and showing them around my city.

I'm over sixty now, but I remember my only trip to Europe with fondness because it was a good time, it influenced my life in a positive way, and it was educational on many levels. The life lessons I learned in Europe stand out to me because my European experiences are stored in my brain on a thirty-day shelf between two bookends—the touchdown in Madrid on one side and the departure from London four weeks later on the other side. The memories lean on one another, easy to access, and tapping one wakes up its neighbor.

Travel without a Hangover

The first lesson I learned was don't be hungover as a tourist. A pounding headache and an unsure stomach turned out to be poor companions while touring Madrid's architectural marvels on my second day in Spain. The day before at lunch, I split a small bottle of white wine with a friend, and at supper we split a small bottle of red wine. I never drank in the States because I was seventeen, but in Europe I wasn't breaking the law, so I decided to embrace the whole experience, which is why I tried white wine at lunch and red at supper. In the evening a group of us went dancing. While disco music and colorful lights pulsed around the nightclub, and I danced with Spanish teenagers, I drank two screwdrivers because that is what my friends were drinking.

The next morning, a chaperone banged on the door, rousing us for breakfast. Startled, I sat upright in a finger's snap. My head lagged behind, pounding as it tried to keep up with my body. Most of the day, I had a throbbing headache. I didn't throw up but the possibility was a nagging pest. Thousands of miles from home and

only seventeen, I decided to experience Europe without hangovers, so if I drank at all, I limited myself to no more than one or two drinks in a day. I carried the lesson back home with me and even after I turned eighteen and could legally drink, I never forgot about my second day in Madrid.

Don't be hungover in life.

Even Muscle-Bound Bulls Have Feelings

In Madrid we went to a bullfight. Attendance was optional because even though bullfights were part of the Spanish culture, the pretense of masculinity and bravado they symbolized had begun to dissipate as more people spoke against the cruelty suffered by the bulls. I decided to go because it was a Spanish tradition. I don't remember if the bull died, but the matador didn't. The stadium, crouching under the Mediterranean sun, became a cauldron of heat. I didn't like hot weather, and I was sorry I had come. Why would anyone sit in the scorching sun to watch a choreographed drama between a sidestepping matador dressed like a golden baroque candlestick swirling a red cape and an incensed bull snorting like a diesel engine?

We had been told it was a nuanced battle, steeped in meaning. Clearly, I didn't get it because that afternoon I decided if the object was to kill the bull, it was a show of pointless machismo. I sympathized with the bull, who unlike the matador or me, had been given no choice about where it wanted to be on that blistering afternoon. I concluded that any competition, legal or not, that humiliated or sacrificed animals in the name of amusement was wrong. But I couldn't throw stones because I knew Americans had their dog fights and rooster fights and probably other types of fights.

As an adult, while watching cartoons with my children, I discovered *Ferdinand the Bull*, a Disney animated short that won an Oscar in 1938. Ferdinand wouldn't fight. He wanted only to smell flowers. He so enraged the bullfighters they simply took him back to his green fields filled with flowers. Ferdinand was a consummate pacifist.

Don't go to bullfights or dog fights or rooster fights.

If You Don't Know the Language, Don't Insult Those Who Do

Mr. Z., who had been my freshman history teacher, came on the trip as a chaperone. He was passionate about history, which I had liked about him. But he had a condescending manner that he dressed up as humor, often unsuccessfully, and *that* I didn't like. His manner of off-handed superiority almost got him thrown out of a restaurant in Madrid. Tom and Gene, teachers from a neighboring high school, who were seasoned chaperones, often took us to restaurants that catered to locals instead of tourists. The food was usually excellent and the prices reasonable. But this meant staff at the restaurants rarely spoke proficient English. However, between Tom and Gene, we always had someone who could speak Spanish, Italian, German, or French, someone who could help with the *pesetas*, *liras*, *shillings*, or *francs*.

At this particular lunch, after listening to Tom speak Spanish with the waiter, Mr. Z., who probably suffered from a bit of insecurity after being shown up by a multi-lingual, seasoned traveler, declared, "It's easy to speak Spanish. You just add an *o* or an *a* to the English word. So, *soup* is *soupa*." Not quite, but no one corrected him. During the lunch, Mr. Z. needed butter for his rolls, but instead of asking Tom to talk to the waiter, he decided to ask the waiter directly.

Applying his theory about the simplicity of the Spanish language to the word *butter*, he waived the waiter over, looked at him, and uttered a word that came out sounding like the Spanish word *burro*, meaning donkey. The waiter's face went red, and his words, rapid and angry, crashed like falling rocks, frightening Mr. Z., who at least had the good sense to stop talking and look nervous.

Tom, fluent in Spanish, straightened out the mess. Understanding the arrogant American hadn't meant to call him a donkey, soothed the waiter a bit, but Mr. Z.'s insult to the Spanish language still rankled him. To Mr. Z.'s credit for the rest of the trip, he didn't try to speak Spanish or any other foreign language, but he should have known better. He had been to the same pre-trip meetings the rest of us had been to. We had been told that many Europeans looked down on Americans who expected everyone to speak English, yet couldn't be bothered to learn another language themselves. Perhaps Mr. Z. wanted to soothe his bruised ego, or maybe he wanted to be funny, but he failed.

Don't show off at the expense of other people.

Patriotism is Fine, But Ditch It for the Ballet

On July 4, 1976, our tour group was in Rome. Even before I left for Europe, I felt bad about missing America's Bicentennial birthday bash. When we arrived in Rome, we were given a choice about how we wanted to spend the Fourth of July. We could attend a professional ballet performance or an evening picnic followed by fireworks sponsored by the American Embassy. I chose the picnic and fireworks because if I couldn't be in the States for the Bicentennial, I could at least be with a group of patriotic Americans eating scrumptious picnic food and watching extravagant fireworks.

It was the worst Fourth of July celebration I ever attended. The food was second-rate, the fireworks were average, and the park was peppered with litter. I grew up inspired by Lady Bird Johnson and the Keep America Beautiful campaign. Every spring and fall my sisters and I pulled our red wagon up and down our road and picked garbage out of the ditches. I yelled at friends who threw litter out of car windows. The inconsiderate Americans who couldn't put their trash in the garbage can embarrassed me. Before the fireworks even started, I regretted skipping the ballet.

At the time I saw the embassy picnic as a lackluster celebration that didn't match the significance of two centuries of democracy. In hindsight it strikes me that American democracy has a long history of casting aside many of its citizens, like the discarded rubbish I saw on July 4, 1976, dropped by patriotic Americans who somehow felt entitled to litter someone else's park. Patriotism isn't about eating a hotdog or watching fireworks. Patriotism should be about loving a country that embraces equality, justice, and opportunity for all. Years later my mother-in-law took me to my first ballet, *The Nutcracker*. I loved everything about it—Tchaikovsky's music, the graceful dancers, the whimsical costumes, and the enchanted scenery. And again, I regretted missing the ballet in Rome, which I think was *Swan Lake*.

Always choose the ballet.

Serenade Your Tour Guide

Our train left Salzburg in the evening, shortly after nightfall. The station's platform was written in a romantic darkness punctuated with street lamps. Our Austrian tour guide had come to the station to make

sure our travel arrangements were in order and to say goodbye. We were headed to Paris.

I no longer remember the guide's name. She was a university student, kind and soft spoken, with a gentle smile and a lilting laugh. Warm blue eyes sparkled behind her wire-rimmed glasses. She had accompanied us to a salt mine, to museums and art galleries, and to the Alps where the mountain scene for the *Sound of Music* was filmed. We stayed in Adnet, a farming village, thirty minutes from Salzburg. The small village had a well-lighted, welcoming restaurant, and we ate our evening meals there as one large group. After dinner we sang songs, and one night someone taught us the words to "Edelweiss" from the *Sound of Music*.

After we boarded the train, our tour guide stood on the platform waving at us. Someone in our group began to sing "Edelweiss." Spontaneously, voice after voice, the rest of us joined in, and on a warm summer's night as the train eased its way along the track, we leaned our heads and hands out the windows, and as one rhythmic beating heart, over and over, we sang the words about a small white flower, about meetings and greetings, about remembering and forever.

Our guide cried, wiping her tears from her cheeks before they could splatter on the concrete beneath her. We sang and waved until we could no longer see her. And as the distance between us grew, one by one our voices drifted off, and we pulled our heads and hands inside the windows, and settled in our seats, bound for Paris, the City of Light.

I sang "Edelweiss" to both of my children when they were babies, and it became my youngest child's favorite lullaby. After all these years, I

remember the gifts we traded with our guide at the station: our song for her and her tears of delight for us. I wonder if she ever plays the memory in her mind like a scene from an old movie as I still do.

Be spontaneous; express gratitude.

Be Alone with Yourself in a Place You've Never Been Before

In 1976, I had a lot of freedom in Europe. I can't imagine high school students today having the freedom we had. We had only a few rules: Be respectful to everyone, be on time for the bus tours, and never go out at night alone. However, during the day when we had time off from tours, we could wander by ourselves. I did this a bit in all the cities we visited, but in Paris I spent most of my free time on my own, walking miles and miles along city sidewalks and riding the metro to explore different neighborhoods.

I listened to musicians busk in the metro, their melodies amplified by the underground walls covered with white subway tile. I bought a bottle of Chanel N°5, my favorite perfume, from a department store that catered to tourists. I walked past bakeries because I didn't like French pastries.

From a local boutique which didn't cater to tourists, I bought a blue T-shirt even though the clerk was rude when he discovered I couldn't speak French beyond my greeting of *bonjour*. I thought if I bought something in the shop, the clerk would see me as a customer and be nice, but he continued to snub me as he took my money, bagged the shirt, and handed it to me. I was angry because I believed I was being respectful by greeting him in French. But now I think about it from his viewpoint. He probably felt I was another American

showing off my one word of French, someone who couldn't be bothered to learn the rest of his language.

Almost every day I ate by myself at an Italian restaurant owned by two handsome brothers from Sicily. The brothers were charming, the food outstanding, and the sorbet, served in large Italian lemons, took the sizzle out of the hot Parisian summer. One afternoon I sat in front of the Eiffel Tower next to the Trocadero Fountain, mesmerized by its synchronized spouts of playful water. I saw much of Paris at my own pace, without having to negotiate with anyone about what to see or how long to linger or where to eat.

Enjoy solitude among many.

Freedom from the Threat of Violence

London was the last stop on our European trip. We traveled around the city using the London Underground, nicknamed the Tube, and the adorable red double decker buses so quintessentially British. Inside the Tube and on buses signs were posted warning riders not to touch unattended packages, but to report them to a conductor or bus driver immediately. The conflict between the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the British Army had spilled over into England in 1973, and from January through March 1976, six bombs exploded in London. The IRA warned authorities before a bomb went off, so injuries were few and fatalities fewer. Because the IRA and British were negotiating, there were no bombings for the rest of 1976, and our stay in London was free from explosions.

The warnings didn't stop people from riding the Tubes or buses. But it was strange to think I could board a bus, perhaps off to Hyde Park, Harrods, or Trafalgar Square, and be blown up by someone

who thought of me as collateral damage to make a point. And yet somehow, I felt I would be safe because I was a visitor from a different country who had nothing to do with the conflict between the IRA and the British. At the time, I wondered what it must be like for people to live under the threat of terrorism.

In the United States gun violence has taken many lives. Schools, places of worship, stores, malls, theaters, nightclubs, restaurants, concerts, parades, neighborhoods, homes, places people expect to be safe have been scenes of bloodshed. When I see a sign that says, “Guns Banned on These Premises,” I think about the *don't-touch-the-unattended-package* signs in London. Signs won't keep us safe from violence or terrorism or war. We need to see each other as fellow travelers in our neighborhood, our country, our world.

Learn about people from down the block *and* from other cultures.

Going Home

After a month in Europe, we landed at Billy Mitchell Field in Milwaukee. I had a couple of dollars in foreign coins and one U.S. dime in my purse. I had spent the rest of my money and might have spent the dime too, but I needed it to call my parents for a ride home from the airport. After I deposited the dime in the payphone, I was broke, but I was rich with wonderful memories and great experiences.

My love of language and interest in meeting people from other countries continued. When I went to college, I kept studying Spanish, and I made friends with people from Europe, South America, and Asia. We cooked for each other and helped each other with our studies. We went dancing and roller skating. We talked for

hours about our lives and dreams. We taught each other swear words and laughed as we cursed in each other's languages.

The European trip my parents gave me was the best gift: an opportunity for me to grow as a person. I have a scrapbook of mementos and photographs, and occasionally I look at them. I have a Spanish Damascene dinner bell I bought in Madrid and a soft plaid cashmere scarf I bought in London. Occasionally, I ring the dinner bell or wear the scarf. But the best keepsakes are the lessons of kindness, acceptance, and adventure that I have carried with me all these years.

TALES OF TRAVEL

The Advantages of Not Speaking English

SANDY FEINSTEIN

Right after the Berlin Wall fell, during *Glasnost* under Gorbachev, a stranger at a ballet in Moscow offered me a job. If he'd been speaking English, I might not have taken his business card.

As a Fulbright teacher at a gymnasium in Denmark, I was invited by one of my colleagues to join a student group traveling to Moscow. One evening, we had tickets for the Bolshoi Ballet. But there was a small problem: all but one of the tickets were together. The student who drew the short straw that meant he'd have to sit by himself was clearly unhappy. Knowing he'd likely want to be with his friends more than he'd want to be at a ballet, I offered to switch tickets with him. We were both happy: he would sit with his friends, and I would be able to concentrate on the music rather than worry about the boredom threshold of the students.

As it happened, the single ticket was in the center orchestra, a

fabulous seat. The students were in the uppermost tier. The auditorium was packed, and I wondered how my colleague had gotten affordable tickets for a student group. Having taken my own students overseas from the States, I knew the teacher-guide was often comped, though rarely offered a seat so distant from the group.

The only disadvantage to my perfectly centered seat was that it required walking past a half-row of elegantly dressed Muscovites, their furs draped on their shoulders or laps. It was February and bone-chillingly cold.

As I stepped over each person in my khakis, bulky sweater, and poofy cloth coat, I offered a soft-spoken “*izvinite*” or “excuse me.”

My Russian was a combination of a year of high school classes and practice with a great-aunt from Kyiv. While I couldn’t carry on a conversation in Russian, I could read Cyrillic, and say “thank you,” “you’re welcome,” “please,” and “excuse me.” I also knew words for various foods, but that’s because my Polish grandmother had prepared them for her Russian husband, her son, and her grandkids.

