

If anyone wishes to be a follower of mine, he must leave self behind. He must take up his cross and come with me. Whoever cares for his own safety is lost but if a man will let himself be lost for my sake, he will find his true self. What will a man gain by winning the whole world, at the price of his true self?"

No Reservations, by S.W. An Chora

Imprisoned by my own curiosity. I felt as if I was looking up through trees that encircled my view, staring at the many branches and the fruits suspended beyond my grasp. I knew I could no longer be satisfied simply to lie here on my back, closing my eyes and dreaming of things out of my reach. I wanted to touch and longed to taste those fruits. I wanted to know where the river was flowing. I wanted to let loose the chain I had bound myself in. As far back as I can remember, I've woken from dreams where I was flying through air above my childhood home. I knew the sound of the air rushing past my ears, the view from above the trees and the knowledge that my ability to fly came deep from within. Yet still, these were only the familiar views from the confines of my own backyard.

I have grown into the body of a young man whose thoughts, sometime sharp yet random, were being built upon uncontrolled emotions. One upon the other they pile up beyond my ability to separate them, making it sometimes difficult to find the clarity I needed. Yet, there were times when I could see the end of the river. It was in these moments when I picked up a pencil and began mapping out my thoughts. Over time I had come to appreciate the mental photographs each of these penciled searches provided me. They were windows not only into yesterday but had the ability to capture the place where I stood, the thoughts I had entertained and helped me to remember where I was. Each one of these windows, much like my dreams of flying, had a claustrophobic feeling of familiarity. They were mostly about things I knew, love I had lost, the fear of death. But it had become evident to me that I needed to jump into the river and head downstream.

I had maintained my student status at college so that I could take advantage of the many student discounts offered. I took a couple of classes and dedicated a portion of my free time to planning a trip down this river. On the surface it had all the earmarkings of a long holiday but under closer inspection I was actually planning a change - a one-way ticket and a trip duration that would be predicated by my ability to stretch funds. An open road.

I'm a Californian who loves California. Whether it's looking up from the trunk of a large sequoia, down into the Yosemite Valley, gazing at San Francisco from across the bay or wandering up the Big Sur coast I want to share what I appreciate about my home. There have been numerous occasions when my path had crossed an individual traveling through this great state of ours. "Where have you gone?" I'd question. "Well, we went to Disneyland and let's see, Las Vegas was exciting but we lost money". I had no intention of being this person, just passing through and ignoring what made each place special. My goal was to sit, watch, listen, share a meal, follow someone home, whatever it took for my eyes to open and understand our similarities. Only then I could begin measuring the differences and begin to define who I am. For months I delved into books searching through history, landmarks, art and I began earmarking those things I wanted to see. I began sketching out a map in my head, of where I would go, how much time it would take me and how much I thought it would cost. I laid everything out but in the back of my mind I still entertained the thought "What was I really going to do with all this free time?"

I recall a few years back drinking a bottle of Wild Turkey on an empty stomach. We were sitting around lounging in the living room, allowing our conversation to be dictated by the alcohol, jumping from one subject to another. Liars always have to keep up their guard. In this conversation, one of the young men (who was dating the young lady sitting next to him on the couch), let this guard down while trying to demonstrate what he considered to be his manhood to the other guys in the room. He was bragging about his conquests. When he was confronted with disbelief and while defending his statement, he forgot that his girlfriend was hanging on every one of his words. Not a smart move. Especially the way he explained the slutty behavior of number three. Blinded by his own brush strokes, he could not see the hole he was digging for himself nor could he interpret the expressions on all our faces. It was obvious that the alcohol influenced his choices and blinded him from the fact that his current girlfriend was now inches away from clawing out his eyes.

As he realized his error the shock took the color out of his face, then she stood up. She made a gesture of distancing herself from him at first but when she reached the edge of the couch she reached over and grabbed his guitar. It had been undisturbed for the last hour and was resting against the edge of the couch. She hesitated for a second and then broke the silence with a few choice words at the top of her lungs and then to our surprise she hit him. She chased him right out the front door with his broken guitar in her hand. He was bleeding from his forehead and began apologizing half way down the driveway. She left no doubt that if he didn't leave, she'd keep hitting him until he did. Once things settled down, if they ever did, I noticed the broken hearted was outside the kitchen door crying, setting the broken guitar against one of the empty trash cans. In an attempt to distract her from her tears I began to construct a story. I expressed in short that all musical instruments possess a soul and how some people would see it as sacrilegious to simply discard such a vessel into the garbage without remorse or even a second thought. To demonstrate that I was serious in my convictions and wasn't just letting the alcohol do my talking, I offered cash in exchange for its broken body. She agreed but probably still thought it was an impulsive move from somebody too drunk to know better.

That guitar sat alone for months in the corner of my room, one hundred percent decoration. One day I got out a bottle of Elmer's glue and began reassembling its broken body. Once the glue dried I again left it alone to gathering dust in the corner of my room. It was a poor little soul with all those scares. Months later while cleaning out my closet and

throwing out a bunch of stuff gathered during my childhood I came across a box of stickers. I found myself a razor blade and began dismantling each sticker into its components to erase any linkage these stickers had to my childhood. One by one I placed each new pattern onto the guitar, with the initial intent of covering up its scars.

Over time stickers came from all directions - small parties, sister's friends, etc., - a rainbow of band-aids. I became convinced that if I brought this guitar along with me on my adventure I could teach myself how to play. I saw this as the perfect solution for filling any down time I might experience while traveling. When I mentioned this idea to my father, he thought that carrying a guitar was the most impractical decision I could make. Maybe a fishing pole or sleeping bag would be more practical. But what I didn't explain was that I was willing to deposit it in the first receptacle when I got tired of lugging it around.

The more I thought about it the more I convinced myself I ought to start off with a traveling companion. Jim was the only person I knew that could afford to travel and would be willing to spend money to do so. The majority of my friends were either seeking to buy a new car, or had spent the last of their available money on a dime bag of weed. So if I would have a traveling companion, it could only be Jim.

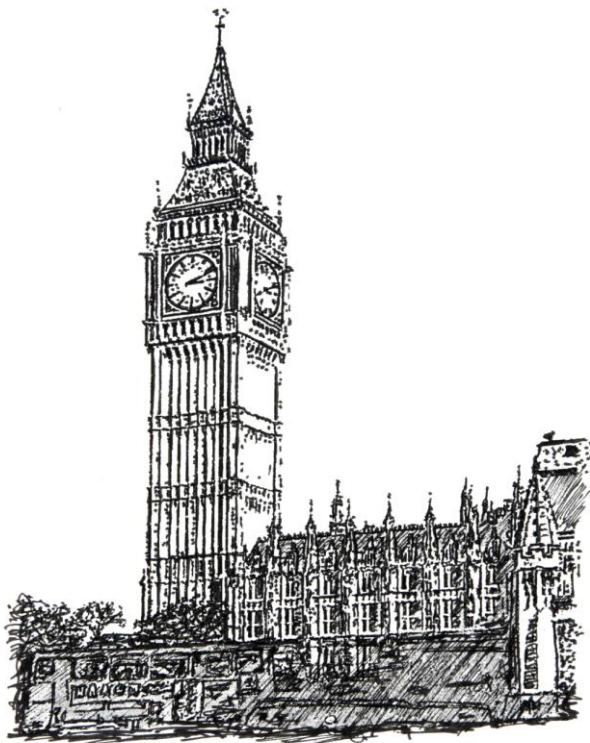
I met Jim in college. He was sitting in the back of the room making puppy eyes at a cute young lady that not only Jim but the rest of the class was too intimidated to talk to. I sat next to her and opened up a conversation. The next day Jim sat next to me forcing this young lady to take the seat next to him, which placed Jim between our conversations. I discovered that not only did Jim and I attend the same kindergarten but we had been in the same class in the same year. That thought resonated in my head for some time, because I prided myself on remembering details but didn't remember Jim at all. We had common interests and have been hanging out since. When I broached the subject, Jim thought about it for a while but it didn't take a lot of arm-twisting to persuade him a vacation after our college work was a good idea and he agreed.

I purchased myself a one-way ticket to London, England, a train/drive pass for Great Britain and two (2) three-month unlimited first-class train passes for the continent. Then I packed up all my belongings and was ready to spread my wings. "I don't care how rough the road may be just show me where it starts".

"To gain what a trusting man would earn"

5/27. The clouds had parted and the wings of our plane began to dry. The very first thing I noticed was that "I wasn't in Kansas anymore". Gatwick Airport had green pastures on both sides of the runway. Unconcerned cows looked up at our passing plane. This was a total contrast to the cement landscape we left behind in LA.

Jim's expression suddenly changed from not knowing what to expect, to anger. Literally - he was ripping at the seams. Although he considered himself an expert in space management and even bragged about it a couple of times on the plane, he had brought way too much stuff. Until that is, his well-packed belongings spilled onto the floor of an airport corridor. He began yelling at stationary objects, fending off suggestions and blaming everything except the obvious - he brought way too much shit.



We didn't have a destination or a preconceived idea of where we would start this journey but after this incident, we decided neither one of us wanted to lug this much shit around. So we headed off toward Victoria station. We exchanged our first dollars for pounds and took ownership of a couple of large lockers. Then off we were - free - to explore London.

We could hear the beating of drums echo through the streets and proceeded wandering down along the Thames toward the rhythm. Like young natives appearing to be darting aimlessly through the jungle, yet every step lead us closer to the campfire. We came upon a mass of people who had gathered around a Reggae band playing their last set of a free concert. The rain had just passed through London and the clouds above separated us from the rays of sunlight. The crowd, captivated by the rhythm, was standing in mud to get a better view of the band.

As we turned away from the music and began to walk toward one of the many bridges, I heard a voice from behind me say "Those that do nothing can still end up in jail". I turned and noticed a couple whose dog I had pet just moments earlier. In hindsight I consider myself quite naïve. I was carrying a knife attached to my belt, something I had never done before. He was right it wasn't at all

a good idea to be parading around an offensive object. Objects like these tend to attract their own kind and its best not to be stereotyped in this way. I accepted his friendly advice and tucked away the knife. He had a smile in his eyes and an edge to his smile. The sun was beginning to hide itself behind the buildings and my mind was beginning to center on where we were going to be sleeping tonight. I attempted to strike a common cord to perhaps obtain some good advice on where to stay for the night. I asked if he could suggest a local pub or club where we could see some good local music later in the week.

Then much like the unexpected weather we were extended a gesture of kindness. “We don’t have much to offer but you are welcome to stay with us”. Naturally an unexpected response for somebody raised in Los Angeles! The media back home keeps the populace afraid and on their defense. We followed the three of them home - Mik, Deb and their dog Charlie. About half way along our journey we boarded a traditional double-decker bus. As if on an amusement ride I jumped up onto the upper deck to enjoy the view. I don’t think we got more than four blocks before smoke started coming up from below. Our first tourist endeavor was left for dead in the middle of the street.

Adjacent to their living room was a small kitchen where Deb began to prepare vegetarian hamburgers. As far as I was concerned it didn’t taste anything like meat but I smiled and endured every bite like the courteous guest I try to be. Charlie liked it. Mik entertained us all night with numerous stories of past travels and his growing fear of nuclear war. It was about half way into the evening when Mik started dancing around the subject of drugs and eventually came to the question he was trying to ask “Do you guy’s smoke hash”. Mick referred to as “Paint”. This made perfect sense since he was a painter by trade and this made solicitations over the phone a little less obvious. About the time we started feeling its effects Jim’s face said it all. Not only were we getting high, we had a comfortable place to lay our heads, interesting company and it was all free. It was hard to believe we had just stepped off the plane hours ago with no plans or expectations. I went to bed with visions from the poster hanging above my bedpost. Its nuclear mushroom would glow with the each passing cars.

We proceeded down this path through a country side park, colored and shaded by many trees and leading into one of the many veins of London’s underground. When we resurfaced we were in the heart of London. It arose more from the haze of my memory than from the morning fog, my childhood memories of nursery rhymes and children songs accompanied every step. Images that conveyed both a sense of direction and a feeling of living in the past. It was then I discovered that I do look in both directions before crossing the street but in the wrong order for oncoming London traffic. I look left and then right, not right and then left. This miscalculation caused me to jump out of the way a few times. I was standing in front of London Tower aside a pair of cannons, and while waiting for Jim to return from the little boy’s room a kid about six, looking up at his dad, proposed a question that many parents might be unprepared to answer.

*To rape the earth, to leave it waste, profit only course
reason being, the path of men, another selfish choice”*

*Where should I go, to get away? There’s got to be another way
they hide in shadows and talk all day, beyond this bridge, I hear they say*

“Bang, Bang, Bang”, his father interrupted, “Today we build better things that kill more people”

Before dusk we headed back toward Mik’s, meeting up and going to take in few at the local pub. Charlie was a small mutt who felt it was his responsibility to show us the way. He’s look back every so often as if to say “Come on we’re almost there”. He was always on the alert and at the drop of a hat willing to trade a few choice words with the bigger dogs. He wanted to let everybody know he was much bigger than he looked – and willing to stand behind every sharp word.

Over these last few days, I don’t think there has been a single street or ally way we didn’t accustom ourselves to. Most pubs we stopped in for a pint, maybe even two. About midday I ended up lying out in the middle of Hyde Park, looking up through the trees, day dreaming under the blue sky. It was another gorgeous day. We decided to give the double-decker busses another try. It was a good way to relax, take in some of the sights, get a bearing on where landmarks are and of course a good way to rest tired legs. Antique shopping doesn’t have much excitement when there’s no extra coinage. With the coming of each night we would roam the underground following the echo of their music, searching for new faces and seeking to gain perspective into what seemed routine. I noticed that most of the men avoid eye contact altogether, unless looking for confrontation and that the women consistently use the reflections from windows to keep an eye on things. I played into that game a couple of times.



Mik and Deb were gracious hosts, opening up both their home and their hearts. I felt a bit more at ease after listening to their stories of traveling and have earmarked a few of Mik’s suggestions into my mental map. Inevitably, after the

third pint, Mik would steer the conversation back into his anti-war dialog, the end of the world was coming. I always had to laugh because we could set our watches by it. After a few days I felt it was about time for us to go, so we said our good-byes. I always felt that I must move on before I am reminded. While Mik attempted to score us some "Paint" for the road, we decided while wandering about Piccalilli Circus we'd purchase a water pipe, as a gesture of thanks for their hospitality. I had fun exploring London. It turned out to be an advantage to be staying on its outskirts, pointing us in directions and showing us places and people we would have neglected, if we had only hovered around the tourist interests. As we were leaving, I forgot and had to run back and snap a picture of the three of them smiling back from their doorway.

It is obvious to me that Jim was not going to successfully carry all that he had brought. While viewing his dilemma I too decided to cut my weight down to make some room to carry food and the occasional bottle of wine. I separated what I was willing to carry from what would be packed up and send home. Jim was lagging a bit behind and began surveying the items I was discarding. "Don't send this home, I'll carry it. This is better than the one I brought, I'll carry that too." I explained in no uncertain terms, that if he wanted to pack this stuff, it was his responsibility and if an when he decided he didn't want to carry it anymore, it was also be his responsibility to pack it up and send it home. I repeated it three times to ensure I got my point across. So we packed up the stuff we didn't want to carry and sent it through the post. This exercise took more time than we had planned and we ended up missing our train earmarked to exit London. I decided that I'd sleep in the station and take an early train out. This decision turned out to ruffle Jim's feathers and he eventually escalated it into a big deal. Jim's comfort level could not tolerate the advances of a young Irishman. I'm not sure if his passes were sexual, probably seeing if he could get Jim out of his comfort zone. He succeeded at doing this and Jim didn't care where we went, as long as we got the hell out of that station. I accommodated his wishes, after failing to ignore his whining. We walked up and down streets for hours, until we stumbled across a fenced soccer field. At least this was accommodating to Jim. At that point I could have slept anywhere, preferably back at the train station. We, well I, slept under the goal posts and based on Jim's comments when I woke, he didn't sleep a wink.

We caught a morning bus into Bath. There was such a beautiful view out the window I hardly noticed any of the other passengers. I could almost imagine hearing the hunter's horn heralding from the hills, the sound of dogs running alongside the hooves of horses. I gazed at the many sheep spattered like white paint against the green, divided by a patchwork of trees and fences. It was if I was glancing at pages from a story book. Then the unexpected happened, a small green apple rolled to the back of the bus and a cute young smile soon followed. A smile that captivated Jim's interest and woke him out of his attitude. A brief conversation enlisted our new friend into persuading her brother, waiting for her at the bus stop, to drive us to the youth hostel we had earmarked in our travel guide. We ended the day behind a few pints of local ale on the back patio of our house on the hill. I just watched all these strangers circulate among themselves and relaxed in anticipation of the next day's trek.

It's so enjoyable to wake to the sound of singing birds. I rose early and while Jim was still sleeping I trekked out on my own. Down through the hillside pastures towards the church in the middle of the city below. The city was waking up around me to the expectations of today's festivities. There were vendors setting up shop to peddling their wares and acts of entertainment were claiming space for the day. Then I heard the sound of angel wings echoing from the walls of the church. A local choir was practicing for tonight's performance. I sat in one of the vacant pews at the rear of the church, closed my eyes and let my ears dance with the notes of their song.

I toured the pump room and baths and upon exiting came across a group of young boys alongside the bridge that crossed the river. These boys' eyes told stories of past mischief and solicited me for spare change. I inquired if anyone had ever jumped from that bridge into the river below. "I've done it" one boy quickly boasted, then two more chimed in "Me too". "No you haven't" as another boy punched the smallest of the boosters in the arm. "I have two pounds right here and I'll give them to the first one of you that climbs up onto that bridge and jumps into the water below". One young lad did not hesitate, until he reached the side of one of the buildings set upon the bridge. But like boys often do, they apply that negative peer pressure, "Coward". To the crowd's approval, one wet young man earned his pounds with pride. As the day began to melt away, I began wandering through the residential areas back toward the hostile. It wasn't long before I stumbled across a gentleman struggling with a houseboat, attempting to make its way up the channel. It was obvious he was having some difficulty with one of the gates, so I thought I'd lend him a hand. Eventually we got talking and he invited me aboard for a cup of tea and crackers. As we traveled north I got wrapped up in the conversation. A few of his friends waiting along the way joined in and we began discussing religion and politics. Very interesting topics but in the back of my mind I kept reminding myself that I was getting farther and farther away from tonight's lodging. Eventually I had to say goodbye and was forced to walk more than a few miles back into Bath, until I finally thumbed a ride. I reunited with Jim for dinner.

I explained numerous times but Jim either ignored my wishes, or I guess in his excitement he simply forgets. I prefer to be a fly on the wall and absorb my surroundings, in an attempt to be included as one of their own, to listen. But in the first couple of seconds Jim would blow any cover we might have had. "Hi, I'm Jim, did I already tell ya I'm from California." I find it better to be on the edges of a party than in the center of it.

One night at Mik's place while passing around the pipe, he weaved stories of sprits possessing the trails between the white horse and the many rock circles heading north. I could almost visualize these images he was painting and hear the pounding of drums in the wind, as I focused in on the flames dancing with the beat. So, while roaming around Bath, I picked up a wonderful map that showed all the antiquities on the island and this became our new guide. For every myth and legend there is a fact to be found and we have found our map.

We decided to head northeast up the A4 towards Swinden. We were up early to see if we could thumb ourselves a ride with the morning commute. It seemed wise for the two of us to separate. Perhaps somebody would be more inclined to pick up a single traveler rather than a pair of males. I was the first to have somebody stop. I honestly don't remember a word this guy spoke to me, just that I tried to look interested. I was more focused on his hands and body gestures. Just in case, one can never be too careful. Coming from California, I'm a virgin at this type of traveling and needed to learn the ropes. He dropped me off at a crossroad and again I was walking the line on the edge of the road. The luck I had captured earlier has escaped me and it seemed as if it would be a long haul before I'd reach our destination. Then what looked to be a small bread truck pulled over just in front of me. The back gate swung open and not only was Jim sitting there but also three others I had seen along the highway. This worked out to be quite the convenience. I no longer needed to wait and/or locate Jim once I reached Swinden.

We slept out along the back trails, stormed over Silbury Hill, roamed the labyrinths of Oldbery Castle and then we proceeded down the Ridgeway path toward Avebury Circle. We walked all day, hours but for me time did not exist and practically disappeared. I was entranced by the winds dancing and drawing patterns across the hills of rolling grass.

*Songs whispered, by dancing grain, beneath the haunted moon
resounding to the whirlwind's sweep the plain, for fear, that daybreak comes too soon.*

*Deep midnight, by the moon's chill glance, out of the dense fog wrapped about them
the children cease to sing and dance, stands in a circle unbroken*

Occasionally we would rest along the trail, roll up some tobacco with hash, take a breather and let nature introduce itself to us. Every so often a group of cows would wander over to the fence and stare as if we were some unknown species. It's true, no one ever showed me how to play the guitar but the gathering cows thought it was quite the novelty. We roamed among the monoliths, resting with our backs against one of the stones. Only our smoke gave us away.

*Along the edge of open sky and vast sweeps of land, I followed the wildflowers
I heard sweet memories dances in the distance, sheep wandering through Avebury*

*Meandering lines of standing stones, crisscrossing the stars and planets, I too followed their path
the body of a serpent passing through a circle, toppled, broke up and buried, we shall never know*

Like a string of pearls, one complaint began to lead into another. One minute it's the weather, next minute it's the price of food, carrying too much shit and then it was his feet. "I'm not walking any further, maybe I'll just fly home", confronted Jim. I reminded him that I was not his mother and if he thought I wanted to hear this shit, he had bigger problems than just his feet. "Nobody's putting a gun to your head and you don't need my permission to make choices". I explained that I was not budgeted for repeating every other step and had a plan of what I wanted to see and experience and sometimes those things aren't at the end of a train line. "I'm committed to go forward and if you find it in your best interest to detour, I'm more than willing to meet you anywhere else on the map". "There's no rule that says we have to do everything together". I provided an example of picking up women. "I expect this to happen along the way and when we reach that fork in the road I'm sure you're not going to be wanting me hanging around as a third wheel or vice versa. We'll just meet up someplace down the road". I tried to be a good person and attempt to avoid confrontations but traveling together has a tendency to bring these things to the surface. Conflicts start and end with words.

*Surely I dreamt today, or did I see. I wandered in this forest thoughtlessly
the clever boy that I once knew; with pebbles white and bread crumbs too
left no trail and lost my way, where all my pictures were thrown away*

*Through the forest, in the middle of a glade, forever nagging to persuade
no plank or bridge was placed in sight, only fists clinched as if to fight
the wind, the wind has caused me harm, you pulled too many false alarms*

We proceeded down through the middle of Wales, heading south toward the coast. We followed the hedge groves that lined the road as it meandered like a large serpent, forcing the adjacent hill to bow to its will. The shades of green against the backdrop of blue skies framed an almost surreal landscape. I walked into this painting and closed my eyes, almost holding my breath not to disturb the faint whispers of nature and walked down the middle of the road. Then the silence was interrupted, "My feet hurt, my feet hurt". We came to that proverbial fork in the road and it had no signs I could read. Jim took off his shoes to show me why he'd been complaining every step for the last three miles. "New shoes?" I questioned for the tenth time. "I'm going home, this is it," exclaimed Jim. I spent ten minutes trying to persuade Jim that it was a better idea to walk another twenty feet, sit down in the pub up ahead and drink a pint or two, than to sit there in the middle of the road with shoes off complaining about the world. The world that attacked your feet. He preferred sitting in the road since it reinforced his illusions of being the victim. Okay, maybe I was a little

insensitive and should have felt sorry for his feet but I would rather have had that conversation with a pint in my hand. I left Jim sitting in the middle of the street and headed up the road, grabbed a stool at the bar and waited for Jim to catch up. I knew I would regret it later but I gave in to Jim's pouting. I ended up sacrificing my plan to enjoy this area at a slow pace and instead hitched a ride. My punishment for trying to compromise was viewing the places I had earmarked for discovery through a dirty window at eighty miles an hour. It just wasn't the same.

