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## **Dreaming of Faraway Places**

*"The Open Road. The great home of the soul is the open road. Not heaven, not paradise. Not "above".  
Not even "within". It is a wayfarer down the road."*

D.H. Lawrence

It is that perfect time of the year when the gloom and chilling early darkness gives way to crisp, cool, sunshine teasers. It is a time of burning leaves and covered gas grills, football crunches with phony southern accents and far flung dreams. It is the time of year when I like to sit in an easy chair, with the first of the seasons roaring fires, a steaming mug of green tea in hand and the long sleeve Eddie Bauer broken out of the closet. It is a time to dream of faraway places.

I have those dreams just like everyone else. My travel is tempered by the limits of those with whom I share my travels. You can take a group to the furthest of the Greek Islands but it would be difficult to get a group of travelers to pay for a visit to Yemen. Yet Yemen is where I would like to go. Tahiti is paradise and I will go again, but where I really want to go is Ulan Bator in Mongolia.

My life is such that whenever I have the opportunity to travel I travel with a group of people, many of whom are friends, some of whom become friends. If someone wants to join our group from "the glass is half empty" side of the population, I usually try to convince them that the tour is sold out.

I tell you that I dream of faraway places because I know you do as well. There is someplace where only a few of us have gone – it is out there, beyond the line drawn in the sand, beyond the Citicorp branch and the locally-owned McDonald's franchise. It is the place where the pavement ends, beyond the last Ramada Inn. The sign might just say "No gas for 3,000 miles".

I've been out there a few times and a few of those times I've shared with you. Getting lost in the souks of Tunisia, rushing to the assistance of a young blond woman who was being dragged down the street by a local simply because she had blond hair.

I remember the streets of Bombay at night as I followed a squad of policeman whose duty it was to gather up bodies in the streets. They were placed in bags and deposited in the backs of green wagons. The air smelled of incense and a soft, polluted fog covered the ground and encircled the yellow bulbs in the policeman's large flashlights.

Once in Delhi I stumbled into a funeral observance at the very moment that the deceased was set ablaze. The mourners turned to stare at me, ever so gently and then went back to crying. I backpedaled my way back around the fence, but I was young and I had no sense that I was intruding.

I walked into a coffeehouse in the suburbs of Ho Chi Minh City because two Viet Cong Generals were said to run the place. And once in Russia, I had to kick in a door to help a young student depart a locked hospital room where he was

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being held against his will because he had a cold and they thought it might be cholera. The Intourist official who waited outside told me it would be all right “you’re with me, don’t worry”, she said. I was young, far too young for the responsibilities I had taken on, so I believed her.

But my travels are still rather insignificant. I was raised to believe that travel was something you did to broaden your horizons. On my first trip to Europe I got by with about three hours of sleep each night. I carried a can of Dr. Scholl’s pads and I kept applying fresh blister pads to my swollen toes. I kept walking, and I kept remembering. I tried to see it all and I kept telling myself to remember it all. On my very first trip, I made the supreme discovery. My father was wrong. It wasn’t all the same. Each and every country in Europe was different. They spoke many languages and the French and the Irish might just as well have come from different planets.

One day I was reading a Playboy interview with the comedian, Mel Brooks. Perhaps this is a little before your time, but Mel Brooks wrote for something called Your Show of Shows with Sid Caesar. Anyway, the interviewer asked Mel how he liked Europe and Mel responded that he liked it so much “I carry a picture of it around in my wallet”. And that’s what I wanted to do. I wanted to carry Europe around in my head. So I started going over as often as I could.

I was going to Graduate School in Washington D.C, and teaching at a boarding school in Virginia. Most of the other teachers at our school couldn’t wait to go camping in Yosemite, or skiing in Colorado. But I would always go to Europe. They could never figure out how I did it on my income but I’m convinced that my trips were less expensive than theirs. I stayed in youth hostels all over Europe. It’s kind of funny how life is. Not too long ago I was invited to meet with the owner of Villa D’Este, perhaps Europe’s best resort, located on Lake Como. The concierge is an acquaintance and I suppose they’d give me a deal if I asked to spend a few nights. But back then I stayed at the Lake Como hostel, one of the most primitive in Europe. I remember being locked out because I missed curfew by three minutes so I slept in a doorway across the street with a half-liter of water and several alley cats. I had seventy dollars in traveler’s checks and my plane ticket home.

I flew Icelandic in those days, big white Boeing 707’s that would lumber over to Reykjavik for a shot at duty free before proceeding on to Luxembourg. I didn’t eat much back then and I certainly exhibited few gourmet tendencies. I ate store bought meals and carried my provisions in the largest flap pocket of my backpack. I loved the rails and the tiny compartments holding six souls and I considered any train trip in Europe a success if I could just get a seat by the window. Eating the plainest ham and cheese sandwich with real European orange soda as the villages in Southern France, or Spain, or Italy, passed by – those were my most memorable meals. And I think that even today, I would gladly give up a Charlie Trotter for one of those sandwiches.

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We all share the memories of our earliest travels and now, when time and circumstance tries to strangle our urges like some invisible net, we still dream of faraway places.

There are lots of ways to do it but I want to leave you with a toll-free suggestion. When I find one of the few who is willing to break away from the mundane, someone ready to go past the point where the road ends and clean sheets are no longer available, I often mention a company called Mountain Sobek Travel. They've been the world's leading adventure travel operator for the past thirty years and I like to keep their current brochure by my easy chair. I save it for the first real snowfall of the year. Call them at 1-888 – 687 – 6235. Press 2 after they answer and order your brochure. You can book any trip with them directly, but you'll do better using an agent. The important thing is to get the brochure, all 163 pages of it, in your hands before the first snowfall. Then you'll know what I mean. Many of us have been tourists – but only a precious few of us will become travelers.

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