Offering up my Russian “pardon” for the last time before I sat down, the man to whom I directed my apology, and whose seat bordered mine, answered, “*Nyama problemee.*” Or, that’s what I thought I heard, the expression being much the same in a number of languages. I smiled and said, “*Strasveeche*”—thank you. At which point he said, in English, “I don’t speak Russian.”

I replied, “Neither do I.”

After we both laughed, he asked, “Where are you from?” I turned the

question around on him. His question, asked in English, brought out my New Yorker wariness.

To which he answered, “It’s complicated.”

I couldn’t help a chuckle when I said, “Same here.” It’s always been complicated for me when asked that question. To my mind, I am *from* New York. But I haven’t lived there since I was eighteen. No way could I say I was from Kansas, Los Angeles, or Tennessee, the places I’d been teaching for the last ten years.

But his response focused on country, not city or region. “I’m from Belgium, living in Denmark,” he said in English.

Without considering where in Belgium he might be from, I answered in basic French: “*Je suis Americaine, mais j’habite á Danemark.*”

He seemed pleased, or at least not apparently insulted, when he repeated, “*Americaine?*”

“*Virkelig,*” I responded, which is Danish for the French “*vraiment*” and the English “really.”

Then he asked, “Do you like to travel?” The answer seemed obvious.

My native language skills were honed in New York under the tutelage of city parents. But when I speak another language, I’m so elated that I’ll blithely interact, regardless of the subject or conversationalists. In any case, a crowded theater minimizes risk no matter the subject.

I answered, “*Selvfolig*”—Danish for “of course”—and pointed to the

upper tier where a few students were trying to find me. They waved and I waved.

He then asked if I'd like a job, a job traveling.

Whenever I get to this part of the story, people gasp. They imagine human trafficking or some kind of unsavory escort service or drugs. These thoughts never crossed my mind. He had asked the question in Danish.

I love speaking Danish, which is hard to do with Danes if they know you speak English: 97% of the population could communicate effectively in my native language; it may be more now. That I was a Professor of English only made a difference to students. My Danish students would choose an impossible-to-pronounce Danish word or phrase for me to say aloud, "*Rød grød med fløde*" (red pudding with cream), and roar with laughter when I tried, secure that their English sounded considerably better than *that*. University students I met casually, on trains for example, upon learning I taught English at an American college, preferred hearing my bad Danish grammar to subjecting themselves to an oral English exam before they prepared for it.

Nearly everyone else I met would speak to foreigners in English: bus drivers, postal clerks, movie ticket takers, waiters, not to mention my new colleagues (except a few who knew I wanted to learn their language). So I often pretended not to know English, trying to look blank when someone spoke to me in English and, thus, forcing attempts at other languages, ideally, from my point of view, the native language of the speaker.

How could anyone know I wasn't Romanian or Polish or Russian?

I look like I could be Eastern European because I am, ethnically speaking. And it was unlikely that denizens of those then Communist-controlled countries spoke the language of capitalists, meaning not just Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan but the idol of those former leaders, namely, Adam Smith, English author of *The Wealth of Nations*.

Pretending not to understand English is actually how I learned Danish, starting with the first day I arrived and wandered around on my own. I'd test out a few words, which sometimes backfired. I remember asking for "te" ("Tay"?, "Teh"?) from a kiosk and was unhappy when the purveyor switched to English, repeating what I asked for as "tea." When I asked him why he switched to the English word, he laughed and said "te" is the Danish word: the two words sound the same.

Meeting another non-native speaker of Danish to practice on at the Bolshoi in Moscow was an unexpected pleasure. It felt like a neutral language. Though we had both chosen to learn it, neither of us would ever gain native fluency in it. We'd make mistakes.

In Danish, I would have told this total stranger anything. I might even have agreed to anything. And that's sort of what happened.

He took out a card and wrote something on it: when I had it in my hand, I saw he had written a woman's name on the other side of the card. He said to call her when I got back to Denmark. The card also identified him as the Director of DIS, a Danish travel organization for students; the name he wrote on the card would later hire me to accompany American dancers to Russia from Denmark.

Soon after I thanked him—“*Tak!*”—the lights dimmed and the spectacular ballet began.

I cannot now recall the specific ballet. But I still remember the name of the man I sat beside, though I long ago lost his card: Robert Doelman, a surname I realized at once was Flemish, which means I made a cultural gaffe in speaking to him in French. Most Flemish Belgians of my acquaintance prefer English to French.

But that’s not the lesson I learned: to be careful when it comes to culture and language or, to stay on the safe side and speak the language I know best that has become the international go-to default, namely English.

My willingness to speak a “foreign” language, even the “wrong” one, was not the point. It was my attempt to communicate in multiple languages that likely impressed a total stranger enough to hand me a card that would lead to a job and unexpected adventures.

I try to reassure myself that his being Flemish also increased his tolerance for my French, for I certainly do not sound French, or Belgian, or North African. I studied one year of French in college and one year in graduate school.

It’s not the content of the lessons I learned in long-ago classes that have mattered most. It’s my habit of trying out whatever I’ve learned.

I don’t fixate on how I sound, which is probably like a child. The advantage of sounding ten, though, is that I express my glee at the accomplishment, no matter how limited my vocabulary and grammar.

There are benefits to being dauntless, too. Not only I was I offered an

opportunity to return to Russia, but when I said I wouldn't be able to lead the next group because my mother would be visiting, they hired her. A little Russian would procure seating in first class, too.

When my mother and I arrived at the Aeroflot gate, where the dance group we would be escorting awaited us, I approached the stewardesses and introduced myself in Russian. They asked for my boarding pass and let everyone else onto the plane, including my mother. Then they led me to my seat—in first class. I said, “*strasveeche bolshoi!*” (big thank you). That there were first class seats on a communist airline was a surprise itself, that I would be seated in it harder still to believe.

My mother was sent to the back of the plane, and another person hired to accompany the group, a Dane I had never met, was led to the seat next to mine. Maybe they thought he was my husband? In a short exchange in Danish, I would learn he had just published a novel, in Danish. When he handed it to me, he assumed what I did not: that I could read it.

I have been deeply moved by how people respond to my efforts to speak their language.

I have fumbled in other languages and been moved by the effects. As a Fulbrighter at the University of Aleppo in Syria, my tentative, limited attempts at Arabic yielded free taxi and bus rides (“*shukran*”). During summer tourist season, a waiter materialized with a free carafe of prosecco in Venice for my Latin-inflected Italian (“*grazie*” or “*gratias tibi*”?).

Speaking another language, no matter how I mangle it, is all mixed up for me in how others respond to my attempts. It's not just the

pleasure of receiving unexpected gifts: that bus in Syria actually drove me to my door, not to the bus stop.

These remarkable gestures show what can be hard to express: appreciation for the effort, for braving the challenge that is speaking their language. I have received generous verbal compliments, *Du taler meget godt dansk* (You speak very good Danish). Yet people express surprise that I would bother: the language is so hard, English is widely spoken, comparatively few speak Danish. But they are no less aware of how limited my language skills are, which means they know I might not understand everything they say.

So, we smile a lot—and dissolve preconceptions.

As the old joke goes, “What’s someone called who speaks three languages? Trilingual. Two languages? Bilingual. One? American.”

Maybe, too, when someone learns I teach English for a living, those who speak to me in their native language relax, amused by the mess I’m making of their grammar and pronunciation. And that’s fine with me.

It’s the least I can do to show I care.

No Map to Follow

CHRIS MARCOTTE

The weeks after my mother's sudden death were like being in a foreign country without a map. My siblings and I weren't even sure there was a will. When we located it, I learned she had named me executor, but without some direction, we were clueless. We floundered.

* * *

Several years before Mom died, my sisters Julie, Rose, and I took a trip to Malta, a small country in the Mediterranean Sea. Mom worried because of the social and political unrest, so I asked her for something infused with her energy to take with me. She chose a lapis heart pendant for wisdom and intuition. Mom was an artist whose spirituality involved angels, astrology, and auras.

Touching the blue stone calmed me when I was frustrated and gave me the strength to hike another mile when I was weary. My sisters and I hadn't traveled together for almost twenty years. There were

times when we rolled our eyes, scowled, or gritted our teeth at the actions of one another.

Our weeks together were also filled with plenty of laughter, goofy snapshots, and stunning surroundings. We hiked everywhere, saw ancient ruins, and embraced the Maltese culture. The renowned Azure Window, a limestone arch that collapsed into the sea not long after we saw it, was breathtaking. From there we climbed rugged coastal paths and referred to our trail map often.

Later that day, Julie and I stood high above an abandoned stone quarry, a once-thriving local trade. As we consulted the map, the wind grabbed it from our hands. Rose saw a flash of white and lunged for it. We watched in disbelief as the map danced gracefully with the current before it landed in the deep pit.

A quick check of our backpacks revealed it was the only map among us. We relied on memory, walked along a dusty road, and hoped to see something familiar from the guidebook we had perused at breakfast.

The trek that day was arduous. We continued single file in the order which we had adopted from the beginning of our trip. In the front was Julie, the most athletic, then Rose, the most delicate, and me, the most out of shape. I felt the lapis heart bounce against my throat with each step, a gentle reminder that Mom was with me.

Finally, we began walking downhill. And I recognized a crossroad and a small building covered in verdant grapevines. We had reached our destination. The fresh grilled fish, local beer, and harbor view were worth the challenges we had endured. We grinned

triumphantly and toasted to our successful adventure even without the map.

* * *

Four years after our trip to Malta, my sisters and I again spent long days together for nearly two weeks. Mom died three days before Mother's Day 2020. I was the last to arrive and was grateful for time alone in her home. Mom's unique blend of earthy oils, for good health and inner peace, lingered. And as always, her scent welcomed me. I wandered from room to room and touched objects that connected me to her. The charred sweet grass in the abalone shell, her beautiful watercolors on the wall, a favorite sweater on the back of a chair.

My siblings and I cobbled together a family gathering for Mother's Day at Mom's, which included the grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Many tears were shed and memories were shared. It was awkward and distressing to grieve wearing face masks, but we did. We started sentences with *Do you remember* and *Oh, look at this* as we paged through albums in search of a photograph for the obituary. We found a picture taken when she returned from her gold mining adventure in Arizona. After five years of good and not-so-good hauls, she came back to Minnesota with no gold, but she treasured the experience and had few regrets. Her smile is genuine, and the worry lines are few. It's a good choice.

Two steps forward, one step back—that's how it's been since Mom died. The pandemic added another layer to the already cumbersome labyrinth of probate court. It was several months before I was granted permission to move ahead with her estate. Between the mortgage

company, banks, and realtors, there were so many decisions to make. So many steps to take.

To have Mom's life reduced to paperwork was devastating. I was often overwhelmed and more than once stroked the lapis heart to soothe my frayed nerves. Some days I cried more tears of frustration than grief. I was unable to grieve the way I thought I should, the way I needed to.

There are no directions to follow when your mother dies, no diagram with arrows, no boxes to check off, no map to guide you. At one point though, I realized we were doing exactly as Mom would have wanted—we looked after one another. We took turns making calls, writing lists, and holding hands. We planned a celebration of life to be just that. We spent hours matting and framing her watercolors. Then we displayed them in the small northern Minnesota town where she was born and raised.

It's been two years since Mom died—and not an easy two years to be sure, but it has become more manageable. The tears are less frequent. The memories are more vivid. Whenever my sisters and I are together, Mom is with us. And when we're apart, not a week goes by without one of us sharing a dream or a message from her. Mom taught us many things, including the importance of love, patience, and compassion. All of which continue to guide us.

I sometimes wear the lapis heart, and when I'm not, it hangs in a collection of my mom-mementos, perched on a high arched windowsill I see every day.

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Lighthouse in Duluth by Piper
Wetzel, 2023.

TALES OF TRAVEL

A Tale: Jeju

DAKOTA BOND

Set out little one

Along with the Journeying sun \

but part when his Chains coil and ensnare you

to Chrysanthemum blooms in early december

with Trembling bonsai and Pale snow skin \

pair the flittering falls with her ocean-descending Hands

hanging your cloth bag on the dimming windowpane \

Glide with black-tailed gulls

as Night sets on the ashen crest island \

Dance atop obsidian and sponge igneous rock under cold Lapping waves \

TALES OF TRAVEL

wait until Morning beckons her sun from the deep

Blue and again set out little one

away from this island \

Seoul Traversing

DAKOTA BOND

Pent up Haven \ away from yawning ears \
where do you hold the Gentle mountains full of leaves and concrete
Never able to rest \ Pent up Haven \ Do your drivers know they
travel
a River that is filled with falling rain and swept up breath \ Pent up
Haven \
are the Mothers-fathers cooking Bulgogi \ Soju Drinking \ aware
their forget can not hide beneath open grinds and hours \ Just in
time \ Pent up haven \
you're open at the Chirr \ ready for the release of the Corralled \ To
be filled by seoul \

TALES OF TRAVEL

Fall Trains

DAKOTA BOND

Gyrating metal

never ceases \ ferrying

Neck-Dropped strangers

across \ Lines and veins

of track Mapped city-leaving \

they are Barely recognizable \

the Shy

self-restrained Magnolia \

Just as i thought

they would never close \

Childful giddy

TALES OF TRAVEL

Coos and giggles

fill the strained air \ Trepidation

under their feet

sets off a soft Push

sending them swaying \

careful not to fall

Half-closed flowers \

this is only the first stop.

A Weekend in Medina

HOORIYA HABIB

I remember the weekend like it was yesterday, with the hot, scorching sun on most of the people's faces. It was almost 40 degrees Celsius. The month of May in 2015 was the hottest month of the year that my parents chose to perform *Umrah*[\[1\]](#). The sky was blue with no cloud in sight to protect one's face from the damage of the Middle Eastern sun. One should really check the power of the brand of the sunscreen they apply to see if it could stand the test of time in the Saudi Arabian sun.

We stayed in Madinah, the holy city and one of the main drivers of economic growth. The first thing we came across in Medina was our hotel, Movenpick; within 10 mins of walking distance, we had Masjid an Nabawi. The hotel itself had a mini-mall and a shop called "Splash." Splash is also known as the ROSS of the middle east. One could find clothes of many styles, mainly modest. One thing I noticed (that was very weird to me) is that they blurred the faces of the models on the billboard. That blurring was something I did not see living in Qatar.

After exploring the mini-mall, we did what my parents intended to do in Saudi Arabia., something I wasn't much fond of, worshipping. We entered Masjid al Nabawi and the first thing I noticed that baffled me was how many people were walking barefoot inside it. I realized that the floors of the *masjid* were made up of marble. It was very cool. However, something that caught my eye was the umbrellas that opened during the day and close in the night. It was to ensure that one can pray easily without worrying that the heat might kill them.