We settled into a small YMCA along the coast, arriving late that evening. I would assume we were the last two travelers who signed the register. As the young lady walked us to our room we passed an empty laundry. Jim saw this as his opportunity to conveniently wash the dirty clothes he'd been carrying around for the last few weeks. Five seconds after our room's door was closed Jim stripped down to his underwear and deposited everything else he owned into one of the available washing machines. Then he slithered back into the comfort of our room without anybody noticing. What Jim was unaware of, which he soon discovered when he returned to the laundry room to move his clothes from the washer to the dryer, was that not only did the visitors have a curfew, so did the laundry room. I offered up some of my clothes but this was no solution for Jim. From his perspective it should have never happened and somebody else needed to take the blame. I was unwilling to burden his misplaced anger, so I left Jim in his underwear and wandered out into the city by myself. I socialized with a group of locals at a cozy pub, got into a game of darts, talked religion and even got a goodnight kiss. I brought back a pizza so that Jim wouldn't go hungry but this went without thanks. I just let the pizza sit there until it found its way into the morning garbage. No words.

We had purchased a train pass for the British railway that provided a few consecutive days on a train and then the use of a car. Our plan was to more or less travel north by train until we reached Inverness Scotland, from there we would rent a car and travel the West Coast of Scotland southward until we reached Liverpool. From there we'd planned to ferry across the channel to Ireland, saying goodbye to England.

We continued wandering between castles and pubs, passing through Cardiff until we reached Penzance. I managed to find myself a good spot to relax and gaze out from the castle's wall. I would close my eyes and image pictures of past events and allowed my mind to wander in search of the sounds. I could persuade myself to believe I could feel a slight vibration through the stones from the pounding at the gate. When we reached Penzance, after roaming the coast and the boardwalk we settled in a local pub. After a couple of pints, I was invited into a game of snooker by the local clientele; a contest intended to test the visiting yanks. I won every game and they started referring to me as "Newman". Either I was pretty good or they thought I had hustled them. Since no money changed hands I considered it a complement either way. Since Jim had a table at home he usually wins more games than I'm able to pull out. We had been crossing paths with a lot of youths sporting green hair, nose rings and tattoos. They saw themselves as challengers for their own future, much like the waves we saw along the coast. It seemed to me that they were seeking unique identification through only visual means and in some way this may have negated the true refinement of their uniqueness. I'm sure that kind of applied true to all of us.

One cold morning, while we were huddling on a train platform like lost ghosts in a graveyard, a young man with a weathered face wandered up to the two of us. It looked as if he had been working the local mines and hadn't showered in some time but approached us with a smile anyway. I offered him the remaining half of a hash joint we had just put out. He was so overly thankful we felt a little guilty we didn't have more to give. In a way he represented many of the faces we'd seen over the past few days. We bought him a cup of coffee and traded words. I once read somewhere that suffering was an illusion, caused by the clinging to objects and not taking every moment at its fullest. I don't feel this applies when you're hungry, truly hungry! I once was told that man asked God, "Why don't you sent help". "I sent you", God replied. When my day drifts into the night I see a clear picture of myself staring back at me from a dark window of my train.

We entered a fairly crowded train and shared a compartment with a pair of elderly gentlemen. Occasionally our eyes would meet and one of the two gentlemen and I would share a smile. His gestures kinda made me feel as if I was his only grandson, or perhaps he was reminiscing about his own youth. As if his mind filled up with kind thoughts. This gentleman's companion was aged beyond his ability to carry a sentence. When he managed to squeeze out a single word, we could see his remaining energy drain from his body. When the train came to a stop, he assisted his companion to his feet, helped him navigate his way through the car and down the steps to the platform. Jim noticed that one of the exiting gentlemen had left his umbrella behind on the seat and made a quick attempt to catch him. He explained to Jim that he wasn't at his destination. He was only assisting his friend off the train and explained that he had a few more stops down the road before he would at his destination. My mind began to wander onto thoughts about aging. How old he looked. Obviously he was declining physically, pale, thin, not enough meat to hide his bones and veins. Even his wardrobe, though in perfect condition, had the look of a museum exhibit. When we reached his stop, I stood up and helped him to his feet. He turned, embraced me and then surprised me with a kiss on my cheek. "Cheerio" he replied. I'm not accustomed to being kissed by men, so I can only image the surprise on my face. He couldn't have caught me any more off guard.

We headed north through the middle of Wales. I don't recall ever looking out from the train's window and not seeing somebody waving back at us. They were always giving me the impression that this was their home and they were proud of it. I like the fact that I'm traveling through their backyards. It reminded me of the first time I rode in an airplane and how my eyes were glued looking out the windows in complete awe. Afraid of looking away for fear I might miss some important detail. I would be sad if these non-commercial train runs disappeared. At the rear of every car had a flier taped to the door, "Help Us Save Our Train".

As the hills in the distance darkened, we meandered to the shadows toward the rear of the train and lit up. Slowly the weather followed. I had been doing too much smoking and felt a bit of a sore throat coming on, probably coming down with something too. By the time we pulled into our destination the rain was pounding the cobblestones and trapping enough water to make us jump between puddles. We ran into the first B&B we could locate and before I asked if they had rooms available, I asked if they had a pair of aspirin. My head was pounding from within and combined with my sore throat it was going to be a rough night.

B&Bs are to me a gift from heaven. I always felt as if I was visiting relatives I haven't seen in years. These settings can turn in such unexpected ways. Arguments can breakout behind closed doors, I could hear secrets, or one can end up sitting at the breakfast table with a little sister looking up with puppy eyes. I met real people with no reasons to hide and willing to open up their homes to travelers like ourselves. This was also one of the most productive and informative ways to discover the nuances of the local area. They usually appreciated their surroundings and enjoyed sharing their secrets. We found a lot of good pubs this way. Stepping from cobble stone to cobble stone, crossing bridges, everything I saw around me, made me feel as if I had traveled back in time. Even the locals contributed to a mood that somehow made the storybook from my youth come to life.

I was disappointed that Jim didn't have the same level of interest in seeing these local sites. I started referring to Jim as "Stationary", because literally, he'd stay in the train station and read a book while waiting for me to return from my trek. Wasting opportunities like these between the pages of some romantic novel seemed foolish to me when this is all new. It's kind of a lonely feeling to stumble across something you wish to share and there's nobody there to share it with. I wish I had a girl friend. I suppose it's my fault by choice, I never really let anybody get too close. Those times where I felt my feelings overtaking me I usually did stupid things to protect my perceived freedoms and secrets. I've been without it and I've been thinking about it a lot recently. When it came right down to it I've always had to take that first step, no matter how subtle. Oh but how I love it when dreaming and like a cold morning breeze she wakes me.

*I know giving, beyond giving, when you, you come to me
who woke the night, before the dawn and touched me, silently
As two windblown clouds, who ripple the night, drifting, not a care
who touches the reasons, of love and why, understanding how to share
It touches me, so deeply, her fingers, as the sun
who warms the light, to my inner soul and wraps me, into one*



We headed north into Scotland. Initially we didn't wander too far from the train stations but eventually we stretched our arms and headed into the countryside. The weather had been wonderful. I truly believe the sun had been following us for weeks. The primroses were in bloom and the fields were scattered with frolicking rabbits. The clouds were absolutely gorgeous. There were clouds on top of clouds on top of clouds. Again, if somebody had painted this landscape it would appear unreal, dreamlike as if it was only imagined.

I normally make an attempt to assemble the entire picture before I up and leave a place. I like spending some time watching the locals migrate from place to place, watching the children play and have a conversation or two over a pint or a cup of coffee. These observations help me calibrate myself to the environment that surrounds me. I plan on learning something. But for the past couple of days it seemed most of the people we were meeting were in pubs. "You're from California, why would you come here"? Yea Jim liked people to know. I got the impression that they viewed life as an obstacle course with no cheese at its end. They had already gotten to know one another, yet they were still focusing on each other's differences rather than their similarities. Maybe they hate the similarities, but I wasn't giving myself the time to find out. They didn't seem to enjoy the things that they had and self medicate.

*Have you seen so many people, hanging around in bars?
locked in faces, neon light, no shadows from the stars
Have you seen so many people, drifting through the town
drinking up, another cup and trying not to drown
Feet are slow, the damage high and sing a song, of days gone by
news is bad, so glasses high and sing a song, of dreams goodbye
Have you seen so many people, whose leaves have turned to gold?
slowly fading, from spring to fall. still hiding from the cold
Have you seen so many people, when looking from above
who drink and dance, another song, just play at making love
Feet are slow, the damage high and sing a song, of days gone by
news is bad, so glasses high and sing a song, of dreams goodbye*

We took a tour bus around the lock, walked along the water's edge, waited and watched but never did see a sea monster. I took off my shoes along its edge and waded ankle deep, for only seconds. To a California boy this was cold. One old man told me that this sea monster stuff had a lot to do with how much whiskey was drunk, but that didn't help either. But do I love good Scotch. It echoes



through like the character of the local 'usquebac' which is Gaelic for 'the water of life'. Time is truly its partner. Clouds began to gather overhead and turned the sky into a gray but as of yet, still we've seen no rain.

It was time for us to move from rail to wheel. We loaded up a car with the necessary ingredients to suffice for a day or two. Bread, luncheon meats, fruit, beer and once packed we then headed out west toward the countryside. This is what I've been waiting for, a different type of freedom. I really needed to grab hold of a wheel and take control. It's wasn't just the control I was seeking but the ability to pass through and experience the remote places and people removed from large city squares and the veins of tourism.

Out came our roadmap of antiquity and our plan was to track each of them down to see what gave them notoriety. I figure having destination like these should give us the opportunity to trek in areas we might have ignored. "Good thing I'm driving" I thought to myself. Well that feeling lasted for about a mile before a small curb got in my way and I destroyed our right front tire. Got out of the roadway and was forced to jack up the car. Not a good first step but it did slow us down a bit which might have been a good thing in the long run.

Tracking down each of the antiquities had the feeling of a treasure hunt and we never felt lost because we could always find signs of life behind the pub door. One of these nights while wandering I discovered the pub door was locked, so I entered an old grave yard across the way seeking the unknown. It was dark at eye level, even darker after gazing up at the million of stars looking down upon me. The trees reached out like long fingers casting shadows across the gravestones. The moon was just peaking over the horizon, not quite full and my ears began to focus on the smallest of details. I was alone, prepared and waiting for the dead to rise. I allowed my mind to wander to the realm of what if, almost fabricating shadows into figures and noises into whispers. I could almost make it real but it wasn't. No sea monsters and now no ghosts.

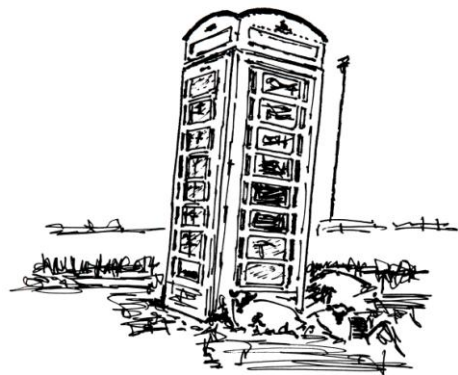
Every so often an urge rose up inside me to climb a mountain, trek up a waterfall, or just meander along the coast. It was nice to have the ability to stop and feel the earth. It was good for me to have an adventure each day. Climbing allowed me to experience the smells, get a little bit of earth stuck to the bottom of my shoes and that invaluable feeling of surveying the landscape for additional signs of life and confirming that I am alone. There have been times where nature's music reached down deep into my soul, second only to the passion for a woman's breast and her beating heart. The darkness says good night and I think to myself, "I am in heaven." An older gentleman explained that the roads here are so narrow they have named each side, "The passing side and the suicide" and he reminded me not to drive too fast or forget the sheep own both sides.

*Like soft rain on the morning rose, the song from a murmuring stream,
the peace from which solitude flows, is life's eternal theme*

*And we like these spring rain drops fall, for we shall meet and run,
for in the end we will meet again, all flowing into one*

*Like the heart of spring lies yearning, where tender kisses rain,
love and life returning, all hearts will bloom again*

I looked down and saw the speck that was our car and I could almost make out Jim sitting there reading his book. "You're missing out", I yelled. I realize coming off one of these mountain I lost my wallet. Backtracked but couldn't find it. Not much money and no credentials or credit cards inside, so that was a relief, but I did lose my address book. So for all those that I promised I would write, please accept this as my apology.



We tried to end each evening at a local pub, in front of a pint or two of beer waiting for it to close. When it did close we'd drive out into the darkness and attempt to find what appeared to be a secluded place to park and sleep. These pub ventures all have one common thread, nobody recognizes you. This fact branches in one of two directions, either there are eyes questioning who has trespassed and why, deciding whether this is good or bad, or one of curiosity. The curious were interested in discovering who and why. Sometimes these types of curiosities blossom into interesting conversations. At the end of each night it's always the same. If we roll

down the windows too many bugs find their way inside, there was never enough leg room to get comfortable and either Jim or myself, or both, kept the other awake snoring. When we woke each morning every window would be fogged and as luck had it, well in most cases, we weren't as secluded as we believed under in the darkness of night. The West Coast of Scotland was absolutely gorgeous and we still hadn't seen any bad weather. Trekking along the coastal cliffs and the Island of Skye can only be described as a religious experience. This is God's country. Gardens touched by the finger of God. A clouded island littered with crofts and memories of the day before Culloden. Those arctic trails had their secret tales. I would stand on the edge looking out onto the ocean in awe, my only concern that nobody else was standing anywhere close to me.

*It rained
and down from the mountain it came
down
to kiss the sea
because
all must come to be
free*



We headed south into the Lake District. I had crossed paths with many English who had told me this was the most beautiful place in all of Great Britain but I learned that none of those people have traveled down the west coast of Scotland. It was beautiful in its own right. We roamed along the shores of many lakes scattered through the Lake District, prepared car made sandwiches and took off our shoes to let our drive weary feet take refuge in the cold British water. It was as good a place to relax and breathe in nature. We were scheduled to eventually drop the car off in Liverpool and cross the channel over to Dublin but we still had a few days left on the car.

When we reached Liverpool we only stopped for a bite to eat and proceed southwest into northern Wales.

We were on the road for about an hour after sunrise. I was passing a small automobile with what looked to be three construction workers on their way to work. As I sped up to pass them, I caught some of the loose gravel and slid sideways into them. I'd say we at least traded paint but when I slowed down to deal with the situation they kept on driving. Eventually I passed them again and looked directly into their eyes and got the impression that they wanted nothing to do with me. I began questioning if it was just my imagination and reality was that we almost made contact. Jim was convinced that we made contact and kept repeating "Let's get the hell out of here". We continued along the coast, from lighthouse to lighthouse. This time we didn't have to outrun the tide to get back to the mainland. I began to look forward to sleeping in a bed again and of course taking a shower. I can only imagine what I smelled like. I know what Jim smells like.

I dropped off the car and nobody noticed that the spare tire was damaged. Maybe someday I'll have to answer to an old elderly woman who spent a half day out on the highway waiting for somebody to bring another tire. What comes around goes around and the finger was now pointing in my direction. We let a flat from a German woman who was more than couple cards short of a full deck. She would merge sentence and subjects that made absolutely no sense. "You sleep motorcycle knife" What? It made it unnerving that we were sleeping on the same roof.

Today Jim and I switched roles. Jim wanted to spend his money on seeing The Beatles' museum so I played "Stationary". I wasn't about to fork out that kind of money to see a bunch of paraphernalia, stuff I couldn't buy, so that time I waited. It was "The Cavern" I was interested in checking out. When we checked out the Cavern, we discovered the majority of action was going on in another pub, just around the block, so we hit that up too.

Once we left the car behind, again I was handed the 'Carry this much shit?' dilemma. It's not that I had multiple bags, just one backpack that accommodated everything I owned, with plenty of space to accommodate food and bottle of wine. Since I've grown use to only carrying a camera bag, a backpack was no longer the ticket. Things just got to go. I don't mind having my belongings hanging around in a locker or the trunks of car but not on my back everywhere I go. I had to figure a way to get by with less.

XX

Road Map:

- England: Gatwick, London [Tower of London, Tower Bridge, Buckingham Palace, Hyde Park, Harrods, Covent Gardens, Westminster Abby, Big Ben, St. Paul's Cathedral, National Gallery], Reading - Swindon – Bath [Prior Park, Abby, Manor House, Roman Baths], Caippenham, Colne [Bonded House, White Horse, Olbery Castle, Silbory Hill. Avebury Circle], "Ridgeway Path", Avebury, Swinden [Burbory Castle, Wayland Smih Caves, Jiffington Castle], Birmingham, Worlester, Gloucester [Robinwood Hill, Roman Villa]
- Wales: Monmouth [Hwy 466, Bridge Gateway, Ciadot Castle, Roman Amphitheater, Fortress], Chepston, Newport [Newport Castle, St. Moolos Cathedral], Cardiff [Carphilly Castle, Rhymeney], Swansea,
- England: Shrewsbury [Nightwick Manson], Birmingham [Weoley Castle], Penzance, Oxford [Bontanic Gardens, Cathedral, Castle, Museum, College Grounds], Leamingonspa,

Coventry [Cathedral], Rugby, Northampton, London, Cambridge [Delapreasy, College Grounds], Peterborough, Leicester [Clock Tower], Doncaster, Sheffield, Nottingham [Castle, St. Bamabas Cathedral] Carlisle, Glaslon, Eninburgh [Edinburgh Castle, Cannon Hill] Perth [Hunting Tower, Scone Palace], Pitlochry [Quenn's View, Pass of Killiecralle A9] Aviemore [Glenmore Forest Park, Queen's Forest], Inverness [Lock, Urquhart Castle, Yh Castle] A875 [Dingwell, Garve, Corrlshelluch Gorge], A832 [Tournaia, Gairioch, Charleston, Lach Maree] A890 [Gleen Carrow], Liar, Stomeferry, Kyle of Lochais

Scotland: Skye [A850 Rudhanan Brathairean, A855 Rittrock, A856 Snizor Beaa, A850 Dunvegan Castle, A863, A850] Eilean Dowan Castle A887 [Lockness, Inchnacardoch Forest, Loch Lochy] Inchree [A82 Lochleven, A85 Black Mount, Pass of Leny, Donne Castle, A84 TheTrossachs, Achary Forrest, Lucky Pass, A821], Stirling, Alexandria [A74, "Lock", Queen Elizabeth Forest], Glasgow

England: Carlisle [Dacrr Castle], Penrith [Madian Castle, A66, Troutbeck, Caslering Stone Circle] Keswick [Derwert Water, A59, Ashris Bridge, Lodore Castle, Boner Stone, Steatailor Barn, Highskand] Gdasmere, Rydalmort - Ambleside - Widermic - Windermere - Bowness Kendal [A591, Castle, Alaving Roman Fortress, Sizergh Castle], Preston – Liverpool, Chester [55, A494]

Wales: Bala, Dolgellav, Barmouth, Haelech [A487, Carrna Flow], Bangon, Ccandudno - Colwynban Chester - Liverpool

XX

We paid twenty pounds each for deck passage to Ireland. Everybody we had been crossing paths with had one priority, duty free beer. Especially a couple of guys we met from the states. One was from San Diego and the other from somewhere outside of Boston Massachusetts. I was still tired from the long walks and late nights in Liverpool, so I thought I'd catch up on some sleep. After two beers sleep wasn't hard to find. Jim volunteered to watch our bags so I wandered off and found myself a comfortable place to grab some sleep. After a few hours I woke up thirsty and began wandering about the boat in search of water. It was then I discovered Jim sleeping with our un-chaperoned bags completely out of his reach. I slipped off with both bags and used them as a pillow for the rest of the night. With the morning sun so came Jim, "You have the bags, right?" He had convinced himself that the bags were with me all the time. Lesson learned.

Our initial plan was to hitch across Ireland. An afterthought was to rent bicycles. But the clouds above looked like they were there to deliver rain, so we procrastinated making that decision. We let rooms in a local hostel and Jim crawled off to sleep. I headed into town, got wrapped up in a couple of bars and made a couple of donations at the dog track. At the track I knew if I couldn't identify the alpha before they left the gate I ought to get out of the pool.

While heading up O'Connor Street I stopped a pair of officers for directions. It was getting late and curfew was just around the corner. The officers had a hard time understanding how could I find my way back if I didn't know where I was going, "Just give me a signpost, please". B&B's are an excellent way to meet locals. Hostels on the other hand are better if you're interested in meeting up with other travelers. A good source of suggestions, like on places to avoid, or where to meet girls.

The clouds were telling no lies, this time they opened up and delivered rain. Bicycles were now out of the question, so we planned on thumbing our way south. We were hardly out of town when Jim started whining again. He's like one of those thimble banging monkeys. Once his key gets turned there's no way to turn him off, until his springs loosen. This time he was upset that I was calling the shots and determining what was next on our agenda. Now that was a shot from left field and from the guy who didn't want to make any decisions, excluding sleeping in soccer fields. I had to explain to Jim that nobody was excluding him from determining what we do next. Suggesting something might be a good place to start. Then Jim changed his complaint topic from our agenda to we were heading in the wrong direction, and he knew this without a map. So I took a subservient position and handed him the map. "You're probably right, I'll follow you then" I stated. We stood in the rain for about five minutes while Jim tried to interpret the map, and he kept getting upset because the map was getting wet. "Maybe if we move out of the rain?" After about thirty minutes of walking in circles, Jim started asking everyone in sight to help get us back on track. Knocking on somebody's door was outside my comfort zone. After a few conflicting directions from the locals, Jim's spring broke and he lost it. He was convinced there was a conspiracy and they were all misleading him on purpose. I'm not a babysitter and did not sign up for this. Every time he stubs his toe he feels he has to blame somebody besides himself. Either the sidewalk or somehow I caused the sidewalk to do it.

Then Jim elevated our so called discussion to the point where I could no longer ignore it. He sat down on the curb in front of an old lady he thought was lying to him and declared that he was not walking any further. Before I could question what that all meant he crossed that imaginary line. He reached into his bag and began discarding all the items he had confiscated from me in Victoria station. Items that he agreed would be his responsibility to send home when he no longer needed them. He made it clear that the curb was now their home. He packed a lot of stuff but it was apparent that he left his meds at home. After a string of "Fuck-You's" the line was clearly drawn, so I exited stage left. "Have fun. See ya", as I turned and began walking back towards Dublin. I had no idea if Jim followed me. Not once did I look back. At that point I couldn't give a shit. After a few beers I started reminding myself that I talked him in to coming on this trip and perhaps I did have some responsibility in baby-sitting him. On the other hand, perhaps he had gotten himself lost again. I decided to leave a message with his mother back home in case he called home for emotional supports or his Meds.

*Will you forget me, when times turn, so tender? licking the wounds, saw so deep
when dreams of our youth, fade out of splendor, will we, lose the sky, when the sun goes to sleep*

As if I were a small child holding on to the hand of a chaperon, willing to follow in any direction given, I willingly followed my guitar. That guitar had an uncanny ability of making its own friends and I was happy to be acquainted. I could be thirsty in an isolated portion of a train platform hoping time would pass quicker so that I could get a cup of coffee, and then some old man would wander up and ask if he could play the guitar. Before I can say "Sure" he'd pull out a bottle of wine from his bag. After a couple of tunes echoing through the station, a small gathering would assemble. Almost every time somebody in this group would lead us toward a new destination or just a place to sleep the night. If strapped over my shoulder it would attract the eyes and smiles of almost every person crossing my path. Children were attracted to it as if she was a small puppy. I was relaxing in a small park across from the hostile, waiting for its doors to open. A pair of neighborhood boys about five or six, who had gotten bored chasing the neighborhood dogs and punishing trees in the park with sticks, had focused their attention on my guitar. They would try to sneak up and pluck the strings and then challenge me to catch them, seeing if I would relinquish my defensive position. Once their game began to irritate me, I picked up the volume. With their tails between their legs, they ran towards home.

Then the two of the cutest young ladies came flirting. Sisters, dressed in matching pink dresses, as if they just left Sunday mass. I think the older of the two might have been about seven and her little sister about four or five. At that age most children are open to the world outside. It's refreshing not to encounter any defenses or preconceived ideas. I answered their questions honestly and threw a few their way. I asked them what they wanted to do in life when they got as old as me. In harmony and without hesitation both said that they wanted to grow up to be Boxers. I took a picture of the sisters demonstrating their best boxing stance.



As I expected Jim did call home, retrieved my message and eventually found his way to the hostel where I was staying. No apology, just looking for someone to blame for his wasted day. I ignored him the entire time but with nightfall, he ended up shadowing me into town. We ended up roaming from one bar to another continuing to ignore one another while watching the locals socialize. It was a long tiring night and I just wanted to get to bed.