It looked like this. One would wait to catch the sight of these umbrellas opening. The shade of the umbrella is spread into the four corners, and the area covered by the shade extends to 143,000 square meters. The other main function of it is to prevent worshippers from falling in case it rained.

I also noticed many people handing out food as charity. It was chickpea and rice. Pretty bland but filling, it was a symbol of simplicity and humility to me. It signified that one does not need to eat like a king to fill their tummies. Simple rice and chickpea can also do the job. One more thing I noticed was the hoarding of *Zamzam*[\[2\]](#). It was like gold to many people. To me it tasted very weird, and almost like sweat, but under peer pressure, I could not deny drinking it. *Zamzam* was also something one would use to do *Wadu*[\[3\]](#) to pray.

After going through the piazza, we finally entered the prayer area (also known as the interior area of the mosque). Filled with carpets which made it easier for everyone to pray anywhere. It was divided into two parts: an area for men and the other area for women and kids. I could definitely see why this mosque was very significant in Islam. It was the resting place of the Prophet Muhammad. It was built

by the Prophet himself, next to the house where he settled after his migration to Medina in 622 AD. It was the second largest mosque after Masjid Al Haram in Mecca. It is also said that one prayer in Masjid al Nabawi equals to 1000 prayers. One of the most notable features of Masjid al Nabawi is the green dome over the centre of the mosque. The cool fact however is that it is always open, regardless of date or time.

As a 14-year-old, my only interest was celebrating my birthday and shopping at the local market. The roads near the mosque were filled with local vendors selling their stuff. Some were selling food, makeup, toys, perfume, Zamzam etc. I personally held a grudge against my father who planned this trip during my birthday week. As someone who was not that religious, I was very afraid that my birthday was ruined. I was wrong. Last time I went to Madinah was in 2007 and I vaguely remembered it. Compared to 2015, it looked way better. I loved the fact that there were original but cheap *Attars*[\[4\]](#). Many are made from exotic flowers, wood, and spices. I did not pay much attention to praying and instead was distracted by shopping in malls close to the mosque (also known as the resting place where everyone went and killed time waiting for Adhan[\[5\]](#)).

On the second day, my birthday, I was very excited, as I was about to get my presents. Instead, I was woken up by my mom, kicking me off the bed, as I was late for the complimentary breakfast in the hotel (something that my parents were very enthusiastic about). As my parents were indulging themselves in prayer, they gave me cash and told me to spend it wherever I want. I ate the local KFC there. No, not the tasteless original garbage. The local KFC there was actually Albaik, a Saudi fast-food restaurant chain. It sold broasted and fried chicken with a variety of sauces. It is Saudi Arabia's largest restaurant

chain. It was so good and that was the reason why people preferred their menu over the regular KFC.

Another thing I wasted my money was on perfume. Yes, I was dumb enough to ignore *Attar* and instead spent my money on perfume and now, as I am an adult, I realize why my parents were disappointed that day. I simply thought they were disappointed by my birth instead. *Attar* was something very original.

On the third and final day, my parents made sure I prayed for at least three hours. It was the most boring and painful moment in the three days we spent.

After the prayer, I was very intrigued by trying a BBQ chicken fast-food chain, simply known as Altazaj. I noticed that Saudi Arabia had many of their own companies spread in the middle east (for example Albaik, Altazaj and Almarai). Almarai is a dairy company; living in Qatar I never saw their ice creams. I was very happy seeing them and tried four.

While my parents were indulged in praying and making sure they have a place booked in heaven, I visited the street vendors selling their products out of the mosque. There was where I learned how to bargain. I started off with choosing something that was 50 Saudi *riyals* which translated to \$14 US; I bargained and got it at the price of 39 Saudi *riyals*, \$10.40 US.

Before I was headed to the hotel, I saw a big fight between 2 men. My family was not interested in the fight; however, I was. The idea of someone smashing a person's head was more interesting to me than worshipping. I saw the other guy take his baby's *Pram*[\[6\]](#) and fold it and then hit the other guy with it. That was when the security

intervened and stopped. I also heard someone say that those two men definitely booked a spot in heaven. I enjoyed watching that fight even more than watching the street vendors. We packed our bags and prepared for traveling to Mecca.

[\[1\]](#) Religious Pilgrimage Performed by Muslims

[\[2\]](#) Blessed holy water for Muslims. It is the spring water that is found only in Saudi Arabia from a water well in the valley of Abraham, Mecca city.

[\[3\]](#) Ablution

[\[4\]](#) Attars are made by distilling flower petals in water under steam and pressure.

[\[5\]](#) Prayer

[\[6\]](#) Stroller

TALES OF TRAVEL

Travels (and Returns) Home

TALES OF TRAVEL

Gram Parsons and La Habra

LIZ MINETTE

It is close to 8 pm when my sister and I check in to Room 8 at The Joshua Tree Inn.

We are Gram Parsons fans, even though when he died, September 19th, 1973, my sister was two and I was three.

We became fans by way of Emmylou, by way of Keith Richards, Sweetheart of the Rodeo, The Flying Burrito Brothers, and through Facebook sites dedicated to the handsome man with shaggy brown hair and bedroom eyes who wrote heartache ballads like “Hot Burrito #1” and “Brass Buttons”; good traveling songs like “Return of the Grievous Angel” and “Big Mouth Blues.”

It is late March 2014. Our rental car we name Pepsi, along with the GPS voice we christen Bernadette, guides us along Old Woman Springs to the Mojave High Desert of Twentynine Palms.

We check in with Trey the clerk who gets our key. He says my sister and I are lucky to stay this week because next week the entire inn has

been rented out by a band. I ask what band and Trey just says, “Ahh, yeah... a band.”

A woman comes in to the reception area whose name we learn is Andrea and that she is the innkeeper. Trey informs Andrea at this point the “mystery” band has let it be known, via phone today, they want to handle any disposal of trash from their rooms. This information makes Andrea stare at Trey blankly for a couple of seconds and then ask, “What, they don’t want housekeeping?”

Trey backpedals and states, “No, no that’s not what they meant they just—”

Andrea interrupts to state she will speak to the band personally about this and leaves.

After this, my sister and I have now in hand the key to Room 8. We open the sea green door marked with its gold eight and enter the room. Among a framed poster advertising [Altamont](#), an oil painting of Gram in his Nudie suit, a collage of small black and white photos of Gram taken inside the Chateau Marmont framing a larger portrait of him standing on the hotel’s roof wearing a suit jacket, white pants and Mick Jagger’s belt, there is an oil painting of David and Bathsheba that was here when Gram stayed and a huge circular mirror with a sun ray frame that once reflected his face.

In the morning we have coffee on the back patio with the rosemary-scented tree and fuchsia deck chairs. The door that opens onto the patio was painted by a Gram fan who, after a bottle of Cuervo, found inspiration and gilded the whole thing in gold leaf.

What was it Gram said about sequins? “We don’t wear sequins because we think we’re great. We wear them because we think sequins are great.”

Later I’m in the courtyard talking to my boyfriend on the phone while the Swedish couple staying next door to us is relaxing too. He is having a beer and she, with her pretty hair and leather boots, gets ready to make a fire in the yard’s stone ring. Their young son, with his long shaggy hair, scampers around.

I come back to the room. My sister is watching the movie *Purple Rain*.

She hiss whispers as I enter, “He’s here!”

“What?” I say.

She hiss whispers again, “Gram!”

Earlier that day we had read some of the entries in Room 8’s guest book. A couple people wrote they had felt a presence, someone else in the room that they couldn’t see; a couple others reported a fleeting shadow. Most everyone left Gram a letter.

Inn lore has it too that a dove, from one of the many that nest in the eaves outside the rooms, comes and sits on one of the benches next to Gram’s memorial outside Room 8. The memorial, a ceramic guitar on a concrete pedestal, is surrounded by fruit and flowers, wilted roses in broken wine bottles, guitar picks and little bottles of booze, some half empty, some never opened. My sister and I had seen a dove that afternoon come and sit for a while beside the offerings.

Back to Gram and the possibility of him visiting us now, I ask my sister, “How do you believe he’s here?”

She said, “The towel draped over the bathroom door moved like a breeze had touched it. The sun mirror, you know how heavy it is hanging on the wall, well,” she said, “it moved.”

Huh. I sit on the bed with her and, after a beat, we both decide out loud to invite Gram to watch *Purple Rain* with us.

About five minutes later, my sister receives a text from one of her good friends asking if we’re okay. We’re like, “Yeah, sitting with Gram, watching a movie, what?”

My sister’s friend says, “Well, there’s been a major earthquake west of where you’re staying, some place called La Habra, and the whole place is on fire. It’s on the news.”

Oh.

Then fifteen minutes later our mother’s voice on the telephone, snow light Minnesota far away asking, “Are my girls okay?”

We tell her about the towel softly swaying, David and Bathsheba dancing, the mirror answering a past reflection. We tell her we’re fine, no fires here, we guess it’s just aftershock?

She laughs then asks, “Would you prefer a visit from Gram instead?”

The earth rumbling, breaking apart, erupting fire. My sister and I are safe and watching a movie we’ve watched a hundred times, and then,

once more, in the middle of the rock and roll desert night.

And so no Gram... but maybe... possibly...

TALES OF TRAVEL

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Photo by Julie Swanson, 2018

TALES OF TRAVEL

Childhood Recollections

PIPER WETZEL

I grew up going on very small vacations with my family, so small that some people wouldn't even consider them vacations. They would take me camping or on weekend trips to the North Shore as a baby. We'd go to the Mall of America with my grandparents and once road-tripped to Colorado for my uncle's wedding. For all of these trips, I was quite young and don't remember much. My younger brother wasn't even born for some of these trips so his memories are even more limited than mine. But in 2012, my mom and grandpa took my brother and me to visit her sister and kids in San Antonio, Texas. We visited my aunt while her husband was on deployment with the Air Force. While there, we went to many places but the only two that stood out are Sea World and the Alamo.

I was born in 2004 and my younger brother was born in 2006. It was easier for my parents to take our small family on trips when we were younger. Sometimes we'd visit my older half-brother when camping or get dinner with him in town. These are things I used

to consider ‘trips’ or vacations. The older we got, the less my dad would go with us when we visited family, the less we saw our half-brother, and the less we went anywhere.

My memories of the vacations I went on as a kid are not very distinct. We stopped going on trips when I was starting to get old enough to remember them. I forget who we went with or what we did when we went on vacations. Unless there are pictures of me, I struggle to believe I was even there. Eventually, the only ‘vacations’ we’d take, and still take, were to visit family in the next state over for Christmas or visit my grandpa a few hours away. We wouldn’t take trips to Minneapolis or the North Shore, or go camping. That was one of the reasons I was really excited to visit my aunt in Texas. It would be the first time we’d left the state in years and the first time my brother and I would be in Texas.

I didn’t know anything about the place we were going. I only knew San Antonio as one of the places my aunt and uncle lived. Because both my aunt and uncle were in the Air Force, they moved around a lot. We drove to San Antonio in the summer, by then my brother and I would be out of school. It took around 36 hours to get there, with my mom and grandpa switching off who was driving and stopping at a few rest stops or gas stations. My mom had packed bags of stuff for my brother and me to keep us from getting too bored, but it didn’t keep my brother occupied nearly as long as she’d hoped.

I don’t remember most of the journey. I have vague memories of sitting in the car but that could have been from any point in my childhood. I do remember that McDonald’s was promoting *The Smurfs* movie and their Happy Meals came with little *Smurf*

figurines that my brother and I played with. My memories of the trip really start when we got to my aunt's house. I remember thinking my skin was going to melt off and I'd be a pile of goo whenever we'd leave the air-conditioned house. I remember my brother dropping a brown crayon on their cement driveway and it melting over a few hours until it looked like feces. I remember their funny-looking trees and houses without basements. I remember her dogs, I can still hear one of them throwing up on the air mattress when we were trying to go to bed. The place I most remember visiting while we were there is SeaWorld. You could see the tops of some of the rides from my Aunt's driveway; this only added to our excitement. I was very excited at the idea of seeing dolphins and getting to ride on "big girl rides." When we went it was blisteringly hot, all of our photos from the trip showcase my brother's and my sunburnt and sweaty faces. We went to a trapeze show and I can picture myself marveling at the skill the performers had and how transfixed I was by their colorful make-up and costumes. We also went to a Shamu Show. I remember having a good time during the show and not being afraid of the giant majestic creatures. I thought the tricks they could do were impressive and that the trainers were all fun. We fed dolphins in a round pool in the middle of the park later that day. I was a little scared then, I thought they'd accidentally take my arm with them when they went to take the fish from our hands. We got to pet and splash with them for a little bit before having to leave so the people around us could have a turn. I have fond memories of my time at SeaWorld, but these are the memories of a child who was unaware of the conditions those animals lived in.

We also visited the Alamo on our trip. I remember my grandfather being really interested in looking at everything and deciding that I should be too. I don't remember most of the

building but I vaguely recollect plaques and cases inside and thinking I was, again, going to die from the heat. We have a few photos of all of us smiling together in several places around the Alamo, but I don't remember much more than some of the exterior and small bits of the inside. My mom said I was very well-behaved considering I was young and had no notion of what was going on. I knew that the Alamo was an important place for some war the U.S. was involved in. I thought it was the site of a major victory for U.S. troops and that it was a landmark celebrating that victory. My grandfather tried to tell my cousins and me about the "heroes of the Alamo" but I don't remember what he said.

I learned some of the truth behind the Alamo in elementary school a few years later. I mentioned to my teacher that I had visited it and I told her about my experience there. She was very interested and asked me to bring in photos of me being there. I don't recall what exactly she told us about the Alamo, but considering it was taught through the U.S. education system and I was in fourth grade, I'm sure it was a very toned-down, white-washing of history.

Now that I'm older, I have the ability to fully understand the context of the places we visited on this trip. I know how horrifying the life and conditions of the animals at SeaWorld were, and I know how dangerous it could be. I look back at what I thought were huge pools for them to swim around in and shudder at the fact that they weren't that big at all, especially considering their natural habitat is the ocean. I know about the unfortunate incidents of trainers dying or of the gross negligence the owners of some of the parks perpetuated and the unsafe and unhealthy conditions the animals

were held in. When I visited SeaWorld, one of the orcas had recently given birth and was swimming around with her infant for people to watch. Now I know that that infant was bred to be raised in captivity and that SeaWorld has many admonishable practices involving their orcas and their orca shows. I look at the pictures of me feeding the Dolphins in their tiny little pool and the dozens of people surrounding us waiting to touch and feed the animals and it saddens me. Knowing that those animals were subjected to a life of putting on an endless show and dealing with being touched and overfed every day until they die in captivity is heartbreaking.