We then crossed paths with a few intoxicated leprechauns who had traveled south from Northern Ireland. No steady hammer and their pouches were exposed, so they only offered illusions of silver and gold. I waited and watched to determine how we were going to dance out of this situation. "They will pound me" one bloke whispered as his eyes darted down both end of the ally. It was a bad position to be in. Being afraid of the dog usually gets one bit. But if you're hiding sheep's wool, it's not a good idea to let the wolves know. I was thinking "Why are you here? Why are you drunk? Why are you exposing yourselves and including me in your dilemma?"

It's wise to always give the impression that you know where you're going. Whenever it seems a confrontation is upon me, I take the first step towards the opposition, so as to place their next step on my terms. But I wasn't going to attempt walking out of town again and a bicycle wasn't ideal either. So to stay on my terms, I decided to rent a car and pick up hitchhikers. This sounded like a good idea as I heard myself repeat the words "Pick up hitchhikers". Hitchhikers usually know where to go and have a designation of their own. For people like us wandering about, it's a good thing to have this kind of dialog with locals.

The gentleman that leased us the car was extremely nice. I am naturally suspicious of people who are too nice and I usually create a bit of a buffer until I've figured out their motives. We ended up talking a bit over a cup of tea before we departed south. The agent's nervous habit of looking out the window was distracting. Apparently the local kids play a daily game of cat and mouse where car windows are broken, so he disliked parking the car in front of the office. I could relate after seeing the abused trees in parks. We packed up beer and luncheon meat, bread, along with an assortment of other goodies and headed out to explore the Irish countryside.

Like an unexpected balloon, red, drifting down from above, presenting itself and beckoning us to catch it, as we turned a corner, a red dress stood out against the green hedge groves. She was hitching for a ride. Her request was like an invitation to heaven. "You need a ride where?" I asked and she replied "To a race track, a horse race track."

As far back as I can remember I loved the horse races. I actually grew up at Santa Anita, a track near my home town of Temple City. It all started when I was about seven or so and was playing in the front yard of Billy Hoffman's house. His dad asked if I would like to join him and his son to see some horses and requested that I get permission from my parents. I was handed a program and was left to spend the day picking up tickets off the ground of Santa Anita's infield. Back then all the tickets were of different colors: light green tickets were for combination bets and two dollar bets were red, but I was attracted to the purple ones. After each race I marked down the winners and used it to verify the tickets I had gathered. I discovered a ten dollar ticket to win and place on Cranberry Road in the sixth race. I don't recall if Road won the race, but it paid me somewhere around sixty eight dollars. I must have counted it at least ten times on the ride back from the track. My dad made me put half of my winnings into a savings account. I used the other half to purchase a king snake, its aquarium and a forty five rpm record player from my cousin Bob. On that day the race track placed its hooks in me and became a joyful obsession. Throughout high school we would ditch class, climb over the fence and partner up with somebody we felt secure with to place our bets. This was so much more exciting than Geometry. There were also numerous father and son days where my dad would use me as an excuse to go himself. So having the unexpected opportunity of spending a day at the horse races was perfect. We drove through the countryside and ended up pulling onto what looked to be a destroyed soccer field. The recent rain and all the

parked cars did some damage, this requiring us to be careful where we stepped. I'm sure if we didn't have our lady in red, we would have with no doubt driven right pass that place, without even realizing what we were missing.

The horse is nature's ultimate wedding of form and purpose. The race itself is a wedding that frees the jockey from himself and into the moment when a man's mind coexists with the body of the animal. It is just beautiful. And even though I risk my money in the hope of winning more, the real excitement is in the knowledge of why I place my bet. To handicap. To watch the beauty of the marriage unfold in front of me, confirming that I was right. So I do my homework, review each horse's conditioning, watch their temperament, the eyes of their handlers and gather up as much information as possible. I was accustomed to a mutual system of betting, where all bets are accumulated to establish the odds. This was my first exposure to a system of haggling and I relished it, as I wandered in and out of the crowd comparing and shopping for a deal.

While in the paddock a dark horse with a long wild mane looked up at me like a phouka. I place twenty pounds on the nose of that dark horse. I felt as if I had completed my homework and received a good grade. The ticket I held was quickly gaining value. I had solidified the relationship at twenty five to one and now at five minutes to post, the odds had dropped to about seven to one. We climbed up into the stands alongside three elderly gentlemen overlooking the course. I think they had overheard our conversation and realized we weren't locals, so they introduced us into their conversation with a question. "Who'd ya bet?" I responded that I liked the number six horse. It that appeared to be working well and I had embraced some confidence with the underlay. "Not a chance", one of them said. "Only the one, the two and the eight horse have a chance in this race" and the three laughed in a way, as if to tell me I was out of my element. I gave them a look back like "We'll see".

The flag went up and the horses crawled from the gate and up the hill, counter clock wise, toward the first jump. My horse was in good form and as he made it over the third jump the rest of the field was falling farther and farther behind. My horse was ahead of the pack by at least four furlongs. As he began finishing the last turn and entered the opening of the long stretch, my horse was about five furlongs in front. I turned and gave the elderly gentlemen a smile from ear to ear but they all still had that same "You'll see" expression. At the top of the stretch my horse could have been



turned and forced to walk backward but would still have beaten the others to the wire. But the unexpected happened. The last jump was too much for him. First he refused, then again. The pack was beginning to close in, and then he ate grass and threw the jockey. Or should I say when he threw the jockey and then ate grass. As the rest of the field approached this last jump, every horse did the same with the exception of the one, two and eighth. I have to admit, I was out of my element. Inside information is a valuable commodity, but the excitement and the lessons learned were far more valuable than the twenty pounds I sacrificed. "You just haven't been around long enough, son" stated that voice in my head.

This world was filled with small narrow roads hidden by hedge groves, secluded lakes, isolated rivers, hills to climb and valleys to explore. Tracking down a castle, graveyard or whatever we had earmarked on our map of antiquities was like our very own secret treasure hunt. Then at the end of every one of these little adventures, we found ourselves staring again at a wonderful pint of local ale, in a small pub in the center of whatever it was the center of. We shared conversations with some very interesting people and many times listened to a local changeling play old tunes long forgotten on the fiddle. Before we were asked to leave, we would pack up and try our best to locate a spot that appeared secluded, to bed down in what could be best termed an uncomfortable position. One of us always had the steering wheel.

I wasn't ready to call it a night, so I proceeded through the low growth, to the top of the highest hill in sight, sat down on a small rock to keep my pants from getting wet from the moisture on the ground and looked beyond the stars that littered the sky. Humbling myself with my lack of knowledge, yet knowing that somewhere hidden deep inside was a feeling that I knew all the answers before and somehow they had slipped through my fingers. It was like I was standing

here in a dream and reality was at a distance. Tonight, I have come to the realization that I am made from the dust of stars and through my pursuit of explanations, I am in fact attempting, as if I am the universe, to look back upon myself, to explain what I am. So I am comfortable sitting here knowing that I am here tonight, at the center of the universe.

Do these eyes of mine, seek out in vain, is every single drop of rain, mine to embrace

The face of a child, with illusions of a world set apart, it's not easy to trace, the lines of my heart

Piece by piece, they fall by my side, as the petals of a rose, slowly gives way to life, so must I

One night after our quota of beers, while deciding on which direction to head in order to locate a secluded spot to sleep, Jim introduced his desire to drive. I reluctantly agreed and took a reclining position in the passenger seat. I must have dozed off after about an hour or so and then whatever I was dreaming merged together with Jim's erratic driving and I then realized we were still moving. Later I was told they're called pillar clouds but to me they looked like ghosts without faces standing in the middle of the road. Jim was running down each and every one of them as if this was an amusement game and not a starlit country road.



We woke to another picturesque day and it wasn't till we began driving the

Ring of Kerry that we realized it was also a lucky day. We were heading clockwise, south to north and every possible tourist and circus was traveling in the other direction. This gave us the ability to stop and enjoy the scenery and not second guess our place in line or force us to let others dictate our pace.

We picked up another hitchhiker who we let reshape our direction. A young Portuguese woman heading up into Northern Ireland. She matched a desirable image I collected somewhere along the way. Her dress like her hair, wandered among the changing winds. While she chased away the goats so we could eat in peace, I watched her. I imagined chasing her through the high grass, disrobing one garment after another until, finally catching her with a racing heart and the sounds of laughter, played with and then snared. But what attracted me to her was the same thing that kept me away. A gypsy likeness that painted a dirty picture, a line predefined in my youth that was difficult to rub out.

She had circled a small hostel up along the west coast of Northern Ireland in the little travel guide she carried. It was a gorgeous drive and well worth going out of our way. I'll never forget the look on her face when she first saw her hostel. It was in the middle of nowhere and when the young men came out of the house to greet her, all the sheep ran for the hills. She had the look of a newborn, clinging to our car as if it was her mother. "No way am I staying here" she whispered, hoping no one else heard her in case we abandoned her here. So we turned the car around and headed back toward the next major city. After dropping her off at another hotel, we again headed into the countryside looking for a small picturesque campground adjacent to a small lake that Jim had penciled on our map. We couldn't understand why we were the only visitors taking advantage of this gorgeous location. We popped open a couple of beers and setup our tent for the night. It was just about dawn when we were finally hit with the reason. It took me a good fifteen minutes to kill every bug inside the tent so I could sleep without this additional company. In the morning it was even worse. First, the moisture claimed all of our gear and second, the bugs were now traveling in clouds, literally clouds. You'd think the lake was lined with campfires.

We ended up wasting a day in a local Laundromat. I was standing in my bathing suit, watching my clothes spin. The locals were quite friendly. Once they discovered that my relatives were originally from Ireland, they actually opened up the local phone book and tried to persuade me to solicit free boarding for the night. "I'm sure this is a cousin" We packed up all our clean clothes and headed east towards a shower. We understood there was a hostel about fifty miles or so down the road.

It was raining a bit and we had a couple of open containers. The roads were narrow with no extra space to speak about. I knew if we got stuck behind another logging truck we could be here for weeks. Once we managed to pass a couple of these trucks we began to make up for some lost time. Jim began complaining that his bladder couldn't take much more of this abuse but before I was willing to pull over, I wanted to put enough distance between ourselves and the logging trucks. The last thing I wanted was to be back in the position of trying to pass them again and lose the ground we had gained.

We came to a long stretch of highway currently under construction. They were in the process of converting the highway from two lanes to four lanes for about four hundred yards or so. Most likely so that traffic like us could get by the logging trucks without having to risk their life. The outer most two lanes had cones placed every five to six car lengths. I pulled over across traffic to the left side of the road between cones. This gave me good visibility of both lanes of traffic. Jim got out, did his thing and we proceeded back onto the road.

I recall looking in both directions but apparently that was only in my imagination. I heard Jim yell, "Look Out" and our car began spinning like a top. After a second of disorientation, I realized that there was another car involved and perhaps there were injuries. I ran toward the sound of screaming children, who were drowning in a sea of stuffed animals. Yes, stuffed animals. There must have been at least two hundred in the back seat alone and until I separated them I had no idea how many children were screaming. I made sure there were no broken bones and all teeth were accounted for. I then embraced the woman who was driving, elated that there were no injuries. She also returned the hug but then took a couple of steps back and began yelling at me. I walked back over to our car to inspect the damage and noticed a small dead bird lying on the hood of our car, apparently struck in the collision. The bird also underestimated my stupidity. I noticed that my bare feet were covered in tar from the new highway. The Dullahan must have held up his head but did not know my name and kept riding through the countryside. I was standing there in a bathing suit with no shirt, under the canopy of rain clouds. The emergency crews arrived on the scene a lot faster than I expected. "Oh fuck, thank God nobody was hurt" screamed within my head. We were then patrolled down to the local police station. While I sat for about thirty minutes on the windowsill in the men restroom, hanging my feet in the sink trying to scrape off the tar, Jim was being interviewed.

Eventually it was my turn to be interrogated. I had no intention of defending myself and had decided to place myself on the mercy of the court. There was large desk that separated me from the Chief of Police. He sat back in his chair, allowed a period of silence to hang in the air. "Let's start at the beginning", he requested. Nervously I began. "We were parked in-between cones. I looked one way down the highway, turned back checking the way we came and then pulled out into traffic. I didn't see her until she hit me. It was all my fault". I explained how it all happened so fast and how I remember each frame as if presented to me in slow motion. I'm just thankful nobody was hurt. After each statement the officer would vocalize every other word as he wrote down my statement, "Looked carefully in both directions", "Proceeded cautiously into traffic". The officer then looked up at me from the sheet he was writing, "Now don't let this ruin your holiday. Would you like us to get you another car?" "Oh no" I said. Please just give me a ride to the nearest train station. Inside I felt an undertow, telling me to get out of this country as soon as possible. If asked for money, any travel plans I might have been considering could be in jeopardy.

It felt good to back on a train. Once I relaxed I realized how sore my body actually was. As we were approaching Dublin, Jim threw me a curve and I wasn't even going to try swing at it. Jim mentioned that the fifty-dollar check he had left behind as a deposit for the rental car was not signed and kept repeating how nice the guy was. Who in their right mind would let us leave without signing the deposit? Jim was insistent on going back but I had reservations. Why not just sent him another check through the post? My body definitely wasn't up for doing any walking and I felt I wasn't getting the whole story from Jim, so when we arrived in Dublin, I waited stationary. Jim returned from his little excursion with a story of how nice the guy was, how he felt so bad and how I owed him fifty dollars because he gave the guy another hundred. "Will split it" he said. Now I have a headache. I never really did get an acceptable explanation why but it didn't matter. Jim posted the original deposit and I picked up the cost for gas along the way, so I knew the cost of full tank of gas and it wasn't anywhere close to fifty dollars. I wasn't sporting any extra cash to be giving away, even if he was so nice. It pisses me off that Jim makes me consider the price I willing to pay to avoid confrontation. I wasn't going to give him any extra money and he wasn't going to give me the complete story.

We planned on leaving the island and reviewed both the train schedules and ship departure times for France. They aligned into an overnight voyage. When we arrived in Rossiare there was a small waiting room adjacent to a parking lot. The room was already overfilled with a bunch of schoolgirls laced with the excitement of going on a trip and here I was thinking this cloud had no silver lining. We mingled into a game of cards, when an older woman interrupted our concentration. She was spreading the news that no boats would be leaving that night and perhaps we would be in need of a room. I'm normally cautious accepting news from someone soliciting but it was apparent that if she was correct availability was limited. I wanted a bed and had no desire for walking or searching. We followed her up the hill to a small house overlooking the harbor that she had converted for just these occasions. She had two young boys starving for attention and an older sister spending most of her time bossing the two of them around. They had learned to tune her out, so they created a lot of noise. We got stuck between an elderly couple from Wisconsin, who continued talking about how their children no longer want to work the farm and the younger of the two boys who was starving for attention. "Play with me, play with me, play with me". Around every turn, like a small puppy, this little boy followed us for attention. It was apparent that his older brother could not fill the void of his missing father.

Each of us needs to compare themselves against a father figure in order to define one's own strength and to establish a position. But I needed to escape, so wandered off into the darkness and sat out on the bluff with a cigarette, thinking about all the little steps that lead up to this point, thankful an accident was just an accident and not an ending. I reflected all night and saw a light. It showed me what is truly precious. I'm grateful I had the opportunity to meet genuine loving people, who open up and shared a bit of their lives, even if just for a day. Their songs and stories are ingrained in my memories. The stony fields that were cluttering my thoughts have been cleared and through the trees the sky appeared. Where the green earth melts in the grey of the sea and sparkling waters fill the spaces between. I have laid down my weary tune, laid it down, for I have found, that time moves in more than one direction. I am alive.

*To carelessly drink from the river of silence, casting life's opportunities into that sea
I stand naked here with no defense, guilty
So easily I disappoint all that surround me, casting my memories into that abyss
In one single heartbeat an unrecognized beauty, pissed*

Apparently we needed to obtain boarding passes and without them we were forced back to the rear of the line. We were surrounded by kids overly excited about the duty-free beer and couldn't wait to get on board and start drinking. I assumed that the age required to drink must be lower while crossing the channel. We reassembled the card game from the night before and our group grew into quite a little party. Little dancing and a lot of drinking and as the night rolled on so did the waves, which began to put damper on the excitement. Once I started noticing the toilets becoming a desirable hangout I crawled off into one of the closed restaurants where I could lay down and stretch out my legs. The roughness of the night was painted across all those morning faces. The girls were kind enough to let us in their room and take advantage of their shower before they checked out. It's good to be clean. It will be good to get these feet of mine back on stable ground.

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Road Map:

Ireland: Dublin [St. Patrick Cathedral, Dublin Castle, Heaustansta, King's Bridge, Christ Church]
Enniskerry [Wicklon Mountains, Three Rock Monuments], Arklon, Enniscrthy,
Wexford [Slade Castel, Abby], Newross [River Barron], Waterford, Carrick, Cionmel "Horse Races"
Fermoy [N8], Fermoy, Cork [R618, Abby, R586, Inishcarra Reservoir]
Glengarriff, Ring of Beara [Caha Mountains], Inerach [Dingle Bay]
Killarney [Lough Leave, National Park,], Castleland [Castle Natrly]
Limerick [N18], Ennis [Killabysert], Kilrush [Moore Bay, Spanish Points]
Lahinch [Cliffs of Meter, Corkscrewhill, Conneman's National Park, Maum Turtle Mountain]
Galway [N59], Clifdon, Leenane, Westport [N59] [Achill Island, Bolinglanna, Corrgun Peninsula]
Westport [Castle Bar, Foxford, Loughconn], Slige, Boyle, Longford, Mollingar [*Accident*],
Dublin, Wexford, Rossiare Harbor

XX

6/23. Like a bunch of cattle we were herded from the boat to the train station. It was in this company we met a group of young ladies from Costa Mesa California on their way to a concert in Paris. We were scheduled to see U2 in Dublin but that plan kinda got left behind with a bunch of stuffed animals. We had no accommodations reserved and we knew it would be a late arrival into Paris, so when one of these young ladies suggested that we accompany them to a small hostile located in the countryside between here and Paris we agreed and prepared to follow. I was told that the hostile was right near the train platform and would be very convenient. It wasn't until the train pulled out of sight we discovered it wasn't convenient and was some distance away. Since we had no transportation we reevaluated our situation and decided that food had moved to the top of our priority list.

There wasn't much of a choice in sight just one café. Seemed reasonable to relax here and get ourselves a meal while waiting for a taxi to arrive. The elderly lady who came out from the kitchen presented us with a motherly smile and dusty menu, entirely in French. She also didn't speak a word of English. One of these young ladies was willing to try out her high school French and the rest of us really didn't have an option but to trust her judgment. There wasn't a single one of us not living within a tight budget, so the comedy grew stronger every time another entrée was served. There was always somebody in the group that needed to be reassured one more time that this wasn't going to cost us any more than we originally agreed to. After another excellent entrée, doubt ran across the face of our enlisted interpreter. In the end it didn't cost us a dime more than advertised. This was an excellent meal at a surprisingly low price.

Perhaps the taxi driver didn't get the memo. First he wanted to charge for each person not just the ride. When we suggested that girls ride along with all of our baggage, he wanted to charge us for each additional bag that didn't belong to one of the girls. After telling him we were no longer interested in his services, the driver eventually agreed that we would pay for the ride including whatever would fit in his cab. The girls were off along with our bags heading north into the French countryside. We walked about a couple of miles in the rain before Mr. Taxi driver made his way back to us. This was not a good day to be out with the elements and we assumed by the length of time it took for him to return, that we had about another eight miles or so to walk. So we agreed to the ride. Apparently he had overcharged the girls to the extent that the people who ran the hostile attempted to fetch us before Mr. Taxi could get back to us, but they were too late. The girls managed to obtain a feather bed in the main house, while we guys slept in a concrete dugout adjacent to a soccer field. This bunker had no carpet and no windows. It was cold and damp, equipped with eight bunk beds and a single outlet for heating up coffee. Eventually we discovered that the outlet didn't work and neither did the bathroom. If it weren't for the girl who brought out Irish coffee and spent the evening talking, this would have been an absolute nightmare.

There were no windows yet I could feel the darkness outside. It was late and I had no idea what time it was. Suddenly everybody got woken up by a young man sleeping on a bottom bunk just to my left, who had begun moaning. I don't know how else to describe it. I wasn't sure if it was sexual in nature or if wild dogs were mauling him to death, if he was the aggressor or the victim. But one thing was for sure, he needed some type of psychological help. There wasn't

a single one of us willing to wake this guy out of his sleep, for fear of what might happen. That morning, everyone kept a safe distance from our late night moaner. Once we were dressed, Jim agreed that we should leave and not wait on anybody, "Let's just get the hell out of this place" he whispered.

Jim took the lead because he felt he knew the way back. I had been watching the meter on the way in and didn't pay much attention to the road signs. We took a wrong turn and went just a few extra blocks out of our way. It was no big deal. Getting lost come with the territory but Jim didn't have an even keel and got himself all bent out of shape. It began raining harder so we stuck out our thumbs for a ride. But there were few cars heading in our direction and it seemed that each one intentionally tried to splash us with the water that had gathered on the road. Then all of sudden from out of nowhere a little French car slammed on its brakes and did a 180 degree turn on the road in front of us. There was no doubt in my mind that the guy was crazy and we were probably putting our lives in his hands. We weren't sure if the two of us and our gear could even fit in his little car. It was raining pretty hard, so we figured to give it a try. As it turned out, it took longer for us to get into that little car than it would have taken to walk the rest of the way to the train station.

It was a relief to be back on a dry train. When we reached Paris we found it almost impossible to find ourselves a friendly word from the locals. It was like the Parisians were trained at youth to be rude to foreigners. Their rudeness came so easily it must have been a mandatory subject in their schools. I located a tourist office and asked in the tourist office for directions. The employee looked straight through me as if I wasn't there. When she finally acknowledged that I was standing in front of her and in need of assistance, she shrugged her shoulders and repeated something in French to rub in the fact that I didn't know what she was saying. I stood to the side and while I attempted to read the train board I overheard that same young lady having a casual conversation in English to a friend. Rude. I purchased an international paper and reviewed the continent's weather forecast, seeking sun. Scandinavia here we come.

We spent the rest of the day wandering Paris's streets, absorbing the atmosphere and gathering up the ingredients for our train ride into Denmark. We claimed ourselves a comfortable compartment and settled in for the long haul. A young lady peeked in from the corridor "May I sit with you gentlemen?" She asked. With a beer in one hand and my usual quest for a smile, I began asking her questions. She didn't seem to mind talking but it was evident after a period of time that she had a problem with accepting food or beverages from others, perhaps she had a bad experience or had been warned. She was sporting a second class rail pass and had been chased out by the conductor a couple of times but always managed to find her way back to us. Late that night an American gentleman I assumed to be in his mid-thirties quietly grabbed the corner seat of our compartment. He didn't say very much and kept to himself.

At first light, Jim took advantage of getting up first and had wandered off to the water closet to do his business. In his absence, our late night compartment addition opened up mood tapes, the kind of stuff like mountain brooks and ocean waves. When Jim returned and opened up the compartment door, he first thought he was in the wrong place but his expression of doubt left once he noticed me sitting over in the corner. The mood tapes were nice, I could live with them. But they were only a prelude. Eventually our American friend began trying to lead a conversation and it was obvious by the way he danced between political and religion subjects that he had an agenda. Whenever lulls appeared in the conversation, he'd ask the questions and then answer them. It was like he was talking to himself. While I enjoy talking on these types of subjects, anything leading to a debate or argument needs to be staged later in the day to get me involved. But we were a captive audience. The idea of interjecting something ran across my head. I naturally take the opposite perspective to survey the landscape in an attempt to discover if an individual is just repeating an idea out of context or if they have a formulated an opinion of their own. Then he began explaining why he decided to become a vegetarian. He stated that anybody who wasn't a vegetarian was unhealthy. Okay I'm in. I stated I was meatatarian and disagreed with his theory. I questioned if he thought that God had made mistakes in nature's design. "No", he replied, "God's design is perfect. It is man and his desires that are imperfect". "So do you think eating meat is a desire?" I asked. "Yes, an impure desire" he responded. "Is it true that the design of man is that of a predator: our teeth, digestive system, even the position of our eyes are those of a predator? This would lead one to believe that God's intention was for us to be carnivores, having nothing to do with desire. Maybe your reference to this impure desire in man is questioning God." When I paused, Solsberg laughed uncontrollably. She gave the impression that something might have loosened.

When we rolled into Copenhagen, our American addition suggested that if we wanted to take a shower, he had a friend with a flat just around the corner from the station and was sure he wouldn't mind. Jim took advantage first, while Solsberg and I went into the city in search for an exchange and a cup of coffee. When we arrived at the flat's door two large African men in native ceremonial dress greeted us. "Me know travel, you eat, you eat" Dada number one said while Dada number two observed us. We both ate a little just to get these two off our backs. There were weird vibes hovering in the air. I made jokes to Solsberg that they probably had cameras in the showers. Out of kindness we agreed to return later in the day for a free yoga lesson, whatever. The three of us wandered across town searching for an available hostel leaving our bags locked up in a train station locker. Once we found ourselves a room we headed back to fetch our bags and drop in for our so called yoga lesson. Individual yoga lessons behind closed doors had all the earmarking of strange, so everything I looked at was under a different light. Jim and I waited patiently on the couch in the adjacent room. Once Solsberg emerged, it was my turn.

Our American addition, now Yoga master instructed me to sit across from him duplicating a sukhasana position and began reciting some nonsense in a language I could not identify. He then asked me to place my hand alongside a pentacle he had placed on the floor between us and asked me to repeat some words that I did not recognize. My refusal and chuckles upset him. "Is it a puppet's dream to be human?" I whispered to myself while I stood up and let the

blood run back into my legs. He seemed quite angry at my refusal to participate and our little secession ended abruptly. He led me back to the couch where Jim was fidgeting. I gave Jim a look and watched him vanish behind the same closed door. I expected Jim to also hit the turnstile after a few minutes. He was in there for quite some time and I began assuming he had passed his indoctrination, maybe got a tattoo or something. I got bored waiting and began doodling on a napkin and left those thoughts behind for a future inspection.

“The wind blows where it will, you hear the sound of it but you do not know where it comes from, or where it’s going. If one blind man leads another, don’t they both fall into the ditch?”

I felt as if I was like the wind. Not knowing from where I have come or where I am to go. So in this curiosity I enjoy discussing life, gasping at reasons, studying rituals and love hearing the perceptive of others on this same journey. But this experience was insulting. I felt dirty, defiled, or that I had contracted some type of virus. I know that’s a bad way to look at these situations and perhaps there was more to learn there through contrast and through agreement but I couldn’t help the way I felt. I suppose I could have honestly applied the same view to the rituals engrained in my youth. These ideas lingered in my mind and while I waited for Jim I began sketching notes.

I once donated time on a suicide hotline back when I was in High School. One the other end of the phone I heard a cry of desperation. I interjected an image of a candle flickering from the middle of the room and asked my desperate friend to imagine standing at its edge with his back turned to the flame. I had him focus his attention not on the candle but the shadows that were cast - large fearful shadows. I tried to get him to visualize that where he was standing in real life in relationship to his real fears was not much different that in this fictional room. My goal was to get him to turn around and face the candle and to realize that the shadows he saw did not represent the actual size of the objects he feared, thus putting his issues in a better perspective to be dealt with.

When we were leaving our host had given the others his personal address and a phone number, where he could be reached and ignored me completely. I was curious to the path the others had taken but saw no value in knowing and therefore never discussed it. I don’t claim to know very much and sometimes can hardly tell the difference between good and evil, right and left. But I do believe that in order to truly believe in anything, one needs to start by questioning. I think we are neglecting God’s intentions if we just accept without knowing the justification of why we choose. I believe my spirit and my flesh are at war for my appetite and this is the way it is intended to be.

In the beginning, there was the light, all bright, until we turned away to see, until we came to be, one with the shadow

We came to see the show, to see what we could find and watched the shadows dance, on the walls inside our mind.

Captivated by its rhythm, I followed like a child, chasing each and every shadow, with passion almost wild.

We danced around the fire, in celebration of the moment, as the darkness gathered round us, I was alone

Loud unnerving noises, downcast unsmiling faces, like dreams I long destroyed, yet, still remember these places

For I have been exposed and have been put to shame, for reluctance, proves a cowardly thin.

*I could not confront the light, could do nothing but decline, these dark corners offered me no refuge,
from the sounds inside my mind*

Standing alone on the edge, the ledge of the abyss, an uninstructed soul astray, I prayed, cowardice

Like an unexpected breeze, a whisper, how everything was going to be alright,

like a hand upon my shoulder, like a loving embrace,

turning me to see the light and there, in the middle of the space,

stood only a small candle burning bright.

*All these insignificant things that I have judged,
that had passed between, casted shadows much larger,
but now I’ve seen*

They were only shadows, only fears,

but now I see as children see.

through acceptance, through embrace,

I found that place, where I am free,

I am not alone

We spent the rest of that day alongside a beautiful lake, gazing up through the trees, watching the cotton clouds float leisurely by and following their reflections in the water. Occasionally a white swan would swim up to us seeking food. As the sun began to go down, we wandered back towards the hostel. It would be an early night. We were all very tired. Jim and I took advantage of an available Ping-Pong table adjacent to the lobby. Solsberg sat alongside watching us play for about thirty minutes until one of her bands broke. She started laughing uncontrollably again and it was evident she needed sleep, really needed sleep. Based on what we managed to talk out of her, plus the last couple of days in her company, I would say she hadn’t slept a wink in quite some time.

We rose early and spent the entire day wandering the pedestrian streets and central squares popping in and out of small cafes and trendy boutiques. That's right, trendy boutiques. The young ladies that gather in these places are quite attractive. Carlsberg and then followed the tree-lined avenues to the harbor. Beyond this ribbon to the wind there sat the "Little Mermaid", listening to the church bells in the distance. The melody of the wind passing over the gentle hills and meadows and here she sits, still turning her eyes landward, dreaming of mortality.

We traveled through Denmark, heading north towards Oslo, Norway. Solsberg played guide and shepherded us through the local sights. She suggested that if her friend gave us the green flag, we could spend the night at their place. She made a couple of attempts to connect and when she finally got a hold of her friend we got the thumbs up. These two young ladies shared an apartment in the general vicinity of the Olympic ski jump, which gave us the opportunity to explore some residential areas and gather up the ingredients for dinner. The four of us drank into the night until the alcohol was gone. Then I began getting the impression that these ladies expected more to the tune of romance. Lounging around in their underwear was a big hint. I wasn't attracted to either one of the young



ladies and had been no effort through the evening to separate into couples. I hoped they weren't expecting a foursome because real men never share abed with another penis. We slept off the alcohol and hit the road running. We reviewed the train schedule and decided to depart north into Trondheim on the midnight train. This gave us another entire day to tour the city of Oslo. Although I have been writing smaller and smaller in my journal to conserve space, it had become evident that I was eventually going to run out of room and need to get myself a new journal. I decided I would purchase a new book and transcribe what was already written in a much smaller font, consciously considering the number of pages to the length of my journey. In between the Viking exhibits and the city parks I located a literary shop that sold journals. Perfect. I procured a journal with a lot of blank pages with no lines, about five by eight, so it would also be easy to carry.

We ended up in Oslo's train station an hour and a half earlier than we had originally planned. We had eaten and kind of ran out of touring options and found ourselves debating on which train to depart on. One train left at eleven and the other at midnight. Jim was having another one of his bad days, randomly complaining about everything and anything that came into view. I wasn't up for spending much time sitting in this vacant station with only Jim's attitude to entertain me. When the first of the two trains arrived, Jim walked the length of the train while I watched the gear. "There's no first class, so let's wait for the next one" Jim demanded. I wasn't enthusiastic about spending another hour there, so I asked Jim to watch the bags and went to see if there were any first class compartments for myself. About half way toward the end of the train, I passed through a group of young ladies gathered outside an open window of the train, giggling and laughing with one another. I caught a smile and a bit of eye contact as I continued through to the end of the train. Jim was right, only second-class compartments. Sometimes second class is not a bad deal, it can be an opportunity to meet interesting people, but not the best of arrangements when finding sleep is the priority.

As I headed back toward Jim, these young ladies kinda caught me off guard. A few of them stepped in front of my path, preventing me from walking through or around them and then the group closed the circle in on me. They began singing a melody. I assumed it was in Norwegian but then the chorus came through in English "I love you, I love you, I want to marry you". If there was a reason for accepting a second class compartment this was it. Jim, clinging to his attitude refused the opportunity. I reluctantly accepted and as my punishment I had to endure another hour of complaints. When the second and last train of the evening entered the station, unfortunately it too had no first class compartments. This time it was even more obvious that we had made a bad decision when we discovered there was absolutely no space to stretch out. There weren't two adjacent seats in any one car, so the two of us ended about four cars apart. I found the last available seat next to a beautiful young lady who had to be at least six two, a true Viking breeder. Throughout the night she tried and tried again to share my seat. With her leaning up against me, draping her

arms across me, some form of touching, all of which prevented me from achieving any type of real sleep. To add insult to injury, late that night our compartment was visited a couple of small dogs and a chicken - yea, a chicken. How do you get a ticket for a chicken? Our three new visitors had nothing better to do than voice their opinions to one another all night. Bottom line, I got no sleep. When we finally reached Trondheim I felt as if I had gotten body slammed and was dead on my feet. I met up with Jim outside on the train platform. We compared notes and figured we had two options: go into Trondheim and pay for a room and sleep all day, or get back on another eight hour train and head farther north. We figured we could see the sights on our way back down, so we choose option two and decided to head north into Fauske. We had marked down Amsterdam for the fourth of July and didn't plan seeing all of Scandinavia in one visit anyway.

I picked up a pair of apples and a few candy bars for the trek, while Jim checked the train schedules. "Track four, ready to go" said Jim. After a minute or two with no train, it dawned on me that Jim most likely misread the schedules and picked the wrong platform. I retrieved the schedule from Jim's bag, "I'll hold the bags, you go check platform six" I bluntly stated. In the tunnel between the platforms I could hear Jim's echo, "Its going!!" I broke out into a run, handed Jim the bags and jumped onto a moving train. It was too late to change our minds. I was half asleep, standing between compartments and there were no seats available within view. I started entertaining thoughts of sleeping on the floor. I turned to Jim and told him that I'd watch the bags, if he would please find us some seats. It's better to find seats without trekking the gear around.

I could see Jim walking away from me through the dirty window that separated me from the passengers of the adjacent car. When he reached the very end of the first car he turned a waved as if there were seats available. I carried both bags, one in each arm down the corridor toward Jim. A little past the halfway point, I heard giggles to my right and when I lifted the bags up into the overhead racks, I received what I would classified as catcalls. Then I realized I forgot the bag of apples. When I turned in the direction of the whistles, in practically every seat that faced us were those girls who sang to me on the platform in Oslo. On the way back from retrieving the abandoned apples, one of the young ladies stuck out her leg to stop me from passing. She looked up and asked me something in Norwegian. I responded with something like "Sorry I only speak English" Where are you from?" she questioned. "California", I responded. "Ohhhh California", resonated through the group of girls. I was dead on my feet and tried to arrange my pillow on the seat's armrest to get some sleep but this bored group of girls just wouldn't have it.

They began singing every English song they knew from God bless America, a few choruses of Row, Row, Row Your Boat in order to keep me from falling asleep. I kept noticing glances from people in the rear of the compartment wondering what all the commotion was about. At one point I almost got to sleep but my short dream or passing thought was interrupted by the flashing of a camera. At that point I began to get a bit freaked out. Why were they taking a picture of me? I was concerned that my fly might have been open or something else embarrassing. The young lady who appeared to be the shiest of the group leaned forward toward me and asked if I would please play the guitar for them. I explain I didn't know how to play the guitar and I wasn't about to embarrass myself in front of all you young ladies. She gave me a look back like she didn't believe a thing I said. At that point one of the three mothers that were acting as chaperones for the group turned around in her seat and asked if I would mind if she sketched a portrait of me. I laughed, thinking this all was some kind of a joke. Perhaps I was on Candid Camera Norway. It was then the conversation started. "Where have you been?", "Where are you going?", "Do you like our country?" The girls listened with intensity while I sat for my portrait, she refused to take no for an answer. Some of the girls had left their seats to move within hearing distance and a few of the girls had wandered in-between train cars to enjoy a cigarette.

One of the young ladies leaned over and asked me if Jim was shy. "He doesn't say very much does he?" The entire time Jim was sitting in the corner seat and hadn't shared a word. "You don't know Jim, he's just tried" I responded while gesturing for Jim to mingle with the others outside. He stood up immediately and headed out between the compartments to join the smokers. As we got past a few of the obvious questions, I learned that this group of girls had been singing together for the last five years and had the opportunity to produce a couple of albums. They were on their way home from their swan song tour. I was told that the girl's initial fascination with me was spawned by my physical likeness to their conductor. I understood that he had just quit the group to pursue a career as a pianist. Supposedly we looked exactly alike. This train ride home was the end to an important chapter in their lives.



Our conversation bounced around until we landed on the subject of my journal. "What are you writing? Who are you writing to?" Since I refused to play the guitar, I was asked to write a poem for them instead. I asked about the song they had sung to me in Oslo's station. I was told it was a Norwegian folk song, a story about a young girl who wished to inspire a young man's passion for her. She wandered into the summer fields and gathered flowers and then she'd

place them under the pillow where he slept. These flowers would turn his dreams to love for her. They watched intensely as I incorporated the elements of their folk song into a poem to solidify this moment between us.

*To walk in hand, a virgin heart
to the break of day
me the wind
as lovers
by her bedside play*

*Before the night, had faded soon
to the fields she'll run
she the wind
as flowers
before the morning sun*

*She'll carry in hand, bundled in truth
flowers for your bed
lay them down
to pillow
dreams of dreams, she lead*

*To walk in hand, a virgin heart
to the break of day
we the wind
as lovers
by our bedside play*

In order to break up the parade of questions, I joined Jim out between the two cars for a cigarette. As I exited the compartment and had eye contact with the young ladies outside, the first words that came out from my mouth were, "Which one of you girls are taking me home tonight?" Three quickly offered with giggles. That came out wrong, so I restated my question, explaining that we needed a place to sleep when we reached Fauske. The oldest of the group explained that her parents were on holiday and she would be happy if we would stay with her during our visit. The remaining hour before we reached Fauske was by far the most memorable and the most special. I sat among all the girls while they sang their last concert to us. When our train reached Fauske and I was attempting to exit the train an elderly couple who had been sitting in the rear of the compartment stopped me. The woman hugged me and thanked me for the memorable ride. "Are you kidding me?" I just sat there and listened.

*Voices of Norway, sing, sing aloud, along with me, along with me
these hills, they wait to answer, their echo's always heard, enchanting me, their melody, a song sung sweet as birds
Sing, sing aloud, along with me, along with me, enchanting me, their melody, a song, so seldom heard*

We followed our new guide through the city to her parent's home. About half way down the path between the train platform and our destination, we met up with one of her neighborhood friends. She was very cute, with smiling eyes and an innocent smile. From the moment she was introduced to us, Jim began acting like a puppy that had rediscovered its mommy. I on the other hand had very little interest in anything other than sleep. It's been days and I can't remember the last time I slept. I almost fell asleep standing up in the shower. Then there was a knock on the door. Jim's Freyja arrived with some eggs to prepare us omelets. It's about three in the morning and the girls crawled out on the balcony to sun bathe. I started to get the impression that nobody sleeps around here. At one point I stretched out on the floor and must have fallen asleep, because I was awoken by cold water and laughter. Hilda, the sparkplug of the group added some needed spice to the evening and challenge the group explore the countryside. The five of us piled into a small automobile and headed out toward Bodo to get a better view of the midnight sun. Even though the sun continued to shine, everything seemed as if it was painted with a slightly different hue. As if somebody stole some of the blue tones. I carried Hilda on my shoulders down to a more private view, trying our best to avoid the bugs. At the moment when the sun came to a stop, just before it began its path back up into the sky, I attempted to take a couple of pictures. I was just sporting a cheap 35mm pocket camera without any accessories, so there was almost no chance I got a picture. It's a bad sign when the shutter speed is in minutes rather than fractions of seconds.

We stopped along the way home, had ourselves a few beers and then to my disappointment we dropped off Hilda. She was kinda of our energy that moved us from one point to another. Jim and his new friend began petting in the kitchen and our host began giving me the eye. I wasn't attracted and the thought of romance was far outweighed by the thought of a good night's sleep. I managed to persuade her to set a mood for the two lovebirds, so in the adjacent room she pulled some beautiful memories out of the piano while the two lovebirds necked in the adjacent room. I crawled down stairs, sealed up the room from the light and finally managed to get some sleep. I have unappreciated the sun's ability to provide energy and to throw off my sense of time. I lost all track of time.

When we wandered into town to gather up some supplies and beer for the day, most of the adults the girls knew gave us the stink eye. The thought that perhaps our staying with these young girls was being viewed as inappropriate lingered through the day. I persuaded Jim that maybe it was best to stick with our schedule and keep our commitment to the Fourth of July party in Amsterdam. We could make our way back up here afterwards. I procured a jewelry box for my sister's birthday. It was kind of interesting, made of some stone that was laced with gold. I understood they mined those rocks close by. One present down, two to go.

With the morning sun we said our good-byes and headed south back toward Trondheim. Jim turned into a broken record and kept repeating his exploits. When he finally he fell asleep, I soon followed. Somewhere in the middle of a dream the train came to a stop and a voice was broadcast over the intercom. Everybody around us quickly got up out of their seat and ran toward the doors. I didn't need to understand Norwegian to know I should be doing the same. The first thought that entered my mind was perhaps there was a bomb onboard. I woke Jim up and explained that we should quickly get off the train too. As it turned out, the tracks ahead were washed out due to a storm and all these passengers were hustling to get good seats on buses. Well, we didn't act as quickly as the locals and ended up with the booby prize, bad seats at the back of the bad bus. The seat I managed to get wasn't that bad but Jim's ended up being in the seat from Hell. He sat up against the window with three drunks to his right. They grabbed my broken guitar and attempted to demonstrate that they could not carry a tune or remember the words to a single song. Their lack of ability to sing and or play the guitar irritated some and made the others laugh. Eventually the alcohol wore them down into a third gear and then it really got comical, unless you were Jim. They were the sleeping dominos. Their sleeping heads would shift with the movement of the bus, first giving Jim a bit of room and then squeezing him up against the window. Even Jim would have thought this was comical if he had anybody else's point of view.

A couple of stops and a couple of sites and we finally ended up in Trondheim late. Our little detour ate up the day and forced us to quicken our pace if we were ever going to make the hostel's curfew. I was uninterested in forking out extra cash for a hotel room or trekking around the city to locate a vacancy. We crossed the finished line with a few minutes to spare. Once we were checked in we wandered about the town to see the sights. While connecting up train schedules we discovered that in order for us to arrive in Amsterdam mid-day on the fourth and to connect up with Solsberg on the way, we would have to make an early train out of Trondheim the next day and had to depart very early. Since we were heading back to Scandinavia after our Amsterdam party, Solsberg offered to watch our gear so that we could travel light. Breakfast came along with the cost of the room, so we made arrangements with the front desk to have breakfast an hour earlier than posted to make our train.

I was awoken from a dream by the sounds of somebody scratching my bed. I discovered there was a porcupine outside my window sharpening his nails on a small tree. I decided to crawl out the window and followed him for a while. I stood there in the darkness, looking up past the dark giants that lined the horizon with the moon nowhere to be seen. As I focused my eyes and looked into the sea of stars, my mind began to reel with amazement. The reality of how vast this all is, how small I am and how little I know rushed into my head. "Talk to me and tell me the truth" I asked the stars. The fabric of space, quasars, gravity, the clustering of dark matter, anti-matter, time, distance, all of this speak to me of order and design with a purpose unknown to me. But if there a single rule that can't be changed there is an intent, a purpose. The plan just unwinds too slowly for me get wind of it.

*I'm one who's not worthy of the heights that I seek.
Untried strength may fail me, halfway up these mountain peaks*

*I suppose I dwell in silence, yet no fear to speak my mind,
still I frightened by commitments, of thought that cling like veins,*

*so the golden rays of lover's light, may never find or lead my way
my path may always lead through night, still waiting on the day*

Everybody was still asleep. Only the sounds coming from the kitchen broke the silence. We wandered in from the dark to see what breakfast consisted of and discovered a feast of fruits, every luncheon meat imaginable, six types of cheeses, multiple styles of bread, a stack of hardboiled eggs at least two feet high and most importantly, nobody to chaperone us. We each grabbed two plates and filled them with enough food to accommodate a long train ride. We were travelers on a budget and need to take advantage of these types of opportunities when they presented themselves.

The train we met at the station had "Business Express" written all over its exterior. We thought, now were going to moving. We grabbed a couple of seats across from one another in first class, put the plates of food under our seats and broke out the cards for a game of cribbage. I don't know if it was because the two of us were wearing bathing suits or because we had plates of food under our seat but the other passengers were giving us snooty glances. There was a look of anticipation of our removal on their faces, waiting for the social scales to be put back into balance. A voice came across the loud speaker, explaining that this train required reservations and those that didn't have one would be assessed an additional fee. We weren't too sure what that all meant and discussed the possibility of moving to second class where perhaps the fee would be less, if any at all. Around us, the other passengers were all smiling and you could almost hear their thoughts. "Don't you kids know this is first class?" We started to get that feeling when the game begins to look out of reach as if we need to concede the wager. At that moment a couple came into the department and asked Jim to move out of their seat. She had a reservation in her hand with Jim's seat number on it and another one for the seat next to him. Everyone was all just watching us and waiting for the conductor to take us away into train

detention. Jim moved into the seat to my left against the window. Then a young lady pushed a food cart with a cash register attached to its side. "Coffee, Tea?" she asked each guest as she passed through the compartment. The conductor was behind her validating tickets, "Tickets please?" and gestured for us to hand them to him. We handed him our passes and prepared ourselves for the bad news but to our surprise he handed them back and asked if we would prefer coffee or tea with our complimentary breakfast. It seemed they'd just have to live with us. We wandered back into our game of cribbage but this time we had food both on the table in front of us and under our seats. That day led right into a game of train tag, with the exception of stopping by Solsberg's parent's house to drop our gear. Solsberg was out at a local party and we missed the chance to say hello and give our thanks for her kindness.

We jumped a train in Oslo and headed south through Copenhagen towards Amsterdam. We ended up in a compartment with a bunch of children. Half of them were traveling along side their high school teacher on a summer trip from the states. Somehow we ended up in the compartment with the teacher and two older kids heading home from holiday in Sweden. We got pulled into a conversation with the teacher about the war he had served in and some of the treks he had experienced in his youth. He told us that he smoked some weed back then but still was curious about the effects of hash. One of the young men broke out some tobacco and few pieces of hash and I rolled one up for the group. We laid down in the dark and wandered into the night while Zeppelin played in the background. I grew so accustomed to the rhythm of the train that it acts like sedative and put me right to sleep. I actually slept very well.

There were no hedges, nor fences, in the bare and uniform countryside leading into the Netherlands. We were heading back into the crossroads of traffic back into the circus they had named Amsterdam. I could see no natural boundaries that separated the courtyard from the jester. We planned to stay in the red light district to get some color, so we followed the light toward a cold beer. We ended up walking for hours searching for a room. When we finally located an available bed its cost exceeded our budget. Eventually, we learned that there were a couple of beds available up above the bar we had been drinking in. We were told that the band stopped playing around two in the morning and then things would start to quiet down. Well that never happened.

There were about twelve of us in the room at any one time and I don't think the light ever went out. It just kept going and going, with all the earmarks of a circus. The only exception was that nobody was selling peanuts. Local drug

dealers would make their rounds in-between beds and when nobody opened their wallet, they'd roll one up anyway and pass it around. The room's jester was a mute and it could have been assumed that he would be the quiet one in the group, but no. With the continuous waving of his hands, he was like the conductor of an orchestra who demanded each note that he had written be read, writing note after note after note. In the beds to my left was a pair of guys from somewhere in Sweden. I don't think they ever stop talking. "OK, you didn't know places like this existed. I heard you! Go to sleep!" After awhile I just had to get out of there, so I laced up my tennis shoes, took a few hits of weed and went out into the dark to jog. While running I stopped to rest and noticed an elderly British couple standing in front of a window displaying the latest assortment of dildos. Their expressions were classic and should have been put on film. Enjoying Amsterdam is, in many respects, it's a lot like experiencing a drug. There are those individuals who when forced off their normal path, feel lost and focus all their attention on getting back to familiar

ground. Those types of people would never see Amsterdam as it truly is. But for those like us who never feel we can get lost, who enjoy seeing new things, taking new paths and have the confidence that the same road still awaits us, this place holds intrigue. "Our music's loud and our streets are crowded, all summer long, doesn't matter which street corner, our emotions are running strong".