The Alamo has a much deeper story than I had known as a kid. I didn't know it had once been a missionary building built by Roman Catholic missionaries until I started researching it. I didn't know the original compound was much larger than the building I saw. I didn't know that the battle of the Alamo happened because of Texas's war for independence from Mexico. And I definitely didn't know that the revolution was started because of Mexico's new leader, Santa Anna, who was trying to move total control to Mexico's government and also trying to outlaw slavery. Texans wanted to keep the characteristics of the Antebellum South and continue to profit off of enslaved people and cotton without relinquishing their autonomy to the Mexican government. I'd seen the propaganda movie that "depicted" the Alamo's last stand. I had been brainwashed by the "Remember the Alamo" sentiment that ran rampant throughout America's history. I didn't realize that those who had been praised for giving their lives to defend the Alamo and fighting for Texas's independence were really only fighting for the ability to continue to enslave people. I especially didn't know that Texas's annexation, and subsequently the battle of the Alamo, had a direct line to the causes of the Mexican-American war.

Not all of my thoughts and knowledge on the Alamo were due to my naivete and age. There are many myths and lies spread about the Texas fight for independence. These lies have popularized the Texas creation myth that paints the defenders of the Alamo as martyrs and heroes. Texas government and its education system have made it very clear that there is only one version of the story and that they were the heroes fighting for their right to independence. Texas is complicit in the attempts at covering up its history of racism and slavery. This is very normal behavior for the U.S. though. Even now Texas is trying to pass bills to stop the dismantling of its white-washed retelling of history. The Alamo's website calls the men heroes and makes no mention of what started the whole affair.

As a kid, I had such an innocent and romanticized view of the world, seeing everything in black and white or all good or all bad. These are only a few examples of my ignorance. Now I am able to see the grey in life. I know that SeaWorld and the Alamo are problematic but they are not all bad. The battle of the Alamo led to Texas being a part of the United States of America and it is a very important and necessary state. I'm also able to recognize the joy that SeaWorld brought people and how it inspired generations of marine biologists and other aquatic mammal lovers. These also serve as examples of why it is important to become more knowledgeable as you get older and to continue to question and explore. My memories of this trip aren't all that numerous but I do remember and have come to appreciate my childlike view of the places we saw. This view has pushed me to look more deeply at the places I've been and to see them through new eyes, eyes that can research and understand more than I ever could before. This was one of the last "big" trips I took as a kid and it is one I will always remember

fondly. Only having a few experiences going on big vacations has led me to appreciate them more, and to also appreciate the small little day trips or dinners with my whole family. The older I get the less I remember from these trips but the more I cherish the memories I do have and the experiences I was able to learn and grow from.

TALES OF TRAVEL

Switching Car Seats

MITCHELL NELSON

I grew up in the suburban area of Cambridge Minnesota. Cambridge was originally created to commute to the Twins cities as it is located an hour North of the cities. At 10,000 residents, the city was able to provide most necessities, but not all. The remaining necessities or events would occur in the neighboring southern city of Isanti. With my house located on the Southwest side of Cambridge, traveling to Isanti meant taking back roads and side streets. These backroads consisted of cornfields, soccer fields, and several manufacturing plants.

Growing up, I would always sit on the drivers rear side to see if anyone was maintaining or harvesting the cornfield or competing on the soccer fields. But around the age of 10, I found myself sitting more on the passenger side to look at the machinery plants. The plants directly in between Isanti and Cambridge consisted of a singular rectangle building with several windows on the first floor adding the only details to the gray exterior walls. Each plant lacked uniqueness as the single lane of parking wrapping around the bland

building flowed into a group of large tractors or machines. None of these plants kept me wanting to sit on the passenger side of the car, except for the very last plant before the city: Ever Cat Fuels.

Every time we passed Ever Cat Fuels I would ask questions hoping my parents knew the answers. What is Ever Cat Fuels? What are the large shiny cylinders at this plant and not the rest? How come they aren't cutting the weeds in their front yard? Why are there three flat lakes across the railroad tracks? My parents never provided concrete answers as they were focused on driving and tired of the hundreds of questions I would ask every day. It wasn't until middle school where I'd get an answer to all my questions. Now that I was at the age to be trusted with a mobile device, every time we passed the plant I would quickly flip out my phone and look up the questions that remained unanswered for years.

What is Ever Cat Fuels? ECF specialized in producing biodiesel through plant oils and animal fat to assist in the replacement of petroleum diesel. Where biodiesel is a recyclable, clean-burning, and environmentally safe alternative. The method used is the Mcgyan Process that uses technology created at the University of Minnesota Department of Chemistry. Unlike other state-of-the-art biodiesel processes, the Mcgyan Process is a continuous process that takes seconds and doesn't need large amounts of water and produces no byproducts. EFC is the first plant to use the Mcgyan Process. The two floor sloped warehouse along with the shiny large cylinders lie on the East side of railroad tracks while a small crop field and three shallow man made square ponds reside on the other side of the tracks. ECF officially started production in 2007, but I can remember the plant being there as long as I can remember.

What are the large shiny cylinders at the plant? The cylinders are fuel storages for produced biodiesel waiting to be transported by truck, train, or barge. With producing 3 million gallons of biodiesel a year, the plant has three twenty foot storage units that house the produced biodiesel with four backup storage units that are a third in size. The backup storage units are made of a marble white material as it has alternative abilities for storage. Material needed to start producing plants and starting different methods are shipped in and stored in the miniature units, but that doesn't stay long as it is quickly planted or spread into the ponds.

How come they aren't cutting the weeds in their front yard? The weeds referred to are actually small stems of plant life in a low agricultural valued area, where the plants don't grow in large sized or richness. ECF mainly planted three plants that thrive for low valued land and produce adequate amounts of plant oil needed to biodiesel production: corn stover, miscanthus, and switchgrass. I was more focused on the corn stover growing up as its tiny pointed stems looked like weeds that would grow in my backyard. The growth of these plants is miniscule, but the usage for biodiesel isn't dependent on their size.

Why are there three flat lakes across the railroad track? Plant oils used for biodiesel aren't restricted to land as there is a water residing plant that produces oils: algae. This is where I began to fully become interested in biodiesel. The slimy chords of stringed weeds that always finds a way to wrap around your appendages while swimming is the forefront of replacing gasoline. The ability to grow algae a hundred yards away from the warehouse allows the company to break the 3 million gallons of biodiesel fuel produced a year. ECF grows and produces microalgae, the second largest species of the

72,000 species of algae behind seaweed. Where seaweed is harvested in aquacultures or wild stocks, microalgae is easily growable as it only needs sunlight, CO₂, and nutrients found in small bodies of open water. For some unknown reason I found myself unbothered by swimming half way through middle school, I wonder why.

These major questions of mine were answered throughout my middle school experience, as traveling to Isanti had become a rare occasion. Although my fascination with the plant began to diminish as time went on, the seeds it planted in my mind as a kid began to blossom as a teenager. I found myself intrigued with science more than any subject in class or the news. I also found myself asking these similar foundational questions to other projects and companies that arose with the advancement of technology. The seed planted in my mind traveling past Ever Cat Fuels as a kid was a major reason I am pursuing a college education to help ensure I can be involved in the science world. I am thankful that I stopped looking at boring cornfields and switched seats to look at manufacturing plants as a kid. Not only did it help me career wise, but also help me realize that touching algae while swimming isn't the end of the world.

Need Title

OLIVER YEHLIK

Friday, October 14, 8:05 a.m.

What is your body witnessing; what do you want it to witness? What are you witnessing in your mind; what do you want to give attention or space to? What is your spirit witnessing, in the emotional world and in connection to others?

These days my *body, mind, heart, spirit* is witnessing cold. I woke up today to the first snow of the year and my body has not warmed up yet. My hands reluctantly touch the keys. I feel myself seated in my chair with headphones on, my legs a bit uncomfortable as I cross them.

I uncross my legs and breathe while sensing into myself. Lately, I've felt a lot of emotion manifest itself physically. I've been jittery from the nervousness and anxiety around my work/life this week.

I want to deepen my connections to the world as an embodied human. Rock climbing brings me some of this togetherness, my

mind and body working with one another to keep me on the boulder. I need to eat well, exercise, and be with others. I want presence through silent touch and shared space. Being anonymous together (if this paradox is possible).

I don't want to so quickly verbalize and abstract what I feel, and instead, give myself the compassion to enjoy my emotions as they pass through me. Slowness and quietness embodied become the literal things themselves. Give yourself permission to hold the space you need to share in this experience with those you love.

Sunday, October 16, 6:15 p.m.

I'm having a tough time feeling like I can meet my needs here. I'm seeking joy. The feeling of going to the symphony with friends, and they are performing my favorite concerto by Florence Price. I heard myself think that I didn't have time for freewriting just now. I heard myself think: "I'm having difficulty shifting my focus to coursework."

[jokes on me]

I've spent most of today on my own, listening to all sorts of music. I need to be in touch with my creative energy. I'm longing to have my fingers on the keys again, showing the world that it's all storytelling. I want to write that new stories are not only possible, but already with us. I'm going to go have dinner and see where I end up today.

Sunday, October 16, 9:25 p.m.

I've spent the last few hours with my dear friend in her room. It's so warm and cozy with the heater on. I'm thinking of something I heard during a training on empathetic listening; people feel more

open when sitting in a triangle shape as opposed to across from one another. I'm so glad to have shared space in this way over the last day.

I feel comfortable. This feeling has not been prominent in the last month. I know that this week might be overwhelming, and I'm sure I will be a bundle of nervous energy come Wednesday. But right now, I am warm. I am with my friend. I am freewriting, offering myself grace over judgment. I'm grateful that I get to live my one and only life. There is so much to create, and so many ways to be. You will make it.

Monday, October 17, 8:05 a.m.

Imagine bird song, a walk through the woods and a detour into the ferns, feeling the day's warmth still lingering in the rock. Today, I will write about warmth...

I'm back in Austin, TX lying on the pavers around the pool. The air is 100 degrees that night and I am shivering. The voodoo donuts make everything better. I say I want to be a lizard, absorbing warmth from the rock.

Last night, I enjoyed the warmth of the heater turned to 70 degrees in my friend's room. We sit alone together in the quiet. She calls her dad while I turn in the assignment I have due.

Warmth, of hot chocolate and good company. Warmth, of a day of rest and enjoying your favorite music under an oversized blanket. Warmth, of a boulder in the sun after a day of paddling in the Boundary Waters.

What I'm really trying to write about is memory. The warmth of a stone in the evening is a measure of the day's sunlight. Despite

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my fingers, cold on the keys in the early morning, I still hold the warmth of last night. Friendship and the sweet, gentle unraveling of a wonderful weekend.



Monday, September 26, 9:12 p.m.

On Thursday morning, my Peace Studies class met in Bagley Nature Area, just past the university's library. All of us were instructed to spend the first 20 minutes out on our own.

After wandering down a trail, I found a small boulder off in the trees to sit down on. I was mostly drawn to the glow of the sun, hoping to warm myself up a bit. Sitting down, I noticed the light shining through the tree branches, the ferns around me, and the moss on the rocks.

It took me a long time to slow down my thoughts. Many of my experiences have felt very intense, everything all at once, and I feel my mind is often very full. Breathing exercises... in for 4, hold for 7, exhale for 8... helped me bring some sleepy slowness to the surface.

As my timer went off, I felt a sense of clarity around some of my thoughts. In my Cognitive Science class, we often discuss the brain as an “information processing machine.” In many ways, I think about my own thinking in this way, but I felt a deep sense that I needed new language.

I am an “information processing machine” but I am also a human, sitting on a rock, enjoying the sensation of the soft moss in my fingers. While I love to learn about my own learning, I also think that so many of the ways we learn can pull us “into our heads.” How can I flip this? If my curiosity comes from within, how can I express that out into the world?

The last few days have been hard for me. I am writing this on Monday night, and felt very slow getting out of bed this morning. So much of my learning (or at least the idea of it) feels really draining.

Tuesday, November 22, 8:05 a.m.

I’m thinking of new beginnings. I’ve experienced a pull towards the idea of a “fresh start” at different times as I’ve grown and changed seasons in my life. However, I’ve found that in seeking a fresh start I can find myself waiting for a new day, a new week, the next month, another year.

The only time we have is the present. We have right now... to do our best work, to change the world, to care for ourselves, to make friends, to wonder. This is what I find fascinating about freewriting as a grounding exercise. In this stream of consciousness, I can allow myself to experience all that I am thinking, feeling, and needing without judgment. I can write down my direct experience and accept that experience as my own.

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I'm finding that a fresh start is often less about the timing and more about letting go. When everything seems like too much, a fresh start means allowing ourselves to accept that it is too much. In this sense of our abilities, we can see our unrealistic expectations. A fresh start is a way to ground ourselves in what we know we know.

We can only act in the present, to the best of our abilities and knowledge. We can rely on the help of others, knowing that we are always in relationship as a person in a world of 8 billion people. A fresh start is part of a cycle that we will always travel through.

Sunday, January 15, 6:26 p.m.

I am surrounded by beautiful words. I find nourishment in language that connects. Analogy that holds space for complexity. I am holding so much. I am a practitioner of uncertainty. I have fluency in recognizing the known unknowns.

Tonight I want to cry. Last night I layed on my floor. Last week I described my mind as an "inhospitable soundscape." More edgy than accurate, but still. My anxiety takes form in spirals of words.

A washing machine spinning and spinning. Rinse and repeat. I'm taking a shower and I hear the same phrases, the stories I tell myself, the rebuttals. I don't want it.

I need the words to come out. Even if they are like this. Messy. Unpublishable. I'm tired. I am going to be okay.

Remember when you texted her. "Yeah totally! sounds good"
[recognizing and reframing truths]

Wednesday, February 15, 4:27 p.m.

There is so much on my mind. It is hard to think... though, I'm not sure if that is my mental health or possible Covid-19. I've been struggling with my writing, my journaling. My attention seems very fractured. Recently, I read about survival.