I walked among the field of painted faces and clown, sand and waves crash and roar, in silence sings, she's coming down. Another sells books which he laid on the ground., a boy runs down the shore, south winds bring, another round



07/04. We wandered among its narrow streets that radiated out like spokes to a wheel. Bicycles danced across our path. Up one of these many streets we spotted a small coffee shop adjacent to one of the more picturesque canals. It was a good day for mischief. It had a large window and we noticed that the table upfront was vacant and had a nice view of a small flower market. The local dealer started out trying to sell us what he wanted to get rid of. "Not interested in anything but the very best", I repeated. Then questioned where do I have to go to find some. Making sure that he understood I knew what we were looking for and was not going to compromise. After the obstacle course of questions, he eventually came forth with what we were seeking. With a pot of coffee, over a game of backgammon and I rolled up I would consider a good one, half marijuana half hash. After the first couple of hits a young German sat down next to us, introduced himself and asked if he could have a hit also. It was obvious he was a little green behind the ears and gave us the impression that this might be his first time. He took a couple of hits and began to relax. Then all of a sudden his eyes grew wide, he stood up and to our surprise ran out of the coffee shop and down the street. It was actually very funny. All the other patrons had no idea what had just happened and by their expressions, they thought he had stolen something from us and questioned why we didn't pursue him.

We waited that evening in front of Ann Frank's house, walked around, kept our eye open, but not a single person showed for our little forth of July party.

We divided up the day between Rembrandt and Van Gough. Sadness is Van Gough's greatness and without his blood and wed of failures, such masterpieces perhaps would have never been put to canvas. I can relate to the color and texture of his turmoil and find myself too at times walking around in a daze. In contrast his colors were bright and unique. Rembrandt has no equal in that range of chiaroscuro. Seems with age his brushwork became bolder. Its thickness seemed to float over the canvas. We viewed a myriad of contrasting styles, contrasting periods and even contrasting museums. The award goes to Van Gough. For those who believe that every museum was laid out by a mad man that had a faddish for mazes, his was the exception.

I looked out from that window, above the red light shining below, my eyes following eyes that watch every step, like clowns that dance in the circus. It doesn't bother me if the clown's expression never changes, he always seemed sad to me anyway. Women would solicit their services. Young boys were yelling discounted prices across the canal. Insecurity and egos collide and clash, each adding different colors to the canvas. Waves of contradictions flood my mind as I absorbed these imagines and incorporated them into a fantasy of her. She is beautiful, many are beautiful, but what is real? I laced up my shoes and headed out into the night.

*That love in her eyes, it's playing - sharp as the blade of death,
the love on her lips, it's straying - hidden in comfort's breath*

*Love on her breasts, is painted - swelling with sweet desire
only the touch of another - sets this woman's heart to fire*

We took another long night train back to Scandinavia. About the time we arrived in Uppsala Sweden, Jim's love sickness had broken into a full-blown fever. We couldn't get through a single conversation without him bringing her up again. "Go get her" I demanded. "Stop taking about it and just do it". I on the other hand wasn't interested in watching two playing house, so over a pizza and a game of chess we discussed options. We decided to head in separate directions and to meet up at Solsberg's house in two weeks time. We set a date and agreed that three day prior to the date we would each call Solsberg's house at noon and leave a message confirming that no unexpected situation arose and that these plans were unchanged, or , explaining where and when we'd meet and adjust from there. Jim left with a hand full of flowers expecting a kiss. I left with a bus ticket and an open road.

With a cup of coffee and a cigarette, I got an early start and headed toward Gavie to see its shores. All this talk about love and kissing had got me thinking about it as well. In regards to the young ladies that had entered my life that I have loved, I always acted as a gentleman and never took control until the door was open and I was invited in. I needed a green light. As I was growing up I knew a young lady from a distance. I was always attracted to her physically and wanted to know her better but our social circles never intersected. A few years after High School we had met up at a party of a mutual friend and during our conversation I asked her on a date. To sidestep a "No thank you" response, I frosted the invitation with a ticket to a concert. I had been planning on seeing Neil Young, who was performing solo at the Universal Amphitheater in LA and had been contemplating who I should take and here an opportunity stood. I asked her and she said yes. I felt we were having a good time and at the end of the evening, while sitting in her driveway I attempted to kiss her good night, nothing but a good night kiss. My hands were kept to myself. She responded by pushing me away and proceeded to place a few nails in the coffin of any real relationship we might have. She stated, "I'm not attracted to you but we can still be friends". Well this was not just some traffic in the intersection, so I backed away to avoid any debris. After this incident, she would call me up on occasion. "Would you like to go bike riding?", spaghetti dinner at her mother's house, or something else along those lines. We kept in touch and became friends. "The stars are raindrops searching for a place to fall". Or perhaps she senesced that I was broken, dealing with issues she's rather avoid. She was unwilling to know me, to step into my space and I was left with unfulfilled desires. Inside I still had hope that we might become closer, that she might see me as a valuable friend. Although the traffic light would seem to turn green on occasion, it was only a tease. With any indication that I might try entering the intersection, the light would quickly turn red again. I normally avoided these types of obstacles and was never one to tolerate games for very long. I decided I would keep my pride intact and not pursue her. From time to time we would get together. We took a couple of trips, drew patterns of each other's bodies. I waited but never got

a green light. On a couple of occasions I got the impression she didn't like my constraint and would play with me to see how close to the intersection she could get me before she'd turn the light red. Then one day she disappeared without a word. I still think about her from time to time and she still is a part of me and my dreams. "Sail on, sail on my little honey bee, sail on".

*I'm dreamin of things that we never did, sunset and sights to see
I hold in my sighs, letting the days roll on by, such things that will never be*

*I remember our trip and the hills that we climbed and wondered why we never could
the image still walks, like a ghost in my mind, still hoping that some day we would*

I was now free to explore without questions, and headed up the coast into Soundvail and arrived in Ostersund with a pair of young ladies from the states. They had made reservations with the local tourist office and suggested I come along. Perhaps they'll have a room for me too. As it turned out they only had availability for females but were kind enough to point me in the direction of a couple of inexpensive rooms. I sat out in front of a concert hall for two hours waiting for a call to be placed home. There was a beautiful young lady sitting there by herself, waiting for a friend who was performing in a local play. During our conversation she suggested a nice restaurant in town and I suggested she join me. We had a nice meal and a long conversation but she was quite young, so I gave her a peck on the cheek and said goodnight. Although she might disagree, it was the right thing to do. The weather wasn't too cold and it was well past midnight. I had already spent more than my daily allotment on food, so I decided to sleep on the street. In my pocket I still had a joint and decided to take one last chance in a local nightclub. At the very least I could kill a few hours. I couldn't locate a single smile. Not one individual had promise. There was live music and a good crowd. The crowd was well dressed but just sat across looking at one another, more interested in their own cigarettes and their new clothes than each other. It looked more like a fashion show than a fun night out on the town. I tried to start up a couple of conversations but my wardrobe only led to unanswered questions.

*Will fashion rule, in nature's art, life's pain, a daily threat
to shut, all such dreams, down in your heart and sail away, love please, not forget*

After that non-eventful pair of beers, I wandered about the city in search for place to sleep. I must have walked for about an hour until I decided to scale a fence into a construction site. It was about the only place that wasn't attracting bugs. They had completed the framing but very little of the dry wall had been nailed up, so when the wind decided to blow, there was really nowhere to hide. I managed very little sleep. I just wasn't too successful in persuading myself to sleep through all this but on a positive note, I didn't get a single bug bite.

As I reached the Arctic Circle, I got off the train in what seemed to be a ghost town. I would assume it was at least three in the morning and everything in sight was closed. Although early in the morning the sun was still up creating an odd feeling, like being on a set of a twilight zone episode. You could tell something was off. I was carrying an address of a good place to stay that was given to me somewhere along the road. At that point I really didn't care how nice it was as long as it had a working shower. After a couple of wrong turns, I managed to find the place but since it was so early I was a little reluctant to knock on the door. I'm not one who enjoys imposing especially waking a stranger from sleep. I always get the feeling that they don't like me for the rest of my stay. An old woman came to the door and bluntly asked me to wait. She walked me over to another building and showed me a room that was available. Once I put my bag down, it was time for a needed shower. I wrapped myself in a towel and attempted to make it down the hall unnoticed. It was after three in the morning and the chance of getting caught had to be slim. As I began to reach the end of the hall, I could hear some commotion, which was strange based on the hour. As I approached the shower door, a door to my left suddenly opened. There stood three elderly ladies and a young beauty who had the face of an angel. Once I noticed her it was like time stopped. I was probably staring. The angel stepped out into the hallway, separating me from my destination, the shower. The three elderly ladies might have been in their seventies but still acted like a bunch of schoolgirls. I didn't understand the language but I knew I was central to the joke. Then she put her hand on my shoulder, "He's



mine girls” she said in English. I gave a smile to the group and headed into the shower, one long hot shower. When I opened up the door to my surprise she was standing there. I wasn’t sure if she had waited or had just returned. She looked to be about nineteen or maybe twenty. “Would you enjoy a cup of coffee?” she questioned. “Yes, please” I responded with a curious smile and the willingness of a puppy. Then she gestured that we head to my room.

She offered me a cigarette and while the coffee percolated, we sat on the edge of the bed and talked. As we talked, her lips got closer and closer, where almost no choice but one remained. I leaned forward passed up her lips and kissed her neck instead. Then slowly I placed my hand on her lower back. She stood up and backed away from me, as my mind began to fill with questions. Did I misread her? Then slowly she took off one article of clothing after another until she was standing there in her birthday suit, waiting for me to touch her again. Well that’s a green light. I could get out of my close fast enough. She must have enjoyed the expression on my face, knowing what power she had over me. It was like she had cast a spell and wrapped her net around me without the slightest of struggle. I drank in every curve, how her breasts lead into her nipples, the length of her legs, her lips. What a beautiful creation. I lost myself in the moment. Only the smell of burnt coffee pulled me back into reality. I woke up with her along side of me. I sat up in the bed while she was still sleeping, a tug a war going on in my head. I kissed her and said goodbye. It didn’t occur to me until I was on a train heading out of town, that I didn’t even know her name.

*Circular trails around the North Star, soaking in the darkness
to the edge of the night, never far, from where my soul confessed
here the world end and extends, unspoiled by the hands of another*

*I'm already torn and cannot pretend, they have failed to waken my lover
the red beneath the rose, the cheek and the sweetness within, the stars look down and knows
where the finger prints begins*

There were about eight of us on a train traveling from Sweden across the Arctic Circle into Finland. When we reached a painted line across the tracks, the train stopped and they ushered us out for a celebration. When the speeches were over, they actually gave each of us a certificate validating our crossing, woopy-do. It was a nice opportunity to stretch our legs, until we came to learn that this leg stretching exercise would continue for another few hours. There wasn’t a restaurant or anything to accommodate us except for the line across the tracks. We all sat in a single car waiting for a new engine to arrive. Between us, there were only two bags of chips and a bottle of rum. We tried unsuccessfully to kill the boredom by discussing our travels and passing around the rum and chips.

As we headed south, another American joined our social group. He was the poster child for what gives us Americans a bad name abroad. He criticized everything for not being absolutely the way he thought things should be, the way it was back home. Differences only confused him. He even got into an argument with the conductor who asked him three times to remove his feet from the seat in front of him. As the ride wore on he decided to take a nap and asked me to wake him before his stop. What comes around goes around sleepy head. I got off at a small whistle stop between Kemi and Oulu, with plenty of time to wander about the countryside and take a few pictures.

I was carrying some bread left from lunch and headed toward a relationship with some local birds down along the shore. I enjoy gaining nature’s trust and would reward the brave ones with extra crumbs. They would battle among themselves along invisible lines of color and size. It’s all so interesting to watch unfold. I eventually roamed in search for some privacy. I felt dirty from touching the birds and thought that this would be a good opportunity to take a swim. Apparently I was wrong. I knew I wasn’t alone when I heard laughter coming from behind the trees.

There was a park bench with a pair of young ladies who thought the whole idea of me not noticing them was funny. I wasn’t sure if I had been singing to myself or if the cold water had caused shrinkage, or what. They came down and introduced themselves. Sisters, not more than two years apart who joined into my social experiment involving their local birds and the distribution the rest of my bread. I was bombarded with questions and eventually they began tempting me to change my plans and spend a few days with them. They would show me the countryside they way they wanted too. I was tempted when they started to dangle unknown places and uncharted opportunities. They shared an apartment and explained that they didn’t get many guests, especially travelers from California. Although tempting, I had a schedule to keep and needed to keep moving. They accompanied me to the train station to see me off. After a couple of beers and no visibility of a clock they successfully sidetracked me into another conversation. Without a reference I lost track of time. They thought it so funny and celebrated their victory. The two of them started walking backwards away from me, waving goodbye as if I was actually pulling away on a train. Since I had four hours to now burn until the next train, I agreed to follow the two young ladies to their apartment and experienced their hospitality. We cracked open a six pack and they prepared me a homemade meal. Having sex with two sisters, it that incest?

I darted around from one small town to another and eventually followed a young lady into Kuopio. She explained that she had been traveling in Germany for the past few weeks and was reuniting with her boyfriend that evening. We kinda hit it off and she went out of her way to call a few of her friends to see if they could accommodate me with a room. She found me a beautiful cottage alongside one of the many lakes. I understood the cottage was her parents or an Aunt but they, like most the folks this time of year, were away on holiday. After getting settled in, I took advantage of a rowboat tied to the dock in front of my room and meandered around the lake. I actually fell asleep for some time and had to paddle my way back. I spent the next day lounging around enjoying things at a slower pace. I must have looked out of place, because on two separate occasions a gentleman approached me and offered a cup of coffee for a

conversation. They both were interested in what I thought about their country and the policies of my own. I know my media bears false witness with the tongue of a snake, opinion based news. Reagan, the anti-Christ? Give me a break. Anybody who pushed the envelope in the right direction gets criticized for trying to change things. They think why not? The truth won't be known for years and they have no real accountability. Those were quite enlightening conversations and I loved the opportunity of being presented with different points of view outside my own circle of experience.

It was late in the afternoon, I ran out of things to do, so I wandered over to the train station to wait for a train departing for Helsinki. I was a couple of hours early, so I wandered down one of the platforms. I laid out my damp pants and we both took advantage of the sun. In the distance I heard an accordion play. It was apparent that the musician played the accordion to solicit spare change but this time he was off at the end of the platform playing just for himself. I laid back and basked in the sun, daydreaming to the music and the sound of a slight breeze. Then the most extraordinary thing happened and it all started with a smile. Across on the other platform, a group of girls began to gather. Every so often, when I looked up I saw that they had multiplied. It wasn't long before there were about a dozen young ladies. I began to feel self-conscious about lounging around like this and decided to relocate myself onto a bench. The accordion music still lingered in the back ground. As I glanced up and checked out the young ladies and from across the tracks my eyes met with those of an absolute angel, a beautiful young lady, by far the most beautiful of the group. Everything on the edges blurred, only her face was in focus. Like a couple of school kids, trying to remain unnoticed, yet, compulsively seeking each other's attention, we continued to trade glances and an occasional smile was caught by the other, until our train arrived. I briefly watched their departure, with hugs and kisses goodbye. I wasn't sure if it was a field trip or who was actually going to board the train, so I grabbed my gear and quickly made my way over to the same platform.

As I approached the train, I noticed that this beautiful angle was the only one from the group boarding the train. My timing was perfect. It was as if scripted. We both boarded opposite ends of the same train. We came down the corridor facing one another. Smiling, eyes not wavering from one another and we met halfway. I don't recall either of us glancing through the window at the waving crowd. I removed the bags from her hands and placed them in the overhead bins. She waited for me to sit first and then she sat right up next to me. There was something unexplainable. Something I couldn't put my finger on drew us together. I had a feeling that this was not where this had begun. I attempted to start a conversation but the combination of the language and her shyness forced us to seek other avenues of communication. I began running my fingers through her hair while I memorized her smile. She leaned toward me and we kissed. From that point on we both found it impossible to stop. It was as if she replaced something that was lost, something I was unaware I ever had. Without words or music, it was if we had been dancing like this for years. Across from the two of us was an elderly lady trying her best to ignore us, concentrating on her crocheting. She probably thought we were young lovers and would have never imagined that we had just met at this compartment's door. We continued in each other's arms petting and kissing the entire trip. It was undeniable that I wanted her but she could have been sixteen for all I knew. Like the many rivers that slowly flowed between those lakes, unfolding her beauty like an early spring painted in quite tender tints. She lay in my arms. I loved her. I knew inside that I loved her. In these thoughts I knew that she would be that piece of sand that will start a pearl in my heart, a soul mate. She watched my eyes while I sketched a poem for her. I asked her not to read it until after the train left the station.

*So beautiful,
to see your eyes smiling, enchanting, such a view, yet closeness brings out shyness and I know that isn't you,
or maybe it's the language, not knowing what to say but it really, makes no difference, I know you anyway.
To speak is not important, to see, to know what's real, to touch, to feel each other, to learn, that love is real*

When we arrived at her destination I held her in my arms till the last possible moment. First a solitary tear and then she began to cry. It was a very special moment. So many thoughts ran through my mind, options, choices, past events, regrets, it was as if a dam had broken, "Who am I" As the train pulled out I sat there wondering what I had done. I felt emptiness, as if a piece that was lost and then found had been torn away. Left with a type of guilt that I had done this to myself.

*Wrapped in silence, deep and still, an ear waiting on that somber voice
within the shadows arose a chill, came a vision to rejoice
Across the moonlight like angles sing, danced the sweetest harmony
what beauty, what passion brings, she touched my heart and set it free
From her hand the subtlest strokes, painted an ardent mood
and in that moment the silence broke and pierced thy inner solitude.*

I arrived in Helsinki alone and empty. I made a reservation for a bed in the Olympic stadium, dropped off my bags and wandered about the city. It was a beautiful warm day and the parks were filled with sunbathers. I made it back by curfew but getting sleep was more difficult than I expected. They had issued numbers for beds and apparently they issued two numbers for my bed, just my bed. And I couldn't get rid of the second guy. "Let's see. Yes I have the correct number, my bags were here all day long and I'm sleeping in the bed. So logically it is you who were issued a wrong number, bye-bye", bye-bye", bye-bye!!" Get the hell out of here.

The weather was pretty much a carbon copy of the day before. I fell asleep in a park across from a graveyard and was woken up by a squirrel scampering across my chest, probably searching for food. I spend the last part of the day feeding birds adjacent to the station, waiting for a train to Turko. I planned on catching a ferry from there back into Sweden. When I arrived in Turko I hit up some food, a few beers, claimed a bench outside the hostel and caught up on some writing. Before it got too late I headed into town seeking some night life. I stopped a gentleman on the street and questioned if he knew a good place to have a beer. He explained he was on his way towards a cold beer and suggested I follow. He introduced me to his friends and I even won a few beers over darts. "You have to come and met my wife, she's very beautiful" he requested, more than once. I forgot to leave a window cracked open at the hostel and needed to pay attention to the time so I reluctantly followed him to his apartment to meet his wife. She was unexpectedly large, very large. But it was evident that he was in love with her and he catered to her every move. Although it was very sweet, I kept looking for the opportunity to say goodbye. I had to be quick and run to make curfew.

I woke from a dream, fixing my eyes on the unseen shadows of the dark room and began tracing the steps of the dream that had just left my grasp. I got up, sat at a table in the corner of the room and stared out at the moon.

*Not a leaf stirred, not a foot print left behind, as I sneaked pass the watchful dragons
paradise, rebirth, immortality, the oracles of human time, questions*

*Without a word, without an image, in that brief moment when the clouds have cleared, silence
where the emotion takes over the intellect, I was made aware*

*I was told to look at my reflection, to face our illusions, told that joy lies in the desire,
true love can be birthed in a blink of an eye and then never dies. worship is charity and nothing else*

Eventually I fell back to sleep and it was then I saw her walking toward me. She had a young daughter by her side, maybe another with her husband who was retrieving something from their car as I approached. I stated what I had rehearsed in my head many times before "what happened to us". Although I had sketched the lines of our time together, over and over in my mind, I still can't recall what broke us apart. Her eyes looked blank as she looked back at me. I thought perhaps she did not recognize me, or worse, didn't remember me at all, but then she smiled. She explained to her husband, whom had caught up to his family that she knew me from her past and that she'd catch up with him in a minute or two. I looked at her family as they walked away and thought to myself how happy they looked. I thought to myself that she was where she belonged. I recall that we wandered along a grassy hillside, talked and laughed a little. She remembered things that I had forgotten. Then our attention was redirected toward a litter of puppies and I awoke. I sat up in bed with feelings of emptiness and thoughts about being alone. I thought about her and other relationships left in my path. And then I wondered where she was now and how we didn't remain friends. Dreams have wings and promise beautiful things but with the raising of the sun I forgot each one. It's been said before better than I ever could "Regret is just a memory written across my brow".

*When I woke up in the morning, felt like all I had was gone, I felt like I was empty inside, something outside was
wrong. The wind blew, leaves scattered to the stream, standing on its margins, I held onto this dream*

*I wonder, how it can be, repeating the music of the rain, I was alone here, unable to explain. The world she spins
around me, love can never change and though I did not embrace it, feelings still remain*

When I woke up in the morning, I lost my right from wrong, I felt like I was empty inside, felt like all I had was gone

We had met at a high school dance and from the moment I saw her through the crowd, I knew that smile. Her beauty was innocent. I recall attempting to organize a surprise birthday party for her and it was during that effort that things fell apart. I don't recall the details. I just knew she didn't want to see me anymore. I have waited, looked for her in crowds, drove by her parent's house a number of times hoping to see her again. I always believed that our paths would cross but they never have. I was so very immature and I'm sure that was part of the problem. Pattern I seemed to have embraced. In many respects these types of relationships placed gains of sand in my heart. The questions that grew from that brief time spent together is what started me writing down my feelings. It was an exercise I used to gain clarity. What was I really feeling? What was I really thinking? It was an attempt to understand myself and what was going on between my ears. Once you get these type of things down on paper it gives you the opportunity to reflect on it later, under a different light. It is that type of light that often exposes the truth. I often look back on critical choices I wonder what direction the opposite choice would have taken me. Where would I be today? A fool again? at least I'm consistent.

*To play in life, a singing song, the hands of a vanishing moon
is reaching out, my heart's loose strings and draws it up in tune*

*That loving touch, I'm missing, my love I lost through tears
is reaching out, I saw you go, hasn't vanished through the years*

*And now, I'm truly lonely, among but still alone,
though the strings, of my heart, so well in tune, has lost that loving tone*

I was up early and through the morning fog headed to the port. It could be called bad planning or nothing much to do but I arrived hours before the doors were to open. I sat with my back against a locked door waiting. I kept trying to shake off the urge to head back up north and chase down my soul mate. The thought of her had been following me around like a shadow. It wasn't long before somebody else joined me in my wait, a young Swede who didn't say very much. What he did say was that he was returning home from holiday, he had been hitching around southern Finland. Once they opened up the doors the two of us claimed separate couches to relax and waited for our boat.