“This is what survival does. It pares us back to our essentials. It keeps us hypervigilant and therefore tired. It holds us there for as long as it can... So I'm wondering if, right now, you and I and all of us reading this, can rename ‘not writing’ as ‘quiet gathering.’ Maybe there are seasons to live our stories, and there are seasons to write them... Even in our seasons of not writing, we are allowed to have hope and pride in what we are doing. Moving from the story of one day to the next is an act of creativity. Survival is too.” (Firefly Creative Writing, 2023)

I don't feel particularly creative. I am longing for an enormous canvas. There is so much I want to write down. To sort out. To move through slowly and gently and with great care. To say and to share with my friends. To build in community. I don't yet know the form of this canvas. Right now, I get to be the canvas. These words are literally stuck to me: “all I'm really trying to do is stay alive with my attention intact” (Green, 2020). That is all I want right now. Presence. Attentiveness.

My creativity is still with me, it is right here. Maybe it isn't the form you expect or want, but it is something. Take it down a notch. Let yourself be vulnerable despite your fears. You are safe. You are loved. You are going to make it through this. Is it that I want a canvas or an audience? A community I can share my work with? Someone I can share these thoughts with?

I have so much doubt. I'm uneasy because I worry I will be perceived

“the wrong way.” I don’t even know what that means. It took stillness for hours to get here. You are surviving and it is hard and that is okay.

Wednesday, March 15, 8:05 a.m.

These days my energy is like...

I feel like I’m on a portage, coming around a corner and seeing another band of trees. The canoe is heavy on my shoulders but I am so close to the end. I don’t recognize the trail, each turn a maybe. Finally, a glimmer of blue blinks through the trees. I come down the hill and tip the canoe off my shoulders. Rest. Turn back for more.

At first, I thought that my energy might be like the lake in the early morning. Calm waters lit by the rising sun. There is something so special about that stillness. When I visit the Boundary Waters, all my expectations and plans vanish. I’m sitting with my dad, drinking a cup of shitty cappuccino made with boiled lake water. It is delicious. I think we are shaped by the environment we are in. I think this closeness to the Earth makes us still.

Yesterday, I ran out of spoons [*energy*] around 3pm. I didn’t know what to do with myself. I know that I need this time to heal, but healing is so hard. I know that I am not a burden for needing care, and no one is. Healing the world is going to be slow and it is going to break my heart, but I want my heart to break. These are the times that you are nourished.

Recently, I read the poem *For When People Ask* by Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer. Her words “devastated and full of joy” deeply resonate with how I’ve been feeling. Relationships take so much time, care, forgiveness. But god damn, how I love my friends. I think

that I am breaking away from the isolation I've been living with. Vulnerability takes so much courage, so much energy. It is so worth the cost.

I can speak these words here. There is something so special, so rewarding about stream-of-consciousness journaling. I get to communicate here with myself in ways that are rare in my life. Remember to breathe. Sigh. Sense your energy and meet your needs in ways that bring you alive.

You said, “anyways goodnight love you” and she replied “Goodnight and I love you tooo!!!”



Tuesday, March 21, 8:05 a.m.

Here I am. Awareness of my breathing, my posture. Feeling my cold fingers on the keyboard. It feels so good to type. The words just come out, my fingers rest on the keys until the next thing. I'm thinking

about the nonviolent communication workshop. I'm still holding the thrilling feeling of the conversations I had last night, speaking what Marshall Rosenberg calls giraffe language.

I am learning, I am becoming fluent in giraffe language. [*And I say to myself that I can't speak a second language.*] I have many languages.

The sun has peeked through the clouds and light is washing over me and my table this morning. Trust your gut, Oliver. Write what you need to write today. It is okay to shift from something to another. Remind yourself, "here I am." What is alive in you this morning?

I am tired, I am peaceful. My life has been so full of beautiful energy. I've felt enthusiastic, radiant. Tears feel so close, closer than ever before, tears feel so wonderful. I have been feeling life and not just thinking it. Presence. Not a judgment of right or wrong. I need this intensity around giving, honesty, love.

This all takes time, and you have done nothing wrong. You are just where you should be. I love you.



Friday, March 24, 8:05 a.m.

We are starting today with a poem, Lost by David Wagoner. “Stand still. The forest Knows where you are. You must let it find you.”

I told an old friend that my mind was a bit everywhere all at once this last week. I’ve had a sense of anxiety trying to make itself known. Yet, I know how to manage. Take a breath. Drink some water. Watch the sun dance as my red bottle bends the glow outside the window this morning. This world’s beauty can be found in the simplest things.

Stand still. Stillness is precious. Whenever I feel lost, know that the forest knows where I am. We. Us. I am never alone. Remember that when your frames don’t feel like enough, others have frames to guide you. I close my eyes, and go back to my Solarpunk book club.

Sunday mornings. “Was it really so sad if nothing happened in the end?” I don’t remember the conversations, but the people.

Don’t just do something, stand there. I am rewiring my brain and body to change the context of my worries. Breathing through spiraling thoughts, shame, anger. Finding release from judgment of self and other. I am a baby giraffe, learning how to cry again. I never want to speak a language of violence. I love this place too much.

My phone is buzzing from birthday wishes today. I’m 19. No wonder it feels like I have no idea what I’m doing. No wonder it feels like I know precisely what I want to do. Trust your intuitions and know when to care for yourself. Know when to ask for care. You are never a burden, and no one is.

I had three places to be at once yesterday. I chose to play with dirt. Transplanting seedlings of Dogwood. I hope they grow. There is so much energy inside of me. I’m ready for today. Potential energy becomes kinetic energy, keeping me going. Movement.

Thursday, March 30, 8:07 a.m.

I’m arriving late today. That doesn’t mean I can’t move slowly, sense my breath, and sit up straight. Today I am rested. I woke up with a deep sense of peace. This week has been a lot. Last Friday was my birthday, which my friends helped me celebrate. Overjoyed to have these humans in my life. Last Sunday I spent all day napping.

On Monday morning, I spoke to my professor to check-in on everything. As I prepare to do undergraduate research in Morocco, I’m seeking to understand the flow from the stories we tell into the feelings and needs behind our words. I told my professor about the

little Marshall Rosenberg inside of my head. Our conversation turned towards hope, justice, empathy... I don't remember it well. I do remember that she was excited about my project. I remember her talking about our spiderweb brains. I remember her saying I seemed to be right on track.

On Monday evening, I submitted my application for my Interdisciplinary Studies major. It's done. You did the hard part. Now we wait for everything to just do what you designed it to do. I am weaving webs and building puzzles. Of course my path looks different from most. Feels unfamiliar. You are just where you should be.

This feels a bit like an ending. And that is perfect. The month of April is not arbitrary. You've designed everything for yourself to get you here. To be ready to run. Take another day. Breathe. You will work it out and it will work out. Offer yourself peace today. You are ready. Your friends will not forget you. You are not a burden. It is okay to cry. Feel it all in your body.

Today, go out and give, perform random acts of kindness. Feel that joy. <3

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A Place in Me

SAVANNAH SCHMELZER

Childhood

As a child, every trip to my grandparents house was like a dream. We stayed over every weekend, me and my younger brother. My grandpa would come pick us up in his shiny new truck, a bright crimson that my dad always referred to as hot-rod red, and we'd stop for snacks on the way.

Weekends full of dill pickle chips and redbox movies made up my childhood. Sometimes the cousins would come on Saturdays, for a barbecue or just to visit, and we'd play pretend in the backyard, jumping off of the trampoline and imagining we had elemental powers.

Dinner was Papa's pancakes or Nanny's soup, eaten in the living room while we watched whatever movies we had. Sometimes we played dolls or painted or played on our game boys. The sky grew dark. My grandfather and I wrote notes to each other each night- I'd

write one for him wishing him a good day at work before I went to bed and he'd write me a similar one for the morning.

On Sundays we had church and lunch at Sportsman's. In the summers I helped Nanny hang clothes on the line to dry, and in the winters we built snowmen and dug caves through the piles to show off to her. Papa's dog, Rajha, would run circles around the yard regardless, chasing us.

And then we'd go home, bags of treats in our hands, excited for the next weekend. I'd think of my grandpa's recliner all week, comfortable and soft in all the right places. I'd think of my grandma's prayers at night, the ones we'd say with her, and her hands in my hair. I'd think of all the love that surrounded me.

Adolescence

What happened to my time? Adolescence hits you with a lack of hours, all of them spent on homework, sports and friendships. The weekends at my grandparents turned into less and less, but they were still there, still present in my life.

I could drive myself then, and though I felt the absence of those car rides, seen through rose colored glasses, I loved having my own music and driving at my own speed. I knew every turn, all of the backroads with their crooks and crannies, the fastest and the slowest ways to my grandparents, for when I had brand new music or nothing to listen to.

The cousins didn't want to play pretend with me anymore, so I wrote my thoughts instead. Day in and day out, ideas and stories scrawled

into notebook after notebook. Suddenly old enough to drive the four wheelers and go-carts ourselves, the spring and summers were spent with all of the cousins, racing each other in the giant field in the backyard.

Holidays were still at my grandparents house. Everyone came, from the uncles to the aunts to the cousins. I spent weeks before every holiday dragging Christmas or Easter supplies up the basement steps, putting decorations up with Nanny and my cousin, Bella. I made sure to pick all of my favorites in the stocking and basket candy.

My brother stopped coming altogether. His friends wanted him over every weekend, and there was no wife at Papa's and Nanny's. I slept on the floor now, instead of in my grandma's bed with her. She bought me one of the roll out mattresses, a gesture that still warms me to the core. There was still something in the air, staying over. That feeling of comfort, something that was always there, always open, always offered.

Before

The cancer was stage four. Deeply progressed and life-altering. She'd beat it once before, but the end was clear this time.

I was in college then, so my weekend visits had come to an end, living in another city. I used to go back whenever I could, taking off weekends as much as possible to see family, to see home. But after her diagnosis, every weekend off felt exhausting before even being there. Every drive back to my hometown was long and uneasy.

How could I deal with this? How could anyone? Long gone were the

hands in my hair and the memorized prayers, forever in my memories but wiped out in hers. This wasn't the same woman I knew from my childhood. I painted the nails on swollen fingertips, searching for that feeling. I helped where I could for as long as I could, trying to make up for what I couldn't fix.

Mostly I just talked. I talked to Nanny. About classes. About friends. About memories and family and life. I was desperate for some kind of reaction, some kind of sign. Every once in a while, her eyes would light up, like she remembered me. Like she knew who I was. And then it was gone, a flash of what it used to be.

Uncles to aunts to cousins visited, in and out, but their minds checked out the moment they walked through the door. We made small talk like we were strangers and left after an hour, too tired to continue. And then there was my grandpa, simultaneously there and not. He was steady but guarded, level-headed but exhausted. He took that weight but it hollowed him to the core. There were no more overnight notes anymore.

I knew I should've visited more, should have made those trips. It was too difficult then, too much. I had homework, and bills to pay, but really, I didn't know what to do with myself when I was there. I wasn't allowed to be that child, playing pretend in the backyard, eating dill pickles chips and scribbling in notebooks. I had to be someone else, packing up clothes and speaking with home nurses.

But I should've visited more.

After

I yearn for a place that no longer exists.

After Nanny had passed, everything felt so quiet. Even when she was sick, there were always nurses over, always machines running, always people visiting. After, there was nothing left. Like she'd taken the very life with her.

I visited my grandpa as much as possible. Eating lunch with him at his work, sitting in silence together in the living room, golf on the television, phone calls every other night. I didn't want him to be alone. It wasn't crimson trucks and coke-bottle glasses, but it was still him, and that would always be enough for me.

And slowly, so slowly, color faded back in again. Everyone came for holidays again, birthdays and Christmas and Easter. We spend time together, talking and laughing and filling the house with voices and activity. The uncles watch sports on the television, newer and larger with each passing year. The aunts make food and gossip about life. The newer, younger children run and play in the backyard, on a new trampoline and a new swingset, without the wear and rust of my youth.

But the clothesline goes unused, the strings never fixed after a harsh winter of breakage. No one makes chicken dumpling soup, Nanny's specialty. Her bedroom is untouched, pristine and perfect, as though she never left.

I simultaneously visit more and less often than I did before. I take time off as much as I am able, and I go when I can, but I never stay over anymore, even if my roll-out mattress still sits in the closet.

She's still there. I know she is. I feel her spirit when I'm walking in her garden, the one that my aunt Brooke keeps alive every year. I

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smell her laundry detergent and perfume in her bedroom, where her bed is made and her photo hangs on the wall. I hear her voice on the drive there, in the songs on the radio. My childhood is still there too. I see it in the Christmas decorations every year, and the old furniture pieces of her bedroom. I hear it in the chirp of the birds and the sound of the train at the end of the road. I feel it in the quiet.

It's on another plane of life. Not quite here, but close enough to feel, close enough to remember.

I visit more, now. Even if the place I remember isn't quite there anymore. That place lives on in me.

Opportunity of a Lifetime

EMILY HALLING

Travel is something that many people view as a privilege. An opportunity to experience something you may never forget. The ability to immerse yourself in a new location, and to truly find yourself through experiences you will reflect on with a smile. To go somewhere you've longed to go for the majority of your life, it is quite a rewarding and refreshing experience. A place where you feel as though you just *belong*. My trip to New York in September of 2022 is one I will never forget.

Ever since I was a little girl, I've loved everything to do with the arts. Being involved in theater productions from the time I learned to speak, to solo performances with the piano at age six. To this day I am now playing trumpet for my university's big band. As I grew up, this love for theater and music never changed. I only became more infatuated with them. This was one of my first passions I acquired as a child that never fizzled out as I had gotten older. I wanted to expand those horizons, and see live theater done at the highest level.

What made this travel experience possible was my roommate Emma. She has roots in New York. For as long as I can remember, I expressed an interest in the big city. It still baffles me how I landed that connection, that outlet, that opportunity. Nevertheless, I was going to find myself in a new location doing brand new things. Many of those things of which I could never see myself doing without that connection. It all started when she simply asked if I wanted to join her on this trip.

I said yes, without giving it a second thought. When was something like this going to happen for me again? She was simply going to visit family and see some familiar sights she had seen while growing up. Meanwhile, I was going to explore aimlessly and discover some new things. The difference is astonishing.

New York City, the epicenter of all things arts. I'm fascinated with the hustle bustle and great food. I thought I knew what it was all about. The environment, so often portrayed in movies, seemed as though it was so familiar. It is a quick paced city and it keeps you on your toes. The dissonance of cars honking and the shouting of people hailing a taxi are just a few things you tend to pick up on when consuming media surrounding New York City. The complete opposite of the small city in Minnesota where I reside. But most importantly, I love how there are Broadway shows at every corner. It is every thespian's heaven. Like a kid in a very expensive and immersive candy store. Lights and marquis make the city dazzle and I just love it.

It was always my dream to fly out to New York and see a Broadway show. COVID-19 had closed the curtains of Broadway for a short while, and I was itching to see a show. There was another problem.