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Road Map:

France:	Cheborg, Lison, Isigny – countryside, Paris
Belgium	
Netherlands	
Germany	
Denmark	Noestued, Copenhagen [<i>Tival Gardens, Langeline, Fiolatrarde, Glyptoteret Museum, Nyhaun, Seaman Quarters, Tower, Tower House, Castle, Palace</i>]
Sweden	Heisingborg, Goteborg
Norway	Oslo [<i>Vigeland Sculptures Park, Askershaus Castle, Town Hall, Viking Museum, Ski Jump.</i>] Trondheim, Fauske, Bodo “Midnight Sun”, Trondheim, Oslo
Sweden	Gyeborg
Denmark	Copenhagan
Germany	Hamberg
Netherlands	Amsterdam [<i>Vondelpark, Anne Franks House, Rembrandt and/Van Gough Museum, Canals, Districts</i>]
Germany	Hamburg
Denmark	Copenhagen
Sweden	Helsingborg, Hassleholm, Massjo – Nvkopina, Stockholm, Uppsala [<i>Castle, University, Forrest</i>] Gaule, Soderhamn, Sundsvail, Ostersund, Hating – Storuman – Arvidsjaur, Jokkmokk Forrest, Gallivare Lapland Islands, Kirung – Narvic – Gallivare – Boden – Tornio
Finland	Kemi, Oulu, Yiveska, Kokkula, Seingjoki, Tampere, Heksamakj, Kuopio [<i>Market Square, View Tower/Ski, lake to lake</i>], Kouvola [<i>Pieksamakj</i>], Helsinki [<i>Kauppatori Square, City Hall, Palaces, Catheral</i>], Turko
Sweden	Stockholm

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Eventually the crowds gathered and like sheep we were herded onto the boat. I managed to weasel my way through the gridlock to the sunny side of the ship, found myself a deck chair and began to relax under the sun. There was a young lady who had the same idea and took the liberty to pull her chair up next to mine and start up a conversation. Honestly I was more interested in her bathing suit than the conversation. From here the view was spectacular. Thousands of white sails littered the horizon and the many islands looked as if God scattered them from his own hand. I got the feeling that Tom Sawyer's spirit would have flourished among these conditions. We arrived into Stockholm's port and again gathered like sheep toward the exit. The young man I met while waiting to board approached and asked if I enjoyed the trip. He explained that he had slept downstairs through the entire voyage and had only awakened less than an hour ago. “Well that explains why I didn't see you“. He mentioned that he hadn't done that much walking since being in the military and these last few trekking around had wore him out. I expressed that I had never joined nor had a longing toward joining my country's military. I would most likely out of place since I don't like being told what to do and when to do it. I added that in America, the majority of those in the military were volunteers and in many cases either had very little other options or it was something each generation in a family would participate in. I had neither. Apparently one of our noble soldiers was walking along side during our conversation and expressed his disagreement. I was embarrassed, getting caught expressing an opinion where I had very little knowledge or direct exposure. This Swede asked him if he enjoyed Finland. Our American soldier explained he didn't have much time, so he never left the boat. The Swede thought this was quite foolish and a waste of time. I on the other hand he didn't sleep below deck the entire trip either. I inquired if he could suggest the best way from the port to the train station. I knew I could always calibrate myself from there.

I followed my new guide into the city, where we came upon live music and a cast of characters that had taken over the city square. I still had the makings of a couple of sandwiches and my guide bummed some coke from someone in the crowd to mix with a bottle of vodka he had been toting. We got talking and he suggested if I wanted to get some rest, it might be possible to stay at his place. He explained that he didn't have a key and would have to locate his roommates to get one. About that time of day, he explained, they would be in a small bar along the waterfront. I got the impression that this waterfront bar was a daily ritual. When we arrived at the bar he introduced each of his friends with nicknames. And from that point into the night I was forbidden to pay for a single drink. They explained that this alcohol was on the Swedish government and when this money runs out they'll receive another check, so enjoy. After the third drink, one of his friends brought up that the “Aid for Africa Concert” being televised tomorrow. Apparently Led Zeppelin was reuniting to perform in this concert. This was the first I've heard of this and since I expressed interest, they suggested, if I wanted to, I could stay with them for the night and watch the concert tomorrow at their place. I agreed. The one they had named “Indian” suggested that we hit up a local nightclub. We all agreed and we began wandering the streets until we located its front door.

The nightclub was a lot larger than I expected and consisted of three stories. Each floor played a different decade of music. The group wandered in and headed up to the second floor while I checked by bags. The first thing I noticed

was the beautiful girls. One after another entering, exiting, dancing, they were everywhere. The group had grabbed a large table just off the dance floor and we were just about halfway through the second round of drink when one my chaperons leaned over and asked me to dance. My mind quickly assembled all the pieces gathered over the last few hours and drew a picture. Let's see. Five guys all living in the same house, pick-up a guy traveling and provide an unlimited amount of alcohol. Instinctively and without letting myself be noticed, I reminded myself where the exits were. "No, you don't understand" my hopeful dance partner responded. Concern must have been written all over my face. He tried to explain to me that the girls would be responsible for separating us. Guy on guy was not allowed, look at the dance floors. He had to explain this a few times and I needed confirmation from the others before I hesitantly followed him onto the dance floor. As he predicted, within seconds two girls were out on the dance floor separating us. A beautiful young lady was standing right in front of me and led me by the hand to a corner of the dance floor. After a few songs, she suggested to follow her to her table. "What I would like another drink", she asked. "Put in on my tab" she said to the waitress. It was like I had wandered into a parallel world with only beautiful women and all the roles were reversed. I kinda felt like a kid in a candy shop and my eyes started to wander the floor to see what other delights I could taste. When my glass was down to ice cubes I headed back onto the dance floor to see if what happened before was real or if I imagined it.

Eventually the night was fading into morning and the group began to gather for the walk home. I detoured just left of the entrance to claim my checked bags. Then it happened. Either I never understood the rules or somehow I ended up on another episode of candid camera. I almost got the impression that I was required to go home and sleep with my dance partners. Not a bad deal, and it did cross my mind a couple of times. Two of the girls I danced with followed me to the coat room. They started arguing about something and it escalated into yelling. Then one pushed the other and it turned into an all out cat fight. A large crowd gathered and it was then I realized that my chaperons had wandered off without me. We were all pretty drunk. Once I was able to remove myself from the commotion, I left the two girls behind and started down the street to see if I could find them. It was like they had vanished. It was late and I had nowhere to sleep. Seems I made a couple of bad choices. Maybe I should have followed the winner of the cat fight home.

On my trek back into the city, I stopped at a couple of hotels to see if they had cable hooked up, if they could accommodate me watching the concert tomorrow. After a few conversations and a cigarette, I eventually ended up in front of a closed train station waiting for a cup of coffee. I attempted to call home but with numerous pages torn from the back of the phone book, I wasn't able to figure things out. There were group of kids clowning around a few feet away, so I explained my situation and sought help. The mere mention of helping a disabled California caused the young men to jockey for position. They practical arm-wrestled one another for the chance to prove to the young ladies of the group that they could do it, but after numerous attempts everybody gave up. One of the young men who failed to demonstrate his ability to figure out the phone system suggested that I follow him home. I could spend the night at his parent's house, kick back the next day, hang around and watch the concert that evening. I guess my only other option was to wait another three hours for a cup of coffee. We headed down into the subway only to discover that it too had closed. So this young man, his friend and I piloted a taxi into the countryside. As we began assembling our change they quickly came to the conclusion that we would be short. So about half way to our destination they instructed the cab driver to a new location, his friend's parents' house. Apparently his parents wouldn't be home the next day either, so they decided to go there since it was closer and was more in line with the change we had in hand. We pounded down a few more drinks and fell asleep as "The Song Remains The Same" played in the background.

The young man, who originally invited me to his parent's house, got up at first light and ran off to work. His friend Brent left to pick up his girl friend. I began to prepare omelets for the returning couple and took the liberty of cleaning up the house from the night before. Brent's girlfriend was very sweet and quite attractive. The three of us hung around watched the concert and talked into the night. Every so often we would take a break and go down to the water's edge and do a little skinny-dipping. We took a couple of excursions to local hang outs and met a few of their friends. That was a well-needed relaxation from traveling and provided an opportunity to wash all my clothes and to reorganize my bag. While in Amsterdam I had a local cobbler attach some belt straps to the bottom of my book bag to accommodate carrying a bedroll. I figured when I reached Norway and picked up what I had left behind, I planned on sending everything that didn't fit in my book bag home. There was no other way to travel than to travel light. I learned that lesson the hard way.

We were getting along well and apparently Brent's girlfriend enjoyed my company enough to persuade Brent to ask his parents if I could join them on holiday. They explained that Brent's parents owned a boat and we would be island hopping off Stockholm's coast for a week. It sounded like an offer I could not refuse and the timing worked out perfectly. Tomorrow was the day I was to leave a message with Solsberg to confirm our original schedule or setting an alternative. We thought it would be nice to reciprocate Solsberg's hospitality by preparing her a dinner. She had very kindly gone out of her way to act as our meeting point and for watching our extra gear. Good news, Jim had not checked in yet, so that was a positive sign. If he would have confirmed I would have had no option but to decline Brent's invitation. Next Saturday, nine in the morning in Oslo Station. I explained that I would have already purchased all the ingredients needed to prepare Solsberg's thank you dinner.

Brent, his girlfriend and I hopped into an old car and headed out towards the local hotels. I needed to cash a few of my traveler's checks so that I could start pulling my share of the expenses and then we were off to Grandma's house. We first stopped at a campground and traded cars with his uncle. I was told his car could actually make the trip and then we headed toward a small island where Brent's grandparent's had a house. It was there I met the family. They pulled

out a world map and laid it down in front of me. "Where is your home" his grandfather asked. Half way through the twenty questions, Brent pulled me a way explaining that we were going to go down to the lake for a swim. We ran down the trail, full of life and eager to jump in. As the trees began to part, I could see the blue of a perfect swimming hole pecking through, undisturbed and waiting. Like a sponge, dry from the Los Angeles basin, I soaked up these places and wondered why and how I had lost my way. Beautiful white swans were undisturbed by our splashing and childish play and seemed to enjoy the ripples we created.

Becky, Huck and Tom, running along the muddy banks, singing pirate songs

Arabs and elephants I can see, these old ways are best for me

*Three candles lay and a nickel paid, dirty clothes and forced to pray
oath of robbers, we'll never tell, I choose to ignore these dinner bells*

Arabs and elephants I can see, ain't no matter, best for me

We gathered up all the necessities and packed them on the boat. We danced among the many white sails that littered the horizon. I recalled that it had been only a few days prior that I had looked from the railing of the ferry out upon all the islands and wished I would have the opportunity to play Tom Sawyer. There I was, sitting up on deck with the wind on my face. The three of us fell asleep somewhere along the way and didn't wake up until help was needed to tie down the boat. Once we got things tied down we grabbed the fishing tackle and went searching for tonight's dinner. I couldn't have been more thankful. We caught an excellent meal, the company was interesting and as far as the eye could see was God's wilderness. "*The earth as it truly is, beautiful in that eternal silence where it floats*".

*With the wind and bending reeds, the flowering grass and scattered weeds
where the clouds pause when passing by, only lend their beauty to the sky*

..... My heart grows fond in deepest bliss, love embrace the wilderness

*In the distance I can hear some birds, the silence broken by their song
my spirit knows, I can't put in words, how my soul knows it belongs*

..... My heart grows fond in deepest bliss, love embrace the wilderness

*Above where leaves dance on the tree and upon the birds their wings
seems these songs are sung just for me, sounds that say a thousand things*

..... My heart grows fond in deepest bliss, love embrace the wilderness

*Of my soul in these veins of air, another breath in nature's song
death by inches, when I'm not there, how my soul knows it belongs*

..... My heart grows fond in deepest bliss, love embrace the wilderness

After dinner we all relaxed over a few cigarettes and a game of cards. I introduced the group to Texas Hold'em and Baseball. The game of Baseball consisted of threes and nines being wild, anti again with each four drawn to receive an extra card. We talked into the night and when our Captain fell asleep the rest of us followed. As each day grew long we focused our attention on the current weather conditions and would reestablish our boat's position to hide from the



wind, taking advantage of the coves. We did this not just to protect us from the changing winds but more importantly to protect our privacy. Since we didn't want to share our new location, every time another boat strolled close by, we took off our clothes and danced around the boat as if we were insane. If there were children to protect this would present itself as a bad environment. Just the sight of our nude bodies usually did the trick. If that didn't discourage a new comer we would be forced to pack up and go searching for an island of our own. That was our routine. .

Behind us we towed a small motor boat. Being an inexperienced sailor, I first thought we brought it along in case the boat began to sink. But no, when strawberries were needed to complete a meal, we suited up and headed in the small motor boat toward a local port. I liked to imagine that it was my blue eyes, or my healthy build, rather than just the curiosity of "Who is he?" Dark hair and a tan was a rarity in those out of the way ports that time of year. But either way I did get a lot of attention. Like a puppy in the park. We traded smiles but I was on a short leash and couldn't wander off.

I've don't believed in destiny, where things just happen because they're meant to. I think that once somebody accepts that perspective it kinda removes some of the responsibility. I believe that I have been given free choice and either reap the reward or suffer the consequences of my actions. But I also believe that we interact within an environment that I will never fully understand and can only know it by its appearance. So I guess I don't really know anything completely. That being said, when situations that were so wonderful and unexpected arose, I admit I kept my mind open.

Lying back on the deck looking up at the passing clouds, I felt a cool breeze through the warming rays of the sun on my face. Every so often as I glanced over at the girls sunbathing I could hear in my head the words of our Captain "Why would I want to be anywhere else when I have all of this?" as he pointed to the young ladies in their birthday suits and the beautiful horizon. Brent's girlfriend wandered over and I found myself trying to look into her eyes rather than at her breasts, or other lines. We danced between subjects while she was tried to discover the roots to my journal. I didn't like opening up my journal to people I met. I considered them my private thoughts and where not intended to be shared, yet. At this point in my life I needed to put my thoughts on paper to keep them from bouncing between my ears, or to have as a simple picture to appreciate when I'm older and have forgotten the details. I always felt that if I shared those thoughts, people would misinterpret them and take things for granted or out of context. I was changing day to day. The person I was the day before was not the person I was the next. When I was twelve I thought I was the smartest twelve-year-old. But when I turned thirteen I believed I was the smartest thirteen-year-old but then knew I was a stupid twelve-year-old. Brent's girlfriend requested that I write her a small poem about this chapter of my journey. Honestly, I just couldn't say no to a beautiful young lady sporting only a birthday suit.

*A journey through the pieces, isolated by the sea, this place of inner solitude, has adopted me
and though dreams may come and dreams may go, I'll keep this picture painted in my soul, my Swedish family*

*A picture framed with smiles, on faces of compassion, of my shipmate and his princess, his queen and her captain
standing in front of the many white sails, you could see the winds come and go
and our captain's eyes had stories to tell or many journeys and rainbows*

*Look around, he told me, I already found the pot of gold and I'd give every last wish for eternal time
if this was the end of my road, don't let yourself be, like the others, never letting their feet touch the ground
maybe you have to grow as old as me before you'll understand*

A journey through the pieces, isolated by the sea, this place of inner solitude, has adopted me

The three of us took a small boat to the mainland so I could catch a ferry to Stockholm. We sat waiting, drinking beer with money I had won playing poker. "You're going to have to come back for our wedding" she explained. "I wouldn't miss it for the world", thinking a trip back there would be nice. "Perhaps we'll come visit you. On many occasions we've entertained the thought of renting a van and driving down California's coast". A kiss, a handshake, a hug and then there was just me alone sitting at the rear of the ferry, thinking of the white sails, grassy inlets, strawberries and cigarettes. I knew they were all just oddly shaped gaps among pieces of a puzzle, and no matter how they are assembled; it was the gaps that couldn't be easily explained that made the puzzle so special.

My mom has always tried to keep things even between my sister and me. The value of gifts, the number of times she says I love you, it was just her way. So it's no wonder that I get uneasy when those scales are out of balance. It had always been hard for me to accept gifts if this balance was not maintained. A few years ago my friend Don unexpectedly gave me a guitar. He was trying to motivate me to learn how to play. I told him I could not accept his gift unless he would accept a gift in return. He was no longer a bachelor without a microwave. But along the river I have been learning to accept the generosity of others. I gained the knowledge that it is a continuous chain of events that connects us all and I accepted the obligation to pass the generosity I received on to somebody else. In doing this without reservation I knew one's cup would never be empty and the world takes on a new and different color.

I began letting the feelings of loneliness creep back into my mind. Like a broken record, my needle jumped back into the previous song, allowing thoughts of young ladies and past short dances where I had entertained romance. I found myself thinking of a young lady I had met crying on a football field back home. She was very young, too young for me

to consider. But her curious eyes, heart unbroken and innocent outlook were a breath of fresh air. She also had long term goals, something I was unaccustomed to at that age.

*Are you in love my lady or are you waiting for something more, then please my lady come to me,
let me open up the door*

*I know my love is strong enough, you'll see my love is true and if you keep an open heart, I know, you'll love me too
I know that life is very special and I know the songs you sing, so how could I, let you pass me by,
not knowing what I bring*

I bring you flowers, this summer's day, so when you're down, you'll hear me say, I love you, I love you, true

*I know that life is very special and I know the songs you sing, so how could I, let you pass me by,
not knowing what I bring*

I bring you warmth, on winter days, so when you're cold, you'll hear me say, I love you, I love you, true

While I was wandered about Stockholm's streets I eventually came upon a unique statue of a man looking up from a manhole. The statue was about two feet off the ground. It was unique and I thought it would make a nice picture, so I got out my camera and squatted down to frame the picture at its height. Then somehow, no I know how, I'm an idiot and let the camera slipped through my fingers. The camera crashed onto the hard cement and ending up in pieces. The last roll of film was exposed and lost, and now my camera totally out of commission. "Fuck, you're a retard" I said out loud to myself. Even though the statue was named "Humor", I didn't think it was very funny. I eventually ended up sitting at a small table outside a café overlooking one of the main squares. I wrote a little and drank a little. I wrote a little more and drank a little more. I was very upset. I had taken some really good pictures and couldn't rid myself of the disappointment, so I assembled a few words in an attempt to fill the gap that remained.

*I've lost the colors, pictures of memories, of the best-made pieces life has polished, now lost inside of me
one careless moment and it found its way, this light destroyed with speed and took away the colors,
I could never let you see*

I still had a few days left until I'm scheduled to meet up with Jim. I talked with Solsberg's mother who explained that Jim did get my message and had not call back to adjust our revised schedule. Who knows, by now he could be all wrapped up in wedding vows? Since I still a two days left I thought I'd head to Bergen. I planned to walk the trail between Myrdal and Flam, so it was train tag from Hallsberg to Karistan and then an all-nighter into Oslo. I met up with a young lady going in the same direction. Sure I'm repeating myself but it was so true. Hooking up with a young lady was the only way to travel by train. If you don't have one you got to get one. Besides the company and conversation, cuddling up together almost always eliminated sleeping in an upright position. Everybody else would kinda keep their distance and would leave us alone. I kinda have a way with asking personal questions and still keep people in a comfortable mood, allowing them to open up and share the most intimate details of their lives. Even though we had just met and were only friends, having a young lady sleep in my arms temporarily helped relieve any loneliness I might have been entertaining. The two of us woke alongside one another about an hour or so before the train pulled into Oslo. After a kiss and a hug again I was steppin out on my own.

I wandered through the station lingering on familiarities. It's amazing how routines destroyed time and sped things up. There were so many unexpected avenues, detours, new faces and outright pleasures that it seemed as if it had been months since I left here, not days. I got talking up with a couple on the train that had been reading the same travel guide and discovered out we were going in the same directions. Apparently the weather had been less than perfect for some time, but when we arrived things changed for the better. The skies had just cleared and the sun began peeking through the clouds, painting the edges of everything in view with a halo of gold. I'm still upset with myself that I had no working camera. I kept repeating over and over to myself, stupid retard as a punishment to myself. I did manage to find the right type of glue and had some nylon string in my bag, but it was still in recovery and would take at least another day. The pictures that got away were just breath taking. It was like I was walking among the clouds. "I am the king of the world, as far as I could see is my kingdom". It's kind of funny how true beauty makes me feel that way, as if I was the only one that had that that experience, somehow making me special.

Eventually the clouds in the distance quickly overtook the sun, it was apparent that the rain was on its way back. I sat above, looking across the bay, watching the rain clouds file in. I felt much like the sky. I had left a lot behind and was seeking protection from the loneliness of the crowd. I was running out of time. My connection with Jim was just a day away. I sat in a local nightclub behind a solitary beer, watching the young ladies dance. In the background I could hear the rain disrupt the beat of the drum. I waited and waited and just got tired of sitting in one spot. There was something I couldn't put my finger on that made me feel uncomfortable. I headed out into the rain to catch the next train to somewhere else. Since the local trains from here traveled on the same line as the main train into Oslo, I could stop anywhere along this path as long as the Oslo train stop there. I ended up pretty much in the middle of nowhere, cracked open a paperback and attempted to read myself somewhere else. After about an hour or so, a young man wandered up and assumed I was also waiting on a train. From a distance he gestured if I wanted a cigarette. About halfway through the cigarette he pulled out from his jacket pocket a bottle of what he referred to as moonshine but it tasted more like kerosene. We talked until his train arrived and when it departed, only me on a graveyard of a platform.

My eyes got tired from reading and I grew impatient and began to wander toward the end of the platform. There was a slight drizzle and I enjoyed looking up into the clouds and watching the rain drops fall through the platform lights to earth. The platform lights illuminated each drop. As I wandered down to the end of the platform, I surprised a young lady who had her pants down around her ankles and was in the middle of taking a piss. Her smile was unforgettable....I'm almost done can you just ignore me? To erase her embarrassment the quickest way, she approached rather than turning tail and scampering off. She explained that she was on her way to meet up with some friends who were following a good local band. She convinced me that following her back into town was a better option than burning time in this forsaken place and she would buy me a drink. I admit I had some fun but the whole time I had to keep one eye on the clock. I could not afford to miss my train and leave Jim in lurch.

Once I boarded the train bound for Oslo it was evident that it would be a shit ride. Every seat was upright and as hard as a park bench, practically making it impossible to get any sleep. Once I did get myself to sleep an Asian bitch woke me up by hitting me on the head with her newspaper. Apparently she had a reservation for the seat I was sleeping in. The car contained about forty seats, of which thirty seven were empty. I gave the bitch my seat, moved up four rows and attempted to recapture my dream.

I situated myself behind a cup of coffee in the middle of Oslo's train station. It was early and I was in clear view of all the entrances and exits, so there would be no chance of Jim missing me. I had already gathered up the necessary supplies to prepare that night's dinner for Solsberg. After about eight-hours of waiting, I was getting fidgety, actually angry, but assumed Jim probably had a bad connection and was on his way, so I held tight and caught up on my journal. After a few more hours I lost my patience and called Solsberg's house. Her mother explained that Jim had already picked up his gear early that morning and confirmed that my message was given to him. In an angry tone, she suggested that I pick up mine gear also, as if another day on her doorstep would reclassify my belongings as garbage. Well that didn't make sense. The first thing I did was check the train schedules and wondered how Jim could have avoided Oslo station but I didn't really know where he was coming from or going to. I still questioned the circumstances that derailed our dinner plans and where was Jim? I waited another hour with numerous ideas passing through my head and was getting angrier by the minute.

When I reached Solsberg's house I found her mother, my bags, the guitar and adding insult to injury, every item Jim had taken possession of in Victoria station. In Jim's world selfishness trumped responsibility. Jim also left a note that specified where he was going. "That fucking asshole"! It was impossible for him to leave from here at eight in the morning and go where he had stated in his note without going through Oslo's station, unless he took a helicopter. He had either not looked to see if I was waiting, or had avoided me all together. I couldn't believe he left me holding all that shit and Solsberg nowhere in sight. What the fuck was going on! Her mother's attitude didn't change when I gave her all the food I was carrying and she practically slammed the door in my face. When I finally reached the local train platform I began discarding those things I wasn't willing to carry into a garbage receptacle. Two gentlemen, like vultures, waited for me to step away from the garbage can. When I reached Oslo station I spread out the rest of my belongings in order to separate it into two categories. Items that would stay with me and could fit within my book bag and those that would be wrapped up and sent home. I actually had to explain to a few people passing by, that nothing was for sale. I had balanced the desire to continue on without Jim with getting answers and decided to seek answers first and boarded a train to Stavanger.

On the inbound train I kept reviewing all the facts related to the "I ditched you incident", over and over in my head. I kept coming to the same conclusion. What in the hell was I doing going to Kistiansand? I should have just headed in my own direction and only kept Jim's note for my scrapbook. So when I arrived in Kistiansand I walked through the rain with only two objectives, heading towards the local post to discard the extra weight and to the local tourist office to leave a note for Jim. The note in short said that at such and such a time I was boarding on such and such a train and if you're there you're there, if you're not you're not. There were probably another couple of choice words that better expressed my disappointment. The people I met at the local post office were extremely friendly. They kindly helped me wrapped extra reinforcements around my package in order to make sure what I sent would make it home in one piece. Good riddance, I won't miss either of you.