Being on the other side of the country, this was a rather difficult dream to succeed in. But there I was, sitting on a plane flying that very direction. The entire plane ride was a blur, out of sheer excitement. Little did I know, I would be getting the surprise of a lifetime.

Later on, getting into the city was a surreal experience. Nothing like I had ever experienced before. Seated in the Long Island Railroad, we embarked on a painfully slow ride. The entire time I was filled with nerves. I remember staring at the window and watching the little towns passing by in a fuzzy blur. Finally, what seemed like forever, the train began to slow down. The screeching hiss filled my ears. The doors squeaked open, and we bolted out of there.

I've heard horror stories about being crushed by quickly closing subway doors. I didn't want to figure that out first hand.

Once again, I felt the adrenaline kicking my legs forward as we continued through the underground maze that was the subway. After sitting for an hour it was great to get moving. I was finally in the big city. This is what all of that waiting, and dreaming led to. I wasn't quite there yet. We took on a giant set of stairs that led us to ground level. I almost forgot I was underground.

The closer I got to the surface, the more I began to hear the sounds of honking cars as well as the roaring noises of a subway train approaching. I also heard the hissing of hydraulics and other types of unexpected, yet perfectly reasonable commotion. Posters of attractions filled the low, angled ceilings of the subway stairs. Pictured Broadway stars smiled down at me, and that was encouraging to see.

As we quickly jogged up the stairwell, it began to fill with the bright lights that were reflecting off of buildings. The sounds got louder and louder, and it all became more real. It felt like a stairway to heaven. I shielded my eyes from the sheer brightness from what I would learn to be reflected from buildings. The commotion became more and more real. It felt as though a volume button was raised a couple notches with each step I took. Was New York always this loud?

It was just me and Emma, taking on the big city. Something I never ever saw coming. You could tell my 10th grade self about this and she would never believe you. She would laugh at your face, and hope and dream it could happen behind closed doors. She would never see it as a possibility. This was truly a once in a lifetime opportunity.

The sun, once again, was blinding. The fresh, yet not fresh air slapped me in the face. The unpleasant aroma of garbage mixed with some sweet smells of bakeries flooded my nose. Savory notes of marinara fill the air. The odd combination immediately immersed myself. To this day, I'm not sure why, but that sealed the deal for me. The garbage smell meant the city.

We were immediately surrounded by buildings. Millions of windows bounced the sun on us. I've never been in the city when it was summer, and there was a small breeze. Tall buildings cast small black shadows on the ground. Some scaffolding nearby made for some great ways to beat the sun too. This was something I wasn't used to. I felt a chill every time I went under a tall building because of the amount of shade it provided. We began to explore the city,

not entirely aimlessly. Emma was on a mission of sorts with GPS pulled up on her phone.

I felt my heart sink into my stomach. Butterflies fluttered about. We finally began to get into the path of theaters. I saw the theaters that showcased *Book of Mormon*, and *Moulin Rouge!* “Hey, look! They’re everywhere!” I called out.

Some smaller theaters showcasing productions I hadn’t gotten the chance to listen to yet also came into view. They were practically cornering me now.

Suddenly, a breathtaking building became apparent. The entire balcony was covered in gorgeous red flowers, which accented a beautiful golden structure that shielded from the sun. I didn’t even have time to look up at the marquis because of how enamored I was with the exterior of the building.

“Which theater is this?” Emma finally asked. Coming to a stop. At the time, I didn’t realize she had stopped. I was so mesmerized with my surroundings.

“Walter Kerr..” I responded, dumbfounded. “Where Hadestown is played...” I trailed off.

“Alright.” She began, she stopped, and turned to look at me. Her eyes beaming with delight.

“Get in line.” she replied triumphantly. I could just tell she was waiting to say that. Those words left me speechless.

“What, wait no-.” I managed to get out in a quick burst of air. I shook my head. “You’re kidding.” I whispered. I shook my head in

TALES OF TRAVEL

disbelief. My eyes grew big, I was faced with the glowing marquee of Walter Kerr. It shone back down on me, the dazzling lights had me captivated. I looked around, the whole city seemed to be beaming. Everything was spectacular, and nothing could've ruined that moment for me.

Overall, this experience really shaped me and taught me some valuable lessons. I had the privilege of being able to succeed in my dreams of seeing a Broadway show. To this day, I often think back on that trip with a smile. I understand this isn't something that can happen to everyone. This trip taught me to take every opportunity that is given to you. You never know what kind of exhilarating, life-changing circumstances you can find yourself in.



Photo by Emily Halling

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Photo by Julie Swanson, 2017

TALES OF TRAVEL

Manitoba Scars

TYLA MADDOCK

My feet were torn up and bleeding, each shallow cut gritty with sand, and I had never been happier in my entire life.

* * *

Lake Winnipeg fell victim to the zebra mussel epidemic in 2013 when the Red River's current granted them safe passage across the U.S.-Canada border. Looking at them, you wouldn't guess they're living things. In the same way the corals in our oceans don't appear to be living things. Just jagged masses of sediment and natural debris. But like us, they have organs that allow them to breathe, move, and reproduce; they can't survive on their own for very long or outside of the environments they've acclimated to. They need their colonies, and they need a home.

Despite their classification as an invasive species, I've grown to understand their nature as parallel to ours: the pursuit of survival in a world of division. Like them, humans can't survive without

community or family, without a place of safety. Nowadays, this can be a difficult thing to find. Some of us are privileged enough to be born into it, and lucky enough to hold it tight and never let go.

* * *

Miles and miles of water was a sight I had only glimpsed a few times before. At the summer houses of friends, on day trips to Bemidji. But Minnesota's lakes don't often allow for the illusion of being more vast than they really are. Always present on the horizon are shorelines of trees and shrubs, quaint cabins and imposing luxury ones. You can't trick yourself into believing you're somewhere else—on a different continent or even on either coastline.

Lake Winnipeg was different.

From the moment my siblings and I leapt from the car and rounded our rental cabin, it was easy to forget we were only four hours from home, still standing on North American soil. The water that lapped against the rock-lined shore was a far cry from the deep blue of the ocean, but the sizeable waves that curled in the distance were still unlike any I'd seen. They went on forever. Grew as they moved inland. Mellowed out by the time they reached us where we came to stand at the very edge, shoes forgotten on the grass, the cold water curling over our bare feet.

We spent hours wading in the shallow end afterward, delighted to be donning swimsuits in September. This was unusual for a North Dakota valley family that couldn't afford a lake property or a timeshare in Mexico. All of it was unusual, really, because we couldn't afford much back then. This was the first vacation my family had ever

taken altogether. A quick drive across the border was tantamount to a tour of Europe.

That first day on Lake Winnipeg marked a nice one. The sun had illuminated the narrow streets lined with tiny, pastel-colored homes all around us. It looked like something from a Wes Anderson film. So much so that later, when the sky grew dark and we were settling down after dinnertime, we put on *The Grand Budapest Hotel*. I couldn't believe my luck in that moment, surrounded by the people I love most in the world, the ones who had worn me out with their ability to make me laugh harder than I thought possible, compete with a vigor I didn't know I possessed. For the longest time, anxiety would take root in my chest anytime I pondered my mom and dad's financial status. It wasn't something they spoke of with us, just something the four of us knew lingered in the air around them. But as that movie played and lit their faces, I saw how easily it evaporated. All it took was our presence.

The second day was much the same—warm, cloudless, breezy. The steep steps of rocks were becoming a nuisance to climb down, over, and back up every time we wanted to get in the water, so we made a short drive to a nearby sand beach. Quite a few other families were scattered about when we arrived, sprawled out on striped towels and patchwork quilts. Sand-consuming babies and toddlers sat shaded beneath large umbrellas.

Of the people enjoying the sun, only a couple were also enjoying the water. An older man and young boy threw a football back and forth at the very edge of it, their feet kicking up wet sand, weeds, and foam as they jogged to meet the ball at its target. It felt wrong that the lake should be so empty as we spread out our own towels

and stowed away our swimsuit coverups in the tote bag my mom brought. Autumn would fall heavy in just a few weeks, lowering the temperature of the already cool water until winter comes and ices it over. Should they not be luxuriating in it? Cataloging the feel of it on their skin, the contrast of the sun on the unsubmerged portions to the silkiness of everything below?

I knew what I wanted, so I chased it, my little brother on my heels.

We met the water with laughs of shock, forcing ourselves to move deeper and deeper despite the pins and needles and numbness that made the chill almost unbearable. In comparison to the rock-shore right off our cabin's yard, the beach was shallower with a more gradual incline to higher water. We thought it may be more pleasant there, the sun able to reach the lake floor and heat it up. We thought wrong.

But we kept going, knowing our bodies would adjust soon enough. We kept going as it reached our thighs, our hips, our waist, until we felt the urge to push off the bottom and truly swim. Our feet kicked and our arms cut at the weak current pushing the opposite way. Just for a minute, we raced, let our muscles contract and grow tired. We weren't experienced swimmers, but we fared well enough. However, we wore out fast. When we had swam enough that I could feel the exertion in my lungs, we stopped. And that was our first mistake.

We both immediately dropped our legs so we would be perpendicular to the surface, expecting to have gone far enough to float in place without touching the bottom. What we got instead was the searing pain of our soles being pierced and sliced open as we grazed a solid mass of something sharp. I attempted to move away and ended up skimming the top of my foot along it as well. I knew

I was bleeding. I knew by the look on my brother's face he must be bleeding too. In tandem, eyes locked on each other, we brought our knees up to our chests and focused our strength on paddling our arms to keep us up.

“Rocks?” he asked me, brow furrowed.

I shook my head. “Too small,” I replied.

In we swam to shore, breathing hard by the time we could stand once again, weary of what may be beneath our aching feet.

* * *

I learned what zebra mussels were that day as my mom poured hydrogen peroxide over our feet in the cabin's tub. *Usually, they attach themselves to solid objects*, my dad had said, scrolling through an article about their presence in Canada after we'd shown him our injuries on the beach. *I guess the sandbars in the lake became hardened enough for them.*

My brother and I watched the pink-tinged sterile liquid go down the drain, and laughed as we joked about the locals who must've thought we were insane as we made a beeline for the very thing they were avoiding. That feeling touched me once again—a lightness, the absence of heavy worries. There we were, barely able to walk on our poorly bandaged feet, knowing the scraps of pain we felt were worth it. Because it made us realize home is wherever we can be free of our anxieties together. Wherever we can afford to forget them. Wherever pain is inconsequential. There we were.

* * *

We went to museums and ice cream shops, played board games during an angry thunderstorm that lasted our final full day. And each day, I realized more and more that, as cliché as it sounds, money can't buy the experience. For so long, I had deluded myself into believing that someday the financial struggle would be worth it. That our family would come out on top. That brief trip to Canada proved it didn't matter whether or not we did.

The thin white scars on my feet, the portrait of us my mom still has hung on the wall from those sun-soaked days—they're worth more than the traveling we may have done in a different life, if money weren't an issue. Those five people are my family, community, and safety, the kind you don't take for granted. Stuck to me like a patch of zebra mussels on a sandbar.

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Photo by Julie Swanson, 2017

TALES OF TRAVEL

North Dakota

SARAH ROYER-STOLL

I leaned in to forgive today
Watched a triumphant chorus of birds
As they rose to one in the grey sky
Sunflower and corn fields stretched
Along the gentle ponds
As we curved along on the freeway

I learned to let go today
Watched a hawk suspended in the breeze
Wondered what he has seen and heard

I leaned into forgiveness
Leaves changing brilliant colors
As fall brings its lessons
Of how change allows us
To see beauty in the ending of things

TALES OF TRAVEL

The Slow Quest for Trouble

CHANCE LASHER

During the first year of Covid-19, I became a subterranean goblin. I spent the summer holed up in my room, feverishly writing a fantasy novel. I had the luxury of living with my parents while the world churned in chaos, and I partook by screaming at my computer screen in vicarious, alienated anger. When that wasn't enough, I burned off my anxiety by trudging down our dead-end road. Old farm fields unsown in many years made the scenery of my temporary peace. I stuck to that road and no other.

I took the fall semester of college off, and the next spring too. I didn't have a job. All I wanted was to finish my book, and when I did, I realized it was all crap. I'd have to do heavy editing.

So, I stirred the crap, but no matter which way I turned it, it still looked like crap.

When the new year faded quietly in, my father, who couldn't sit still, had a proposition for me. Get a job or work on the thousand footers

with him—freighter ships that sail on the great lakes. It would be peak winter work when ships are harbored. We would travel port to port, month to month, ordering parts and fixing engines.

No way in hell was I going on the thousand-footers. The last time I was I had smacked my head at least three times on the low ceilings and slipped on the steep, narrow stairwells that climb the guts of those iron beasts. The stink of diesel and grease clogged the air.

I preferred my cave but didn't have much choice. I scrambled through online job postings and soon applied to a non-profit that worked with people with disabilities. I got the job. I'd be a job coach—helping folks at their worksites, participating in community events, and driving them from place to place.

That meant leaving my cave and driving into the magical redbrick city of Duluth—a misty figment of my past, where Mom would drive us kids to for doctor's appointments. She'd drive down the steep highway and whizz past the vista of hill-bound houses and the St. Louis River estuary on the worming highway of incomprehensible patterns eventually into the cramped city streets and buildings from old times, times never known to the middle school age kid peeking out the windows.

Even as an adult, the closest I'd ventured to Duluth was to UMD before I'd turn tail. Or, in some brief spurt, I'd ride along for an errand, never really paying attention to my surroundings. Now that I needed to drive for my job, I feared the city. I had nightmares of bridges without guardrails, slick and treacherous, and I'd skid off the side and plunge to a horrible death in Lake Superior below while the choir sang of the Edmund Fitzgerald.

I started to dread my first day.

* * *

When the work started in earnest, I was quickly overwhelmed by the actual job—caring for people with special needs. I had to learn who these people were, what they liked and didn't like, and what places they liked to go to. Some were very chill, withdrawn, and easy to work with. Others were outgoing, curious, and cantankerous, and challenged me in many ways. The idea of caring for someone was stressful enough. On top of that, I'd have to drive that stranger to a city I'd never driven in myself.

It was a white-knuckled affair. I tried to memorize which roads led where, googled the best routes, planned around construction, endured parking downtown with a truck, and drove like an old lady.

I was about as personable as dead fish after rotting a year in Covid. Small talk was a mountain. But the folks I worked with didn't care about my awkwardness, or for that matter, most social norms. They walked up to anybody and said hello, asked uncomfortable questions, and did uncomfortable things.