I sat myself down outside to a cup of coffee and waited for my train. Eventually Jim wandered up with a pair of girls that couldn't have been older than fifteen. He kept running at the mouth about his sexual encounters. I suggested that if "those were the type of girls you were encountering, then you shouldn't be hanging around or somebody's father would be hanging you from a tree". It used to be all black and white and we had to figure out the grey, or get high and watch it, but now he wants to redefine the black and white when it doesn't suit him. "Fuck you". I have been down that road before and I knew where it ends. Jim kept trying to persuade me to follow the children into Denmark. Besides the word jail bait, I wasn't about to spend extra money to travel outside my rail pass. I had to explain to Jim that since he wasn't giving me an explanation or an apology I would do "a" and if you want to do "b", do "b" and that's the end of the subject. I just hated being drawn into a situation I didn't sign up for. I'm going to travel the fastest way from here to Copenhagen and if that meant through Stockholm, then so be it. I didn't say another word. Jim ended up following behind quietly, giving me a face and an attitude intended to make me think it was my doing that had disrupted his love life. "Dude, look around, nobody put a ring in your nose. I don't want to hear it anymore!" I just stayed to myself and ignored him the entire ride into Stockholm. We had a short layover in Stockholm; I fed pigeons in a park and then back onto the rails. I wandered around Copenhagen to grab something to eat and then rejoined Jim for a train ride into the rural side of Denmark.

We came across a small hostile on the outskirts on Nykobing that was basically a campground with scattered bungalows. Since we were not sporting a tent we got ourselves a bungalow. That night we gathered up a handful of beers and wandered into the adjacent forest. From the darkness we watched the clouds overtake the landscape of stars and as our own bladders filled, we too were overtaken by the night. I was awakened by the rain's rhythm on the roof of our small cottage. Then almost like thunder a pair of very wet boots entered through the door. Two wet bikers asked if we minded them spending the remaining portion of the night in the other beds. "If you're paying, what can I say?" I got the feeling that it wasn't the first time they attempted free loading. We woke to clear skies, eggs, sausage, cheese and a cute young woman with broken English that made her even more attractive. We landed seats on a local train that made a stop at every cross walk. The constant stream of local faces and the beauty of those small stops actually incited me to slow down and take a deeper breath, so we took the ferry across to Frederica and made reservations at a local hostel in Skandenburg. That choice established an aggressive timetable. We needed to make up some distance.

We entered a compartment that could be best described as humorous. There was a young lady traveling by herself, who had spread her clothes from one end of the compartment to the other. This was orchestrated to persuade us to look elsewhere. We just laugh since this was a technique we often used to maintain our privacy. We found it amusing to watch her reaction to our comfort. She acted as if her mother unexpectedly allowed her new boyfriend into her unmade room. As we danced between subjects we discovered that a few years back this young lady had spent some time in our back yard, Oxnard California as an exchange student. She expressed an interest in American slang and had inquired if we knew any new words she could add to her dictionary. Our conversation matured into an invitation to sleep over at her parent house. When we arrived in Aarhus she contacted her parents and obtained permission to bring two strangers home. We wandered through Aarhus with our own personal travel guide, who pointed out the major landmarks and added stories from her past. Once we reached the edge of the city we chartered a bus to reach her family's homestead. When we arrived, the family was waiting in the doorway and greeted us with "We don't have a lot to offer. Make yourselves at home". We were then shown the basement, gathered up our dirty clothes for washing, showered and then the dinner bell rang. Little sister was all smiles, enamored with possible of new play mates. For dessert we were given a piano concert. The entire family went out of their way to make us feel as much at home as possible. It was lovely and memorable.

We were up with the morning sun. Everybody in the household had plans. Little sister was trying to obtain her driver's license and had to meet up with a driving instructor while big sister had a morning engagement to break in a horse. Jim and I set off into the countryside, wandered in the villages and passed through the city's garden. As the sun positioned itself for the afternoon, we found ourselves in front of a church with a pair of beers, in need of a church key.

We had agreed to connect before dawn to attend a local concert. Big sister was following a band from Iceland and had been anticipating seeing for some time and we had made additional plans to visit the local Tivol. We spent the remainder of the day watching the summer crowd meander around the city square. Both Jim and I fell asleep on the train ride back and slept right through our stop. I guess it was a combination of the long day and all the walking, oh the beer probable helped. As it turned out there were no trains heading back that would allow us to meet our pickup on time, so we quickly looked for alternatives and located a bus going in our direction. It was a bus by all definition but I swear we could have walked faster. Recently this had been par for the course. These local bus drivers just like stopped to wave hello or shoot the breeze with anybody they knew along the way. Nobody is ever in a rush. At the exact moment we exited the bus, the sky open up. Luckily our late arrival aligned precisely with our pickup, so we spend very little time in the elements.

There was quite a crowd, girls everywhere, all dressed up for the night. There were many inviting smiles and curious glances but we pretty much stayed to ourselves. As it turned out the crowd was much larger than the space available. There were just too many of us trying to stand in the same space and it became impossible to avoid the heat. I couldn't wait to get back outside under the cool canopy of clouds. On the way out I stuck a coin in a slot machine, it only gave tokens back and it just wouldn't let me lose. I ended up leaving the machine filled with rewards for the next patron. The band was really good. They had no singer but their melodies were ingrained in my head. I found myself humming a few of their tunes on the bus ride home. A comfortable bed and hospitality was the recipe for a good night's sleep.

We were all packed up and ready to explore the Dutch countryside. It was nice to pack nothing but clean clothes for a change. Our hosts attempted to persuade us to stay a bit longer but I always hate to wear out my welcome and prefer leaving things more pristine. A beautiful, warm family setting and a kindness shared that will remain with us always. One of the wondrous benefits to traveling was the opportunity to meet people with different perspectives and then to discover we are the same, sweet memories. We headed north toward the coast and spent the day in the sand. There was a cool breeze coming off the water that contrasted with the hot sand and made it a perfect day. Besides the beautiful surrounding, there wasn't all that much else for us to do. We found ourselves wandering back toward the hostel in Sickeborg where we had made reservations a few days back. When we reached the edge of Sickeborg I jumped in the canal for a brief swim. The water was cold and the banks were muddy but why not?

We rolled early into Hamburg. Since we had reduced our load to just the essentials, we could now fit all of our belongings into a single locker. We wandered about Hamburg searching for a suitable place to put down some breakfast and a few early morning beers. That day had been earmarked as a day to relax, to kick back and enjoy the city's parks and its many bridges. The sun wasn't up yet, so we took advantage of an empty cathedral. We sat inside, watched early sacraments, studied the building's architecture and stained glass windows. We trekked around the lake until I located a beautiful location to stretch out, relax and add some entries into this journal. Awhile back it became evident that I was going to run out of journal space if I didn't start writing smaller, the smaller. I had no desire to carry

around multiple journals or risk sending one home through the post. So when I was wandering about Oslo I procured a new book. Now I got into the habit of taking notes and then arranging them prior to penning them into my journal, this way I am able to discard jibberish and avoid as many mistakes as possible.

The leaves danced along with the wind and ended their short journey at the lake's shoreline. Occasionally a contrasting white swan swam gracefully by while behind us another jogger would be heard scampering by. It was a perfect setting to catch up on my journal and relax. Somewhere during that daydream, I fell asleep and woke up with just a breath of the thoughts that lingered from my dream. I hate that feeling. It was like I just realized something important or experienced something earth shattering, yet I don't remember anything but unconnected pieces. Trying to assemble them makes it all the more confusing.

We spent the night wandering up and down the red light district. Eyes solicited our attention, barkers solicited our money and Jim ate ice cream cone after ice cream cone. I suppose that was his surrogate cold shower. After walking for a few hours, I was dead set on finding myself a cold beer and selected a local bar on the outskirts of the district. I wanted my money to just go toward the beer not the wall paper. My first impression as I entered through the door was that it was a bit dark for my comfort. As my eyes began to adjust to the change, I noticed women lining the walls. Before I actually gained my focused, the face of an angel was looking up at me. She was speaking in German and I said something in English in response to her question. She immediately latched on to my English and a beautiful smile bloomed. I glanced around and noticed that there was no bar tender. Another young lady had already corralled Jim. I thought that the angel assumed I was not done shopping and started listing all the things she was willing to do for me. I looked into her beautiful eyes. She couldn't have been more than seventeen. Somewhere out there she was still somebody's daughter, who most likely didn't know what she'd gotten herself into. I reached out, gave her a hug and whispered into her ear, "I won't sleep with anybody who would sleep with anybody" and turned and walked out the door. Jim followed reluctantly. We sat across the street on the curb. "Did you see and her hand was on my...?" Jim kept repeating as if my decision to leave undermined his opportunity. A second of temptation was followed by an hour of reflection.

*I see the daughter of pain, she lies, darkness embodies, the walls of her skies,
always changing but never, never dies, she lies*

*After the rain has come and gone, I still hear her singing, that same old song,
playing it on and on, she's gone*

A police car pulled up, rolled down its window and asked why we were sitting on the curb. I explained the view was good from here and how it provided an interesting window into the German sub-culture. They both smiled. We continued wandering through the district and eventually ended the day's journey back at the train station where we had started. We secured a corner and tried to get a little shuteye, but the marble floor was a bit too cold for my liking. On the train, we slept our way into Amsterdam, picked up an early breakfast, then continued through Brussels and sought out a hostel in Brugge.

We found ourselves a small room above a bar not far off the main square of Brugge, claimed ourselves bed, dropped off our stuff and hit the local canals for a little sightseeing. We roamed among the flower vendors, chocolate shops, lingered behind a cup of coffee and smoked a cigarette while standing on a humped-backed bridge. I enjoyed the mood of the weeping willows and gazed endlessly at the reflections painted by the water. I sat with my eyes closed, listened to the sounds of drawn carriages clapping over the cobblestones and relaxed. From time to time it was just wonderful when we located an area like this to enjoy without having to trek down something. To just relax, not have any obligations or schedules to keep, but settling in. Having a



bar below our room was almost a guarantee we'd be partying before getting sleep. After a whole lot of drinks the guitar finally ended up in Jim's hands. He played into the darkness until it was time to get some sleep. We loved the location. The people were friendly and the price was right up our alley. The train station was also at a convenient distance, so we decided it would make a good for home base from which to jet around Belgium.

We headed into Gent to be part of its annual festival. I, like a honeybee, danced from flower to flower collecting smiles, memorable fragrances. The next day started off with the similar ritual of walking into Brugge's main square for a cup of coffee, this time before we jumped a train into Brussels. We trekked about the old section of the city and checked out the local sites. Muscles in Brussels and beers, muscles in Brussels and beers. I followed Jim through the shops while he looked for a potential gift to send home. Jim wrestled over purchasing a butterfly under glass for his sister's birthday. He bounced between shops and after logging miles and miles of walking, he still couldn't make up his mind. I gave up and traded Jim's quest for beer on the corner of the main square and ended the day waiting for Jim in the train station. His trek for a birthday gift went into overtime. Minutes before we were to board on our train back to Brugge Jim decided to walk all the way back into town to purchase that butterfly. After a couple of beers in Brugge's main square I wandered along the canals by night following the reflections that danced against the shadows the few street lamps provided. I followed a few that crossed my path and ended up back at the place where I started the day. The same party continued downstairs from the night before. I hung up my hat, said a few hellos and wandered upstairs the minute my first beer was empty.

The next morning we took a familiar walk to the train station but this time we headed in the opposite direction towards Luxembourg. It was a beautiful day under clear blue skies and I spent the majority of the day lounging on the grassy hillsides, pondering meanings and taking a midday nap. It was perfect, since I still had the alcohol from the night before lingering in my veins.

I know and sunk before my vain despair and knelt, to my own desolation, for fear of the end

Day by day, the waters lap the sands away

*Inaccessible winds, they do blow and felt, like spring blossoms,
with winter fade and die*

One by one, returning where my walk begun

I was intrigued with the works of Escher and understood there was an exhibit in the Hage, so I persuaded Jim to board a late train out of Luxembourg. We arrived in to Rotterdam even later. There didn't seem to be anybody but the two of us, the streets were virtually empty. We wandered toward the lights advertising vacancies and pounded on doors until one finally opened. The price the gentlemen in pajamas requested was outrageous. I think he wanted us to just go away. We continued demanding his attention, while we explained that we were only going to be there for a few hours, until light and then would be on our way. He ended up cutting his original price in half. Not because we posed a convincing argument but because he just wanted to get back to sleep. As promised we were on the road early and found ourselves staring at a pond in front of the museum, hours before the doors opened. A family of ducks exploring their small world for the first time captivated my attention and helped pass the time.

Unchanged by distortions and does not tear, reflecting its own landscape. Escher's works jars me out of my own perceptual habits and challenges me to look with fresh eyes, rewarding my prolonged stare.

From Utrecht through Essan to Dusseldorf, back into Germany to see if the rain had stopped. It seemed every time I stepped on German soil the clouds gathered over my head and I got wet. This trip was no different. We arrived into Koln where I spent the first part of the day queuing in the church, then took a brisk walk across town to the local hostel. I loved the walk across the bridge and the view from the river, but out there it was impossible to stay dry. Everybody in the hostel that crossed our path seemed to have a chip on their shoulder. Jim and I kinda hid off in the trees and drank by ourselves. Later that evening I wandered off across the bridge and found a small coffee shop where I could relax and catch up on my journal. An older gentleman approached, curious as to what I was writing about. He kept repeating his perspective on aging and how he was envious of the paths I chose. "When you're my age, you'll look back on these days and realize these were the times of your life".

I'll remember the man, who realized that time, was running away, right out of prime

I'll remember the man, who spent time, was willing to say, a man's half a man, until he's has his day

Roger, a minister from back home who had conducted numerous musicals at our high school and local theater, headed up a choir that was touring Europe this year. I was given their schedule of appearances and some of those dates were approaching, so we made a decision to seek them out rather than tolerate the German rain. We began heading south into Austria until we reached Vienna. Our empty stomachs lead us straight to a small pizzeria not far from the Stephansplatz. While waiting for our order to be delivered I took the opportunity an attempted to place a phone call home. It was about time to let my loved ones know I was doing okay. Well, the technology here hadn't quite caught up with the states. After failing numerous times, they were unable to make the connection and I just gave up.

After a couple pieces of pizza and a few beers we headed back to the streets to find ourselves a room for the night. Yes, we've seen a lot of interesting places and met a lot of interesting people but this kind of traveling was not all

vacation. There was a lot of work getting from one place to another, exchanging currencies, staying on a budget, finding a place to sleep and avoiding obstacles. It could take a lot out of ya. We had no luck finding accommodations. We walked and knocked on door and wasn't able to find a vacancy, everything was filled. At that point it was rather dark and we started debating the option of boarding a train to accommodate a night's sleep. We were sitting on a grassy hill adjacent to the train station. It was a warm night under a full moon and during our indecisiveness, one by one what appeared to be transients or other travelers began gathering around us. By their preparation it appeared that this hill was accustomed to accommodating overnight freeloaders. As we procrastinated, the idea seemed more and more reasonable.

A couple introduced themselves and asked if they could claim the spot alongside of us. Once we began talking we discovered that they were a bride and groom on the day before their wedding. They were on their way to Budapest to get married. Well this is an opportunity to perform a toast, so I walked across the way, procured a bottle of rum and a bottle of coke and we toasted to their future. The rum, the company and I suppose the slope of the hill did not equal a good night's sleep. I laid their most of the night watching the clouds overtake the moon.

One thing was for certain, I needed a shower. Sleeping out with element guarantees one thing, we were up early, so we took advantage and started searching for a room. Luckily we found a room in the area that accommodated our needs, but we couldn't check in until later that afternoon, so we reserved a room. They were kind enough to watch our bags, allow us to scamper off and tour the city. The choir from back home's schedule had them traveling through Vienna and would be performing within a couple of days on the outskirts of Salzburg, so we kept our eyes open for a familiar face.

After roaming around Vienna's streets we explored the museum, the treasury and eventually ended up sitting alongside the wall of St. Stephen's cathedral eating candy. The cathedral's acoustics were wonderful and gave wings to the songs sung within its walls. I sat with my eyes closed and let my mind wander, which usually introduced uninvited thoughts. I looked around at all the images and remembered some of the artifacts we viewed in the treasury. It puzzled me how so many define their self image by the processions they've obtained. Doesn't salvation depend on man's response? Evil must be a necessary element if men are to be genuinely free to make moral choices and demonstrate one's ability to love. What is God's image? The questions flooded my mind and then I required a cold beer to close the gates and keep the horses at bay.

We followed a horse drawn carriage until a small café beckoned us inside. In another attempt to get a message home, I struck up a conversation with two young ladies from Texas and another from our home state of California. During our conversation the young lady from California revealed that she was having an affair with a young man and was to reunite with him in Geneva. She explained that Geneva was having a festival and that would be a good reason to join them on their journey. Sounded like a good idea and our original schedule of traveling through Salzburg aligned. The girls hadn't yet found themselves a room, so we persuaded them to follow us back to where our bag were. The rooms had reasonable prices and perhaps they could also be accommodated.

Our conversations continued through dinner alongside a couple bottles of wine. Everyone agreed that Salzburg would be our next destination. We spent another day of roaming Vienna but this time dictated by the feminine choice. Toward the end of the evening, while walking back to the hostel I just had to laugh. The two Texans were on each other's nerves. Any little thing began by one set the other off. I could relate. It wasn't easy to share that kind of space under the type of circumstances that arise while traveling for very long without pushing some wrong buttons. So Jim and I assisted in maneuvering them into neutral corners. I had gotten into the habit of washing my dirty pants on day one of a new room, hoping that they would be dry when it was time to depart. If they were still damp I'd hanging them out the train window to speed dry. Though it might have looked odd, it was the way to go.

As we approached Salzburg the clouds parted and the sun came peaking through, signaling that a good day was ahead of us. In one of the travel guides there was an interesting youth hostel alongside a casino. I knew from my last visit to Salzburg, that the hostel had to be on the cliff overlooking the old city. Once our train arrived we headed straight toward a phone and contacted the hostel to see if rooms were available. Good news but we had to be quick because they did not take reservations. We wandered about the city until we reached the elevator to the casino. After a short wooded walk, we passed through a stone wall and ended up in front of one of the most beautiful views of the city. We sat out front and absorbed our view while we waited to claim ourselves a bed. Once they opened the doors, we got settled and it was off to see Salzburg. I ended up making a full circle and watched the sunset from the forest between the castle and the hostel. As it started to get dark I headed back towards our private view. The view from our balcony was a spectacular arrangement of colored lights. I was toting a bottle of wine from my city trek and it was enjoyable to have a glass in hand, a comfortable chair, the view and of course, conversation in good company. At that moment in time I could not image another place I'd rather be.

*Nectarous wine, taking on another life beyond the vine,
from your lips of character, red and pure as spring, beckons me in, to hear you sing,
inhaling your delicate perfume, through my eyes, this flavor now fills the room*

I woke up early and headed down into the city for a cup of coffee. I sat there wondering what it would have been like if I grew up in a place like this. Would that city have shaped me differently? By the second cup of coffee I began reminiscing on my own obstacles, identifying the crossroads I had approached and the turns I had chosen. I discovered at a young age that expressing differences, standing outside the walls that protect our normalcy, could place you on the

outside looking in. A group of kids can unknowing be cruel, or enjoy it with a passion. I quickly adjusted and blended in but in doing so I took on the characteristics of the group. Not that that's a bad thing, it just wasn't always me. Along the river I learned that I am unique. All my faults, what I laugh at, all the choices I've made and those who have entered my life, contribute to who I am. I have learned that I don't just carry memories in my heart. They are a component of my heart. They are a part of who I am.

We had earmarked today as a field trip day. I had my mind set on visiting Hitler's estate but everyone else wanted to do the "Sound of Music" tour, so I went out on my own. It was difficult to merge the beautiful scenery with the history being presented and to come away with a single picture. We met up that evening over Chinese food which is a meal I always consider more sociable since sharing entrées is common place. The two young ladies and Jim returned with an Englishman who spent half the meal explaining why he feels sharing food is barbaric. His criticisms just rubbed me the wrong way. If it wasn't the waiter, it was the food, or the clothes people wore. His criticized never seemed to end. The only positive words he offered were about himself. He really did liked himself and had the girls eating right out of his hand. Not literally, he probably would have considered licking disgusting, you know bacteria.

Our English gentleman managed to persuade the group to accompany him to one of the bars he frequently visited, giving us the impression that his name was etched somewhere on the wall of the restaurant. This luxury required us to trek through a tunnel exiting the old city of Salzburg to the other side of the mountain. When we reached his bar, without a reservation they could not accommodate us. The only option on this side of the mountain was to trek the long walk back. The bar I suggested would most surely have patrons below his class level, so instead of subjecting the group to his criticism we hit up a local liquor store and purchased a couple bottles of wine. We headed back up to the Hostel to continue where we left off the night before. About halfway through the first bottle one of our Texas maidens was surrendering to the Englishmen's advances. I relaxed into the bottle of wine and just watched everybody do their own thing. Even Jim was seeking a Texan surrender. Eventually I crawled of to bed to catch up on some sleep. That time I shared a bunk bed with a kid who moved around all night long. His bed squeaked so much it sounded like an orchestra of crickets, not good for somebody seeking sleep. His crickets incorporated themselves in my dreams.



Today's plan was to wander around the city in an attempt to locate our choir from home. After another walk along the river, around the castle and up and down the many streets, I got the feeling we had taken the wrong approach to find our choir. I began thinking it a better approach to let them find me. That would at least reduce the walking. In the middle of the squares in-between the castle and the church sat a large chess set, with pieces about two and a half feet in height. There was an older gentleman who gave the impression that it was his square. While I stood waiting for my turn he reinforced this perception by winning five matches in a row. Understand that my objective was to be in the center square for the longest possible period of time, so I would make moves that would just stifle my opponent. Making offensive moves and retreating began to frustrate him and then his character emerged. I caught a neglected queen left vulnerable. Once he noticed her vulnerability he attempted to take back his previous move. I had started to

get tired of standing in one place anyway and since there was no shade I decided to make issue with his attempt to cheat and gave up the stage. Sometimes a non-win strategy is a hard strategy to figure out.

We crossed the river to search the other side of the city, scanning the many buses for familiar faces. As I turned one of the corners, to my surprise there stood a classmate that I have known since grammar school. He was shocked to see me standing next to him; the expression of “where did you come from” was plastered across his face. Our hometown choir had just pulled into the city and was off to get things settled in their hotel. They had scheduled a concert the next day in the countryside east of Salzburg and I explained that we would catch up with them there.

Tonight was a repeat of the night before. We wandered between bars but this time the clouds had brought rain. We ended the evening under the patio umbrellas in front of another bottle of wine. Once we checked in that little bit of freedom was available to us, and we traded stories into the night above the light of the city below. Our Englishman liked to turn the conversation to current politics. I don’t recall the sequence of conversation that lead us into a discussion of the United States and its so-called war on drugs, but he had been baiting me for some time. There were moments when he made well-substantiated points that were grounded but at other times it seemed as if he just wanted to disagree. I took the position that economics was the foundation of any successful solution. Currently that river ran too deep (demand is actually an addiction) and the current was too strong (margins are extremely high) to wade across to the supply side of things. The solution in my opinion was to remove oneself from the water. I suggested that controlling the supply side of the problem and to treat it like a problem not a crime. You can’t fix anything if you don’t understand it. By then we had soaked up enough wine and water to be considered wet and headed inside for a dry game of cards. When we knocked on the front door of the hostile, the old woman that ran the place came to the small window in the middle of the door, opened it up and stated, “No room, no room” and slammed it shut. The old woman put on a gritty front but was really quite a softy, quite a piece of work. Her comment and tone caught the girls completely off-guard. I wasn’t worried, even if she wouldn’t open the door, I had window wedged. A habit I had found valuable. You never know what fate lies around the corner. I decided to head off to sleep and leave the rest unchaperoned.

First words out of Jim mouth were a story about last night’s kiss and he presented it in such a way as if it was supposed to disturb me. He had the idea I was interested in a particular lady and as the night wore on, that he had won the war. I explained first that we are not in a competition, second I had no interest in either of the young women or I wouldn’t have retired alone early and third that he was an asshole to even consider it.