One individual, whom I shall name "Trouble", was fond of holding his hand out to strangers and saying, "Pull my finger! Pull my stinky finger!"

I'd hunch my shoulders, and quietly plead with the person until they pulled away. I was embarrassed, but by what exactly I couldn't say. It wasn't me holding out my finger for a fart joke. I was supposed to be in the driver's seat, literally, but instead, I felt tugged around.

The roads stymied me still—foiled by a wrong turn, unable to find

a parking spot, and ending up late to a community class. I had lived near Duluth all my life and didn't even know its main roads? Duluth isn't even a real city, a big city like Minneapolis, like New York. If I couldn't do this, how could I do anything?

But I am a shark-eyed dog with a bone, for better or worse. I rolled with the proverbial punches. Gently, I peeled folks away from awkward situations, trying various techniques with varying results. When my pre-planned routes collapsed after a failed turn, I improvised a route. Once, an individual I worked with said "You could have turned there," minutes after I missed the most direct route.

I learned to laugh at my mistakes and move on.

I visited the Aquarium, which I hadn't been to since I was actually goblin-height. The Skywalk, through dirty walkways between odd shops and old downtown buildings. The Depot, steam locomotives, railroad documents, and artifacts of the 1800s are set over crooked stone walkways. The Miller Hill Mall, blanched into a ghost by the press of the pandemic.

Slowly, these places became familiar. I optimized my routes and burned them into memory. I grew thicker skin for awkward social situations. Most strangers are indifferent to Trouble's approaches, though many times we wandered into pleasant conversations. Trouble knew so and so from way back when he was in grade school, and so and so knew him from a friend of a friend. Rough-looking strangers would melt into a warm exchange. I found a strange joy in these random encounters.

* * *

I finally returned to the public library after ten years. It was smaller

than I remembered, but then everything is bigger to a kid. I ordered a library card, browsed the fantasy section, and reminded myself the world contains more books than I could ever read. But a writer needs his books, no matter how long it takes to find them.

I tossed my Covid-19 novel in the digital shitter. It was a bad book—too fixated on an underground temple where no one had lived for years. I'm writing a different novel, about wolves, ravens, and a girl who leaves her quiet village to save her best friend.

This goblin isn't sunblind any longer, and some days, he straps on his boots and hikes past the foot trails of his cave, slowly, pushing the boundaries of his old maps.

Still, I'm mostly a homebody. I'm not perfect, nor is every encounter, job or not, magically different now. The tight ball of anxiety has unwound slightly. Social interactions are not white-knuckled brawls even I falter through them, and the roads are not cosmically designed to torture me even if I despise them. Without a little trouble to set me on edge, I wouldn't have left my goblin cave, and without job coaching, I wouldn't have learned that trouble was good for me.

TALES OF TRAVEL

Aspen Music Festival

KONNIE ELLIS

Lounging on the lawn
in the cool blue breeze beneath the aspen grove a woman in a canvas
chair knits
and pearls a pale pink scarf
while Sarah Chang dances with Vivaldi
and the trees huddle with small green ears.

I watch an audience of clouds
above the music tent
and stir take-out coffee in a paper cup with a violin.

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Photo by Julie Swanson, 2018

TALES OF TRAVEL

Riding the Dog

GAIL JOHNEJACK

The young, black man sitting across from me, and the old, white nun in full habit a few seats down from me, were engaged in a fascinating conversation. It was just the three of us and I sat quietly, trying to be inconspicuous. The orange and mint green, hard, plastic chairs facing each other were uncomfortable and the air was stale, but the conversation! I'd never heard anything like it in my young, sheltered life. I never imagined that there could even be such conversations.

"I went to see my girlfriend today at the hospital. She just had our baby!" said T., excitedly.

The nun was unfazed.

"How is she? Did everything go alright?"

"Everything went fine! I was just so happy to go see her, especially since it is almost Christmas," answered T.

The florescent ceiling bulbs and the few scattered strings of flashing

Christmas lights glowed in the waiting area while the dark loitered outside the big windows where it was cold and snowy. A small, fake Christmas tree stood in the corner. It was a dry cleaning business that doubled as the Greyhound bus station, with T. manning both at 10:30 p.m.

I listened to wide ranging topics, including God and religion. The conversation was peaceful and filled with curiosity. The nun did not seem to judge the young man for his pregnant girlfriend. She knew of the world. She was genuinely interested in him and asked questions. She showed care and compassion. I wondered if kindness was her middle name.

And T.? Well, he was a revelation for me. I had seen black people, but in all my 17 years, I don't think that I had ever had the opportunity to listen to or talk with a black person. My religiously sheltered youth in my white hometown provided little opportunity.

I sat quietly, not saying anything. So, T.'s sudden gaze and his question took me by complete surprise.

“Are you going to be a nun, too?”

“Um, no. Um, I don't know her. We aren't traveling together.” That's all I could get out. Plus, I doubt that I would tell him that I was, well, Lutheran, and that Lutherans and Catholics were diametrically opposed and that I was taught that a marriage between the two was considered a mixed marriage.

No, the nun and I were only traveling companions waiting out a several-hour bus layover in Dixon, Illinois. We were the only two heading on into the blackness toward Iowa and Nebraska, where I would visit my sister.

It was 1978 when I stumbled upon these two people in the night. A nun and a person with black skin. An unwed pregnancy that wasn't a sinful thing. They spoke words about things that were unspoken in my world. Greyhound had opened the door to an unknown universe, and I stepped in.

We said goodbye to T. and re-boarded the bus. I tried to sleep across two seats, but eventually I just stared out the window. We drove into the cold, dark prairie scattered with flickering, barely visible farmhouse lights. There were stops at parking lots and diners. Lone cars waited, engines running, exhaust floating through the falling snow as it glistened in the glow of streetlights. There were quick hugs, suitcases put below and bags with gifts peeking out the top. Greyhound was connecting America.

Each time the bus approached a new town, there was the voice, the driver saying, "Five minutes. Podunk, Iowa, in five minutes." Then, "Now arriving in Podunk, Iowa. Please collect all of your belongings. And thanks for going Greyhound." Thanks, thanks, thanks for going Greyhound echoed in my consciousness as I drifted in and out of sleep. It still rattles around in my head today.

A Greyhound bus is a silver cylinder barreling down the highway. It is a way to get from one place to another cheaply. It connects small, rural communities with larger cities, and it is sometimes the only way that people without cars can get where they need to go. It has attracted job seekers, adventurers, families and people looking for escape.

Greyhound had its humble beginnings in 1914, when a Swede named Alan Wickman started transporting miners in his touring car from Hibbing, Minnesota, to the nearby mine in Alice for 15 cents a

ride. By 1925, Wickman was buying and selling small bus companies and connecting them with trains to have further reach. Someone thought that the silver bus going by reminded them of a greyhound dog racing past, and so the name. Stories of “riding the dog” have become part of Americana: the history, culture, and folklore of our country.

The company grew and, “In 1930, company headquarters relocated from sleepy Duluth, Minnesota, to wide-awake Chicago.” From the 1930s to the ’50s, advertising told people that Greyhound was the most exciting way to see our amazing country. It inspired songs like “Love on a Greyhound Bus.” The 1934 movie *It Happened One Night* features a bus ride from Florida to New York with Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert. It was a huge hit. World War II servicemen were transported all over the country by bus, and women replaced men as drivers during that time. The company designed new buses, including the 1954 Scenic Cruiser, with bathrooms in the back.

During the 1960s, Freedom Riders took to the buses. The Freedom bus that was burned by a Ku Klux Klan mob in 1961 near Anniston, Alabama, was a Greyhound. After the Civil Rights Act was passed, Greyhound quit requiring black Americans to move to the back of the bus when they crossed south of the Mason-Dixon line. The company reached out to improve black ridership, carrying them to jobs in the North and visits to family in the South. The bus drivers were not always supportive of the riders. Attorney General Robert Kennedy had to call Greyhound at one point and demand that they find a driver for a route.

Through all of this, hundreds of songs mentioned Greyhound rides.

Chuck Berry, Billy Joel, Bruce Springsteen, Harry Chapin, Diana Ross. And there is the famous “America” by Simon and Garfunkel.

Laughing on the bus
Playing games with the faces
She said the man in the gabardine suit was a spy
I said “Be careful, his bowtie is really a camera”

That song takes me back every time.

I am amazed by this new-found Greyhound knowledge. I thought my experiences on the bus were only my own, like I was the only one having them. It turns out that I was just one of thousands who got on the bus and met people, found something, did something, ended up somewhere that wasn't always the place or state of mind that we were expecting. My bus trips were part of a national experience.

It was the fall of 1981. I was barely 20 and was transferring to Utah State University in Logan, Utah. It was another Greyhound journey for me, from Wisconsin to Chicago and across I-80 to Salt Lake City, then north to Logan. I had never been there before. It would be brand new.

“Five minutes. Cheyenne, Wyoming, in five minutes. And thanks, for going Greyhound.”

It was 11:00 p.m. and they were going to take a few hours to clean the bus before continuing. Re-boarding would be at 2:00 a.m. for a 2:30 departure. There I was, at another fascinating bus station in the middle of the night.

The place was glaringly bright and not quiet. There were families with running, noisy, little kids and there were lone travelers. Young,

young girls in makeup, short shorts, cowboy boots, and cowboy hats with braids flowing out, leaned lazily in a row against wall lockers. Are they hookers, I wondered? I had grown up a little bit since my experience in Dixon, but these young women were way outside of my comfort zone.

The attached diner was full of clanking dishes and the low rumbling of truckers talking while eating slices of pie and drinking coffee. There was not a single empty chair or piece of wall space. People and luggage were everywhere. It was loud, chaotic, and overwhelming. I stood near the boarding door, leaning on the doorjamb with my carry-on bag and pillow, watching and hoping that I would have a seat to myself.

Finally, it came time to board. I knew they re-boarded previous riders first, so I was right there and ready. I snagged a spot towards the front, put my pillow on the window seat and sat by the aisle. As the waiting area slowly poured its contents into the bus, I realized I would have to share.

A young man asked if he could sit with me. I shuffled my pillow and moved over. He sat down, arranged himself and let out a deep sigh. "Thank God," he said. "You were the only normal looking person in the whole place." Neither of us had known what to make of it.

His name was Rick, and we struck up a conversation. He was in college in Florida, studying forestry. I was going to school in Utah to study hydrology. We had a natural resource thing in common. Why was he on a bus in Wyoming? I don't remember. We talked through the night and into the beautiful, slow sunrise that illuminated the rolling, grey-brown earth in golden light.

Right before we arrived at the other end of the state at 8:00 a.m., he asked the big question that I have gotten over and over again through my whole life. “You are going out to Utah all by yourself? Aren’t you scared?”

I paused. “No,” I responded slowly. “I’ve gone places before.”

Mostly, I was telling the truth.

Rick got off in Green River and for just a moment, I felt how “Love on a Greyhound” could actually be a thing.

I continued on until the bus deposited me at a street corner in Logan. A cab drove me up the hill to campus and Greaves Hall. I spent that year living with three black women. We were the only non-Mormons in the building, all tucked in together in one little apartment. I dated a Muslim and then a cute Hispanic guy who eventually broke my heart. I played softball with *Catholics*.

I partied harder in Utah than in Wisconsin because, well, us non-Mormons and foreign students subconsciously decided that somebody needed to make up for lost time. So dancing to Michael Jackson’s new album *Thriller* at parties at the so-called Bolivian Embassy was a thing, especially for me, whose high school had not allowed dancing.

I was raised in a family that was able to travel. I don’t remember a three-day weekend that we weren’t camping. Every summer we were off for two to three weeks, somewhere, anywhere. My parents modeled hard work, curiosity, and adventure by tent camping and cooking our way across the country with four kids in a van. I learned

that it was okay to be uncomfortable. I learned to read maps and that I could do hard things.

I did not recognize it at the time, but now I see the contradiction. My childhood was torn between enjoying the world and being told to be afraid because the world would eventually lead me to, well, you know where. I could not reconcile the two. My church school snow globe was beautiful, also confining and guilt-ridden. It developed cracks that gradually spread until the whole thing shattered. After some time, I carefully shook off and slowly walked away.

So, thank you Mom and Dad, for taking me places when I was young and helping me realize, if not fully understand, that there is more than one way to live and that there are people to meet and adventures to be had. You put me on that Greyhound bus to Nebraska, my first solo venture into the world outside of family and religion, and I am grateful.

Then, thank *you*, Greyhound, for opening your doors and transporting me, not just to new places, but to new people and experiences. To growth and understanding. To a life filled with curiosity, adventure, and joy.

I didn't set out to find "America." But find it, I did. And, I found myself.

What I Learned from Three Weeks on Another Continent

MATTHEW JAMES

Having lived in the Netherlands for nearly a decade, I thought this call for travel writing would be an interesting opportunity to reflect on what my time in a foreign country has taught me.

I remember all the small things that surprised me when I first visited the Netherlands as an exchange student over 20 years ago. How the roads had the traffic lights before the intersection instead of across from it, so I couldn't see when the light turned green if I inched too far forward, which I did a lot. How you needed to put a coin into a shopping cart to unlock the chain that linked it to the next shopping cart and would only get the coin back when you reconnected the cart, a system that kept shopping carts from being scattered all over the place. The quietness of all the shops being closed on Sundays.

I don't go too far forward at the traffic lights anymore, all the shopping carts come with plastic coins because people have stopped carrying change, and most shops are open on Sundays now. There

must still be a lot of differences, but I don't know if I see so many of them anymore. When people from the U.S. visit and I need to plan where to take them, I have to remember which places I used to find so fascinating. Just two days ago, I got a letter from immigration services saying the king has approved my dual citizenship request and I should wait for an invitation from city hall for a formal ceremony. I don't think I can consider being in the Netherlands traveling anymore. I think I'm just at home, even if it doesn't always feel exactly that way.

If I'm going to take the prompt seriously, I should write about what I learned the last time I really traveled, and that would be the trip that I took this summer to Duluth, Minnesota, the place where I grew up.

I left Minnesota at the age of 13 after my parent's had a messy divorce that left me estranged from my father and his entire side of the family, and with a rather complicated relationship with my sister after she found herself forced to choose sides. I had been working to re-establish a relationship with my father and my extended family over the past several years. This trip was my first time back in Duluth in 14 years and my first time staying with family there in 30 years. Over three weeks, I learned a good number of things. I've done my best to articulate those here without any particular concern for the logic of the order.

The first time I returned to Duluth was when I was in college. I stayed in my old home, with a friend who still lived on the ground floor of the duplex where I grew up. I had the experience then that many people do when going back to a childhood home; everything seemed so much smaller than I remembered. This time, I returned after having lived in the Netherlands for eight years. Most people

don't have yards here, the city streets are often one lane wide, and houses and apartments, including my own, are small and narrow. Everything about the neighborhood where I grew up seemed enormous.

The six steps alongside my childhood home are no longer there, replaced by some small shrubs. When my father built them, my sister and I, ages seven and five, pressed our hands' side by side into the wet concrete of the third step. I felt sad to see that step gone, as I had thought of it as a permanent reminder of when our hands were once so often near each other.

The two trees in my old yard that I used to climb had both been removed; the porch no longer had the divider that we dared each other to jump over; the city moved underground the open creek in the alley across the street where I would smash open the ice in the winters with a friend who was Latino and Native American, aspects of his identity that I only recognized much later; a scary Doberman no longer barked when I approached the white picket fence of the house on the corner.

A very small portion of an enormous boulder is still sticking out from the hilly slope of my old backyard, threatening the blades of any lawnmower; a single pole of the four that anchored the clotheslines where my mother hung our laundry to dry is still standing, its five hooks without ropes; my name is still faintly etched into the brick next to my old front door; the hilly vacant lot at the end of the block where the house burned down when I was eight after a teenager fell asleep while studying with a candle burning (but really we all knew he was smoking) is still vacant and seemed ready for sledding with the first snow; the neighbors who had the scary Doberman still live

on the corner and still remember taking me for my first visit to the Minnesota State Fair.

My dad still makes the same dad jokes.

I biked a lot as a kid and I still do in the Netherlands, where biking is a standard form of transportation. I grew up in the East Hillside and would often go on day-long bike rides that would cover absurdly short distances. I must have stopped a lot. I'd bike to the mall. I'd bike down to the lake. I'd bike east to Hawk's Ridge or up the hill to the edge of my known universe, the Piggly Wiggly in Woodland. But going west, I would never go past the Point of Rocks. It wasn't any sort of rule or even a conscious decision. We only knew one family that lived in that direction, in an isolated house just outside of Morgan Park, and the drive felt so long that everything west of the rocks seemed completely separate from my experience. I'd bike the steepest hills, but crossing Mesabi Avenue never occurred to me. That whole part of town just felt like a different city that had nothing to do with me. During this summer trip, I wanted to bike the length of Duluth to broaden my sense of the city. I started on the far eastern edge of town by the Lester River in the early morning and must have stopped a lot because the sun was just beginning to set when I crossed the Point of Rocks. On the other side, I biked down a residential street built up on the side of the hill lined with rundown houses from the late 19th century. The concrete steps leading up to the houses had thin iron pipe railings. It looked and felt exactly like the block that I had grown up on. It's hard to describe what a shock this was to me. As I approached the Point of Rocks, I had the same sense of anticipation that I feel stepping out of the airport in a country I'm visiting for the very first time. But instead of finding myself in an unfamiliar land, I seemed to be in the neighborhood where I grew up. This probably

shouldn't have been a surprise. I wasn't in another country. I was three miles from my childhood home. The houses looked like those on my block because they were almost certainly built by the same developer. What I had conceived of as being so completely other was probably the most similar place to my childhood neighborhood on the entire planet. I felt a little uncomfortable with that realization. It forced me to wonder what else I might be putting in the category of other without having the slightest idea that belongs in the category of ridiculously similar.

I learned that no matter how hard my friend from seventh grade insists that entering a Canal Park liquor store barefoot is no big deal, if the clerk notices, he will go from friendly to agro almost instantly.

One of the few friends that I could talk about my family situation with as a kid is someone that I can still talk about my family situation with as an adult. Sitting in the living room with her children, her two older sisters, and her mother, listening to their stories, I learned what a family that has stuck together through differences and difficulties looks like.

As a kid, I remember spending time with my younger cousin at our grandmother's house. Two days into my stay with my cousin, I learned that she had no memories of me, which led me to think that it was very generous of her to let a stranger stay in her house, even if that stranger is family. She was close to our grandmother before she passed. She now has a painting by a renowned Anishinaabe artist that hung in our grandmother's living room that I have no memory of.

Within the boundaries of the Fond Du Lac reservation, I saw the one-room schoolhouse where my grandmother went to elementary

school. I wished I had had the opportunity to ask her about her childhood.

I visited the cemetery where our family plot is. I had been there once with my grandmother and was able to walk right to the wooden corner that had the large stone with my last name. As a child, I certainly recognized the name but the long-dead people buried around the stone were a complete abstraction to me. One of the projects I worked on as part of reconnecting with my family was digitizing and organizing the photos of my 98-year-old great-aunt. This time in visiting the cemetery, the names meant something to me.

My great-aunt asked me to check if the house where she and my grandfather grew up still has the stone fireplace in the backyard that was built by her father, a World War I veteran who took me to Disneyland when I was seven and he was 90. Trying to answer her question led to a tour of the house. The fireplace is still there. The coal room is now a sauna.

I learned I'll buy just about anything Duluth related. A t-shirt with D·U·L·U·T·H in the Friends font? Sure, why not? How often am I back here?

Somewhere in the middle of my trip, when I called at night hours after I said I would be back and my dad drove out and picked me up from a rather inconvenient location, I learned he wasn't going to express being upset with me, even in a situation where it would have been entirely appropriate.

I have a U.S. driver's license but not a Dutch one, and most people I know here don't own a car. Outside of this trip, I was only in a

car twice last year. Perhaps because of how much I liked to repeat this anecdote, perhaps simply because he worked for years as a professional truck driver, my father was always gently pushing for me to be the one driving when we were in the car together. I suppose that shows some trust because I'm a terrible driver. At the end of my trip, on the way down to the airport, I agreed to drive if we could go to downtown Hinckley after getting cinnamon rolls from Tobies. I made this request because all I had ever known of Hinckley was Tobies. We went, and I bought a St. Scholastica pennant for a dollar at a rather nice secondhand shop. And I learned there was more to Hinckley than Tobies. I think that one sentence might be the best summary of the difference between my child and adult understanding of Minnesota.

I learned that the large buffalo sculpture on I-35 just south of Duluth is there to attract attention to some restaurant and campground called the Buffalo House and not just some randomly placed buffalo art.

My father grew up in Cloquet and still lives there. We biked around town together and he showed me the places where he had lived as a child. And then he showed me the house that he and my mother had made an offer on before I was born. It was accepted. They didn't buy it because the other more expensive house they had wanted, the one that I grew up in, agreed to lower the price. I had never heard this story and hearing it while in front of this other house made an impression on me. It was a brick duplex similar to one in which I was raised, but instead of a back balcony with a view of Lake Superior, it had a front window that faced a giant lumber plant. Between the house and the factory was a set of active train tracks. I came back to this neighborhood a few days later on a warm evening with a sky full of dark clouds, trying to imagine what this other life would have

been like. My grandmother within easy walking distance. Walking across the bridge to Dunlap Island to swim in the St. Louis River, just like my great-aunt did as a kid in the 1930s. Hearing the whistle from the trains instead of the horns from the boats and the bridge. A girl my same age lived in the duplex where I actually grew up. We once participated in a study at UMD of kids that have a best friend of a different gender. We reconnected in college when she was an English major at UMD. We would send e-mails to each other of events we had entirely invented just to see if we could write a convincing short story. She had a friend who lived just up the hill who is now the person that I'm closest to in Duluth. These people seem like a permanent, inevitable part of my life, but if the person who sold my childhood home to my parents had decided to wait for a better offer, they would be strangers. I would be looking up other people on this trip, Cloquet people. I understand that all of my own choices open up one future and close off many others. But I hadn't considered all of the rather arbitrary decisions my parents had made before I was born and how those ended up shaping my identity. I probably should have, as my very existence is due to an improbable sequence of events. My parents met when my mother dialed a wrong number. She asked if Diane was there and my dad's roommate said, "Yeah, she's right here," and handed the phone to my future father.

I didn't realize that my father was the one with our old family photos, a box full of pictures that I had forgotten or never seen. The Sears portrait studio photo of us all together in our best terrible clothes; a photo of my mom and sister, estranged for nearly 30 years now, in front of a stage wearing matching pastel flower dresses; my parents smiling with their arms around each other on a 1970s couch, a winter blanket that I now own behind them; me, never really a baseball fan that I can recall, wearing at least five different Minnesota Twins

shirts; a photo my dad took as evidence when he drove south during an unsuccessful attempt to visit us after the divorce, the angry face of my former step-father illuminated by a harsh flash outside of the pizza place where my sister worked. I wasn't there when that picture was taken, but I still have the fear imprinted upon me from when my step-father came home shortly after and took his loaded sawed-off shotgun out of the closet.

I learned that my father went through two painful divorces in his life: his parents' and his own.

While grocery shopping with my father for the first time in 30 years, I learned that Super One has on its music playlist the Mike + the Mechanics song "The Living Years."

I still enjoy exploring the older cities of the Netherlands. There are car-oriented suburbs like everywhere else, but there are also so many of these old car-free city centers that started around a central church and expanded into a densely interconnected maze of streets with no particular logic. The rational grid planning of the United States has some advantages, but I like places where the density and complexity mean I am continuously surprised by what comes next, even if I have been there many times before. I often wondered what it would be like to grow up in one of these places, having it as a space to explore. This summer, I visited the space my mother had rented by the VenDen at UMD and while walking around the labyrinth of the campus' interconnected buildings, I realized that I had the exact same feeling as my favorite old Dutch cities: I knew every turn I needed to take, but I only knew it when I saw it. And then it came to me that UMD started with a couple of main buildings and expanded over time into a densely interconnected network of hallways with no

particular logic. And I loved exploring this maze of hallways as a kid while my mom was working. I did grow up in one of these places, I just hadn't realized it.

There's nothing Dutch about Old Dutch Cheddar Cheese Popcorn. Not now, not historically.

My father is still good friends with a man I remember well from my childhood because he owned Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark on LaserDisc. Both the movie and the technology made quite an impression on me and I have a vivid memory of watching the final scene of the film with my family in his basement entertainment room. We spent time at his cabin this summer, where we talked about, among other things, how he never owned Raiders of the Lost Ark or a LaserDisc player. We agreed to disagree on those points. His cabin is on the edge of a small lake renamed Big Lake by European settlers. When talking with my dad over the past couple of years during the summer, he has often been at this cabin, which has a wooden floating diving platform an easy swim from the shore. While standing out on this platform getting ready to dive into the lake for the first time, I suddenly realized how easily this could be a nostalgic memory instead of a new experience. If the visitation agreement after the divorce had been held to, if my sister and I had spent six weeks every summer in Minnesota, this lake would be where we would have swum. With the sun behind me, my shadow moved across the water just below me, and I could see two things at once: a past where I would have dove off of this platform summer after summer over the years and the present where I was now, in my middle age, diving for the first time. Those past summers were gone, but right now I was visiting my dad for the summer, going for a swim at his friend's cabin. And when I dove into the water through my own shadow, I

tried to hold both of those ideas at the same time: what might have been and what was.

When driving past an open garage, I saw two enormous flags against the back wall. One said “Trump for President” and the other said “F**K Biden” with the U.S. flag in the space of the U and the C. I learned that the national division that I had seen from afar from following U.S. news was just as present in northern Minnesota. And in seeing those flags, I felt a sense of sadness, not only because of the ideas that I assumed those flags represented, but because I grew up in a largely Republican family and remembered nothing of this hostility, and wondered if I still knew anything about this place, or if I had just been away too long and everything was different now.

When I was a kid, we’d go down to the outdoor stage in front of the Duluth Public Library for big band concerts on summer nights. During the final song of the concert, a red-haired woman who played saxophone would blow bubbles out into the crowd. I loved chasing after the bubbles, but just as much, I loved the woman for blowing them. I knew I would be in a lot of trouble if I brought my own bubble set down there and used it while they were playing, but somehow this woman was getting away with it, and it made everything better. This summer, my dad had parked near the library when picking me up from the train museum and we caught the last 15 minutes of an outdoor concert. We found a couple of free seats in the back where we couldn’t see particularly well. The moment that I heard the saxophone play I knew that the bubble woman was there. There were no bubbles, so at the end of the concert, I very nervously approached hoping my questions would not sound too odd if it was not her. It was and I was able to articulate to her what I could not as a child: what she had meant to me. In leaving the concert,

I felt quite happy about this chance encounter with someone from my childhood. I left with the sense that I still knew this place, that I had been away too long, but these small points of connection and continuity were still there waiting to be found.

The parents of my best friend from fifth grade still sit out on the porch during the summer and drink lemonade that tastes just as good as when I was a kid.

Duluth, as the place where I grew up and where my immediate family, for all of our imperfections, somehow managed to co-exist for the early years of my life, has always had significance for me. In returning, I didn't know if I would experience a sense of remoteness, where certain places only served as reminders of distant memories, or if I would be returning to a place where I still felt a sense of connection. The answer, I learned, was a bit of both. I jumped off the sand dune on Park Point that I always loved to jump off of as a kid and that rather impossibly still had the exact same shape, but I didn't really enjoy doing it. A small waterfall along Chester Creek remains one of my favorite places in the world. My aunt recently moved to the same street where I grew up, just on the other side of the creek, which makes my old neighborhood still feel a bit like my neighborhood. I still had connections to the place, but they were so much thinner, as I expected after a 30-year absence.

I always thought that I had a rather clear and reliable memory of my time in Minnesota, but in walking around my old neighborhood with a childhood friend, she pointed at house after house of old classmates and so often not only did I not remember the house, I didn't remember the classmate. This is something that I have noticed with my father, and with my sister. We remember the years when

we were together, but we were separated for so long that we have our own unique sets of specific memories. Sharing a past seems to require a continuous sharing of the stories from that past. In returning to Minnesota, different locations brought back clear memories, but those memories were mine alone. I still knew some people and some people still knew me, but what we knew of each other was not entirely in alignment.

I met some new people and some people that I had only interacted with online. I made some new memories with my family that have already since been retold as stories on the Whatsapp group we created. My sense of belonging was far less than when I left 30 years ago, but far more than I expected. I don't know what happens next. I don't know if the passage of time will inevitably continue to diminish whatever remaining connections I still have even as I work on maintaining specific relationships from afar. I don't know if returning for a second time next year can possibly match the excitement of returning after such a long absence. Or if excitement is even relevant, and return visits will be more rewarding as I develop stronger relationships with my family. The only way to know is to go back again, but I suppose that's the nature of traveling. As soon as you return, you start thinking about the next trip.