We took an early morning bus through the countryside to Lake Wolfgang. Our hometown choir had scheduled a performance alongside that picturesque lake. Buckets of rain accompanied our bus ride into the countryside. By the time we reached the concert site the sky had opened up presenting the sun to the wet green grass. It was a beautiful day. I could point my camera in any direction and frame what would be considered post card worthy. We hung around for a while and in our impatience inquired about the concert at a local gift shop. The teller explained that it was canceled due to the early rain. We attempted thumbing our way back to Salzburg but not a single car would slow down enough to even see the expression on our faces. We decided that since we had already checked out of last night’s hostile, most likely our beds were given to somebody else so we decided to head south into Italy instead of trekking back into Salzburg for another night.

Another beautiful sunset, this time with the Dolomites in the foreground. As we passed through the Alps toward Venice a young gentleman sat down next to me, still dressed in his climbing gear, with his helmet strapped tightly and rope over his shoulder. I glanced down and noticed that he was still wearing his spikes. As I stared at his spikes my mind wandered into reminding me that true mountain climbing is still on list of things to do.

With the sun going down and the coming of darkness, it was time for us to find a place to sleep. After the long day I wasn’t up to sleeping on the road, so I insisted we try our luck at the next stop, Spittal-Millstattersee. We ended up in front of a local restaurant, matter of fact I think it was the only restaurant. At least from where we stood it was the only one in sight. Jim had gone inside to call the local hostel we had earmarked earlier on the train. I was standing outside with the guitar over my shoulder, when a pair of elderly nuns approached me. One of the nuns asked if I would please play them a tune. I tried to explain that I didn’t know how to play nor could I carry a tune. I explained that I just carried the guitar around for the conversations it brings to me. They both smiled “You do know how to feel everything” one of nuns said. I smiled right back and told her that “That might be true that I feel everything but I’m still trying to figure out what it all means”. Their smiles changed slightly as if they agreed. At that moment Jim came through the door in a trot. The hostel had rooms but their curfew begins in five minutes, so we had to get moving. Luckily we managed to slip past a locked door, claimed ourselves a bed and then got comfortable in the hostel’s kitchen. There was a young woman sitting across from me with a stack of post cards at least a hundred thick. I learned that she was from San Marino California and wanted everybody she knew to know she was seeing the world. A couple from Malo, Norway joined our conversation. They suggested I head up to visit them that winter and experience firsthand the beauty of a Norwegian winter. Seeing the northern lights was an attractive option so I pocketed their address. Eventually I ended up over in the corner by myself adding pages to my journal. I began thinking about the nun’s words earlier that evening.

I pray every day (unless I forget) for the same three things. Forgiveness is first on my list. I’ve done things in the past that I’m ashamed of and wished I had known then what I understand today, so that I could have avoided those obstacles. Second, I pray for strength to avoid those pit falls in the future and third, I pray for the opportunity to provide support to others in need. I believe “I am my brother’s keeper”. I really dislike the fear factors applied to moral issues. For example, heaven being defined as only for the few righteous, leaving the majority of us sinners on the

wrong side of a locked door. Such a perception must lead to the loss of many hopes and dreams and would leave one to wrestle with regrets and failures. Everybody seemed to be divided between us and them but I believe we are one. I began thinking about extremes and recalled images from my past.

I remembered a trip to the county fair in Los Angeles. There was a blind man, oblivious to the crowd that surrounded him bent down on one knee, embracing his dog. "I love you", "I love you" he would repeat as he pet his companion's head. His words echoed his sincerity and truth. Later that same day, I witnessed the other extreme from the blind man's love of his dog. It was a horror, a silence like death. There was a well built man, maybe thirty five or so, obviously retarded, walking alongside a chaperon who could not restrain him. He would strike himself in the head, very hard, repeating it again and again. Once the crowd noticed, the once cluttered sounds of conversation would transform into a thick silence that surrounded him like a ring. That sad image still remains with me and added kindling to the fire of questions that resonated in my head. Then my mind migrated into reminiscing of youth, past relationships, desires and I crawled off to bed to embrace a dream.

Invisible, in the movements of life, unfelt and unknown, she lies trembling, am I alone

*In the distance, stands a lonely heart, as I am, so I see
somewhere out there, someone, tonight she waits for me*

A smile in passing, in turning two eyes meet, quick glimpse, a forgotten dream, both wishing to complete

*The loneliness did she undress, laying down, her loveliness, into each other, beholding this,
lips drew near and clung to a kiss*

*Deep within the arms, the rose of beauty burns, tonight, tomorrow's dream
immortal youth returns*

In front of the morning sun we departed toward Lienz. We were lucky to have the company of a pair of young ladies traveling in the same direction. An interesting conversation made the time disappear and before we knew it our train had come to a stop. I needed to exchange some traveler's check for cash and explained to Jim and the two girls that I would be a few minutes inside the bank. Once I exited the bank the three had vanished. I spent well over an hour checking one shop after another, up and down just about every street. Eventually I did find them on the other side of town. Jim was making moves on one of the young ladies and it appeared that the distance traveled was the result of her attempting to escape. We weren't scheduled for a long stop here so I was perturbed we were wasting time. I decided to go trekking on my own today and set a time to meet up with Jim at the station prior to departure.

I took the local cable car to the top of the mountain and then wandered through the countryside back into Lienz. What it must have been like to trek over these mountains centuries ago. This was a beautiful valley. I came upon an old man carving wood figures. I stood there and watch the techniques of a true master. It shows what talents that be achieved with time, and with ease he created details that would have taken others hours. Occasionally he would glance up at me with confident eyes and a smile as I hovered. I continued down the mountain and settled to a cup of tea alongside the square, minutes before our train departed. Jim also boarded but I avoided any conversation and kept to my journal.

As the Inn River narrows and makes its way through the city of Innsbruck and became an unforgiving river of speed. From one of its many bridges we gazed at the patterns the water made on its journey through the city. A pair of young British girls approached and inquired if we knew the way to the hostel. After spending a short time in their company I came to believe they both had to be related to Benny Hill. British humor would accompany every other sentence and if no one else could catch up it was still funny to them and that was funny in itself. In the interest of securing the same bed for consecutive days, we paid for two days in advance. After settling in and wandering the streets we settled on a Chinese restaurant overlooking one of the main boulevards. The owner of the establishment explained he was also from California and provided us with a few free appetizers. Outside the window next to our table we could view the festivities below. About halfway through the main course the rain began to drown out the music from the street. The rain continued throughout the evening and into the morning. Since the weather had not changed I requested a refund on tonight's accommodation and headed out in search for better weather. In my pocket I still had the choir's schedule and we decided to attend a performance scheduled in Burn Switzerland. It was just as easy to travel south through Italy and then up past Lake Lugano as it would be to trek through the northern Alps of Austria again. We assumed traveling south would give us warmer weather and better wine to travel by.

As we reached Bolzano the clouds lost their struggle against the sun and the horizon began to show it's orange. When we reached the Italian border a pair of border guards detained Jim due to his namesake. They carried with them a historical list of individuals that skipped out on their military duty. It was obvious that they enjoyed the comical side of their harassment. We went from Trento to Verona, Verona to Milano on only two bottles of wine. We reached Lugano in the early afternoon. Along the lake's shore we found ourselves a patch of grass where the local kids hung out talking, smoking and playing games of chess. We relaxed with the rest of the crowd and enjoyed the sun. We walked about the city for a few hours in search for a room but had no luck finding a vacancy. We spent most of the evening dining and bouncing between bars and as the night began to wind down, we began searching for a place to sleep. Just below the train station and slightly south of the trolley that headed down to the lake was a small church with what looked to be a shed with a relatively flat roof. I persuaded Jim that we could climb up onto its roof, sleep

there for the night and get a room the next day. Jim had his sleeping bag and I had my jacket. It was a bit cold so I was in and out of sleep all night impatiently waiting for the day to arrive.

I was awakened by the sound of sweeping in the distance. It's funny how things looked different under the light of the day. I really thought we had selected an isolated location where we could be unnoticed but the fact was we practically slept on top of a monument. It was comfortable and no one bothered us and would have been perfect if we weren't sharing the space with a colony of ants. I needed a shower, so we trekked back to the most likely hostel that would have a vacancy. There would be no early shower and we ended up making our self breakfast in their courtyard. At the end of the wait there still weren't any available rooms, so we headed off to our second choice. This too required us to wait.

While we hung around out front of the hostel I struck up a conversation with two girls who ended up being sisters. I was surprised since they did not resemble one another. Every major feature, eye, hair, height was different, for me the jury was still out. They explained their intentions on hanging out that evening and then to depart on a late night train. After we were given a pair of beds and took a quick shower the four of us wandered back down towards the lakefront. We spent some time lying on our backs, soaking up the sun and listening to the music that lingered along the shore. The cool breeze from off the water perfectly contrasted with the warm sun. Sharing a day like this with a fair set of legs and almost exposed breasts couldn't have been more perfect. We tried on numerous occasions to persuade our new lady friends to second-guess their travel plans, but on the other hand we didn't seem to be pairing up. We settled in a small café overlooking the lake and shared the view over a pricy pizza. While the four of us were heading back up towards the hostel to help gather their bags, I heard my name called out from behind. I turned and noticed Roger's wife and a few of her friends looking down from the balcony overlooking the street. They pointed out where they were staying and suggested that we join them across the street for dinner. The older of the two sisters had her mind set on leaving, the younger one, who I felt really enjoyed our company, was casting her vote for staying. A kiss and a hug and we were seeking food.

Jim and I were introduced to the group before we sat down to eat. One woman became hysterical when she noticed Jim. Apparently they had been close back home and hadn't seen each other in quite some time. I think the two of them had worked together in a pharmacy. Neither were aware of the others intentions of traveling to Europe this year, so it was a pleasant surprise. The introduction sure got the meal off on a high note. Half the group planned to take a night boat trip around the lake after dinner and invited us to join them, but outside it began to rain and it wasn't coming down softly. It looked as if it was only going to get heavier, so we decided to head back to the hostel and catch up on the sleep we lost the previous night.

I saw myself looking back from my own reflection from the window of the train. It was dark outside and I couldn't make out the landscape rushing past. I then realized the sound of my heartbeat was identical to the sound of the train hitting the rails, so I began to concentrate on that sound. I woke up to discover that the sound was actually rain hitting the cement outside the window of my room. I was perspiring even though I slept under a light cotton sheet. The sound of thunder shook my room, like mortar fire on a battlefield and then the rain really started to come down violently. Everybody staying in the hostel that night was up and standing outside under the eaves watching those rain drops punish the pavement, amazed at the height they bounced. "The rain, the rain, wilding beating at my window pane, bouncing as high as the heavens they came". I couldn't get back to sleep and began to lose control of the random thoughts that filled by head, so I wandered away from my bed and claimed a table in the lounge since there was just enough light to write.

*It lies in heaven, across the flood, as a bridge, lies, beneath the tides of day and night,
where the flame and darkness ridge, the void*

*There lies, a great chasm fixed between, like the clouds that gather and the mountain stream,
life flows forth, like a cleansing rain,*

To be born again.

We trekked through the mountains down into the city of Luzern. Arriving early gave us ample time to explore the city. We started out along the river's edge and enjoyed a cigarette while looking out from one of the seats on the old wooden bridge that spanned the river. The contrast between the white swans and the cigarette smoke painted a lovely picture to remember. While exploring the backside I was surprised at how much heroin was being passed around. Needles were being passed around like a water pipe. We said hello and gestured that we weren't interested. I noticed an interesting shop selling Swiss army knives and decided to procure a few. Sent one home to my dad as an early birthday present, another one home for myself and kept one to carry around. Two down and one gift to go.

Jim wasn't interested in taking a cog train up to some of the nearby peaks. The last time I was there was with my parents and I had traveled that road, so I wasn't going to waste any energy trying to persuade. As the day wound down we ended up in the train station in front of a beer. A familiar set of eyes wandered over to our table but I couldn't put my finger on where I knew them from. Talk about unlikely combinations and that's what through me off. Our English snob from Salzburg was alongside one of the two Americans we had met on the boat between Liverpool and Dublin. "You know you never did show up in Amsterdam". Then like clockwork it all came rushing back. "The last time I visited this quaint little town, it was to anchor our championship rowing team". I looked around at the group and noticed that no one was paying any attention, as if they heard it all before. But he was not to be derailed, he had a

mission. So I ordered another round of beers. It seemed that this was the table standing at the crossroads of traffic. Once we were alone again, a pair of young ladies we had met back in Innsbruck turned the corner along with two other young ladies. The other girls acted annoyed that our reunion was taking longer than they were willing to tolerate. Well it was nice to see those two girls again and who knows, maybe we'd see you again somewhere else down the road.

There were no rooms available in Burn, but we were able to grab the last two floor mats in the local hostel. To add insult to injury, it wasn't until after we had paid for the mats that we discovered the hostel was just not quite right. Everybody was either extremely depressed or wore some type of attitude on their sleeve. We escaped this dark cloud and attempted to find some food. I used the word attempted because we didn't have much luck finding a reasonably priced meal. None of the menus we passed were in the range of our budget so I sought out some common ground with a local who looked to be a waiter standing in front of one of the restaurants. He was taking a break and was watching the foot traffic alongside a cigarette. I inquired where a good meal could be found on a poor man's budget. He suggested joining him in his restaurant and offered to prepare a plate of spaghetti, with a small glass of wine for whatever we were prepared to pay. Appreciated.

I try not to buy packs of cigarettes. I get bored too easily and if I toted a pack around, I would smoke more often than I would like. Being an OPC smoker on the other hand limited me to maybe one or two per day, if any. I can go weeks without smoking a single cigarette. Still, that little voice in my head pulled me toward somebody who had lit up. I told myself it was the opportunity to strike up a conversation and that became my artificial motivation. Here in Europe every other person had that window open to me. I'd ask if they could spare a cigarette and if they offered me one it established a common ground and a specified a period of time for a conversation. There's a comfort zone because when the cigarette was smoked, it was a "Thank you very much" and we were on our separate ways. I guess you could also view this as an exchange of my lungs for a conversation. I do feel its fingers inside me, yet I make no attempt to loosen its grip making excuses instead. I suppose that alone makes it an addiction.

Jim joined the hostel attitude. He didn't want to go anywhere, see anything, he just wanted to stick around the hostel and wash his clothes, so I sought out on my own. I checked out Albert Einstein's home and then the modern art museum. "One man's treasure is another man's trash". I love art but sometimes. I wandered the market and the local stops searching for Christmas gifts, but ended up buying chocolates to satisfy my taste buds instead. I ended the long day relaxing along the river's edge. It was there I met a group of future Olympic kayakers practicing their upstream maneuvers. Kayaking is such an unappreciated and beautiful sport. I appreciated the time they spent with me explaining the details of the maneuvers and the objects of their sport. Well, much like golf, kayaking it not really a sport. Without challenging a defense, it can only be a game of skill. All in all this was a beautiful place to relax and reflect. Jim and I spent the evening over a game of cribbage.

We started the morning with a danish while we waited for the Parliament building to open and spent a good portion of the day hanging around the cathedral waiting for our hometown choir to show. We were making one last attempt to track down a performance. Crossing the street fair with one hand on an apple and one eye on the crowd, I did locate them waving at me from a passing bus. Seeing them perform began to look more like a long shot instead of a possibility. A walk through the residential areas uncovered how spotless and clean everything was. It was a little bit unnerving. Like being in a museum or my grandmother's living room where nothing should be disturbed. I still don't know why and it's beyond me why we decided to stay one more night. I didn't enjoy sleeping on floor mats the first time around and there was nothing preventing us from finding a bed or another place to stay, so I guess I have to blame it on laziness. I spent the evening staring out at the river over a glass of wine, reminiscing and adding to my journal. Too many lovers, not enough love, things I'm guilty of.

*I've wasted time I know, I think, not enough money but enough to drink
I wandered around in search for a smile, to find they only, last awhile*

*I've wasted time, I think, I know, seducing women even though
to meet the one, to me it seems, is just a picture in my dreams*

*I've wasted time, I know, it's true, so much I plan, I never do
these dreams I know, they never would, turn out the way, I wish they could*

Our rail passes provided free passage on numerous lake cruises, so we decided to take advantage. We gathered up the ingredients for a day out on Lake Zurich. Opened up a cold beer, claimed a table with a view and broke out the cards to continue the cribbage marathon from the night before. What a perfect day it was to be out on a lake. There was just the right mixture between the warmth of the sun, the coolness of the breeze and the temperature of the beer. Man some of these homes that line the lake with their manicured yards and adornments screams money. No wonder their all smiling. We took advantage of couple of the stops and wandered about the neighborhoods. I grew up in Los Angeles and never had a lake or river near my home, so envious of those who had. We continued through Zurich and headed towards Innsbruck, aligned train schedules and earmarked connections. The scenery the way Innsbruck was more picturesque with all the new waterfalls created by the last rainfall and the melting snow, but it was still one hell of a long boring ride. I just felt like sleeping but wasn't having much luck keeping my eyes closed, so I decided to wash my clothes in the train's sink and air dry them out the window of the train.

We arrived late into Innsbruck and discovered that the hostel was out of beds. Only a large attic with sleeping mats were available. Can't say I'm ever use to sleeping on the floor, but having no other choice we made the best with what

we were given. Wedged a window open just in case we became curfew violators and then went searching the city for some food. Well as least you could say that Jim is consistent, I'm beginning to think he'll only eat Chinese food. If I wanted variety it on my own. After we ate we checked out a few of the local hang outs for an extra drink or two. We got ourselves sidetracked by a few local girls and were glad that the window to the down stairs shower was ajar. Once back inside the Hostel we discovered we didn't have sleeping mats. When we found somebody in charge, we had to address all his questions. Where had we been and why didn't we already have mats? Our explanation involved a girl's rooms and this excuse was accepted with a smile. That night was no different than most, the larger the group sharing a space the harder it is to get a good night's sleep.

We were up early, followed advice we received during the last night socializing and joined the "Club Innsbruck" for a day hike. A young Belgium woman had crossed our path searching for the same location. It was early in the morning and we were the first to arrive, so there was nobody gathered outside to identify if we had found our destination. She seemed very nice but didn't say much. It was apparent she was very shy. They began handing out daypacks and boots if needed. I was at a disadvantage because I wasn't sporting socks, just tennis shoes because socks are difficult items to keep either clean and/or dry. After a while of wrestling with this inconvenience I discarded them for good and hadn't had the opportunity to purchase a few new pairs. To my surprise and gratitude, our Belgium maiden found it in her heart to share an additional pair of socks she had been carrying. They loaded us all on a bus and we headed into the mountains. In the back of the bus we struck up a conversation with some of the others. I don't recall how the subject of baseball came up but at about the fifth word spoken on this subject Woody Allan's little brother sprang from the front of the bus. He was decked out with a pin covered uniform and a New York Yankee cap. You guys talking about baseball? Without even a breath between sentences, he proceeded giving an impression that he was somebody we couldn't get rid of.

Eventually we boarded a ski lift to reach the higher elevations, Schrankugel – Schaufel – Ppitz – Wilder Freiger. Our group was made up of all ages so our path was leisurely and there was plenty of time to frame a few photographs. I would wander to the front, to the rear, to the front and then again back to the rear, from one conversation to another, kinda like a sheep dog on speed. The scenery was just gorgeous, the mountains were green but snow capped and it looked as if every flower was in bloom. The backside of one these trails gave us a panoramic view of lush green hills scratched in brown. Apparently the moisture of the last rain dislodged the foundations of some local structures that now lay in ruins at the bottom of each brown scratch. I guess beauty does have a sharp edge. At the top of that trek sat a small little wooden church. God's own church with a true view of his garden. Inside were no more than thirty seats, each worn from years of use. It just struck me as possessing all the characteristics of a true church without all the grandeur. No stain glass windows, no statues or images of saints and I could image shoes being left at the door to keep from tracking in soil.

After the group had caught its breath, our trek leader began handing out accomplishment pins. I'm one who would rather avoid celebration and preferred moving on to a beer. When he started handing out pins for the new members, like me, that had survived the first day, I truly understood this ritual. Our guide would extend his hand to the men but with the women he would seek a kiss. When his attentions turn toward our young Belgium maiden, she curled up like a scared kitten. After the way he kissed the last two, I would have probably have done the same. I don't recall how I was recruited; perhaps it was because I was the only one who actually had a conversation with her. I was selected to attempt to put the pin onto her blouse. I gave her a cute peck on the cheek and as expected she blushed.

We finished the trek relaxing outside a local restaurant to a well deserved cold beer. On the bus ride back to Innsbruck, Jim gave his best shot in convincing two sisters to join us that night for dinner. It was a bad sign when their Mother even was aggressively pushing them to go out and still they said no. Jim just needed to let it rest. I wandered about for a bit and eventually like every night there, ended up staring at the river, hypnotized by its power. I stood almost paralyzed in amazement watching the over swollen waters run through the town. A pair of young ladies had wandered onto the bridge and introduced themselves. They seemed nice but once they got comfortable the one who appeared to be the quiet one wouldn't stop talking. Once she started, she just wouldn't stop. She hated the United States and began expressing all the left wing propaganda I heard so many times before. Okay, have you ever been to the States? "No". Do you know people that live there? "No". Do you believe everything you hear or read? "No". Well there you go and with that I left. That night we had our own room with a window off the shower, so no rushing back. The next morning before moving on, we boarded the cable car to the top of the adjacent mountain and even spent some time visiting the local zoo. About midday we boarded a train to Switzerland.

We stopped off in Luzern to get something to eat and ended up at the exact same table as before, standing at the cross roads. While standing there eating German sausage, mustard and beer another face from the past wandered up and said hello. That day we decided to take things at a more leisurely pace and took the slow road into Interlaken. There wasn't a cloud in the sky and it looked as if we were entering one of those many post cards that clutter the main boulevards. The lakes we passed on our way into Interlaken was such a unique blue, it didn't seem real, especially in contrast to the multi greens of the mountains that surrounded them. As we exited the train, we came across a small group of travelers lost and seeking directions. Since we were all seeking the same location we shepherded them to its door. We hit a gold mine of young travelers and all the inner workings of a perpetual party. At the door they handed us priority numbers and explained that if we were lucky we'd get a bed for the night and if not, there would be room on the floor. Thank God it was a privately ran hostel, cause I discovered that I had left my hostel card back in Innsbruck by mistake.

My guitar, she was such a social animal and loved to exercise this desire. It was a pleasure to be associated with her conquests. She always managed to find her own friends. Two movies showed every night, plenty of alcohol was being

passed around and we even made a few good contacts, but for some reason I felt like I needed to be alone and had wandered into the woods by myself. I didn't want anybody hearing me try to play the guitar.

*Can you see the face, I'm hiding, one who's lonely and oppressed,
with a heart that needs, providing, to be freed, from my distress*

..... Look at me, my misery, look upon my tears, it's been a long time cryin, I could hardly count the years.

*It's a question of a thousand dreams, a passage I still don't know,
as a leaf lies helpless upon the stream, I wander to an fro.*

..... Look at me, my misery, look upon my tears, is it from myself I'm hiding, or am I hiding from my fears.

*Is it a question of misplaced answers, to all this I have seen,
why has it been this way, tell me, or is this someone else's dream.*

*Can you see the face, I'm hiding, one who's lonely and oppressed,
with a heart that needs, providing, to be freed, from my distress*

With the crack of dawn we were up to conquer the monster. We had taken the first train into the heart of the Jungfrau region, Grindelwald to the base of the Eiger. We surveyed the landscape against a local map and selected the West slope since it was opposite from the well-traveled trails the others were trekking. Every time we thought the trail was challenging us, we'd discover a convenience from the distant past, a ladder welded into the rock face. Reaching the first summit was like reaching heaven itself. Every step would take us deeper and deeper into its beauty. Setting out into the wild, touching, smelling, listening, becoming lost can be a wondrous thing. The sun in all its glory would peak through the tall green pines, whose branches reached towards the sky but could not prevent its dominance. The plateau was covered in green and snow-white sheep watched us as if they were in camouflage. Like angel wings flapping in the distance, I could hear a beautiful chime through the trees. It was the alpha male, with a bell strung around his broad neck. I became intoxicated with the idea that this bell would become my souvenir. Getting close enough was the first challenge. He was quick and had challenged me on a couple of occasions. I chose my moment and made my move, tackling him. Believe it or not, I was surprised he didn't just roll over and let me remove the bell from his neck. He acted as if this processed the honor to rule over the others. Besides dragging me through sheep shit, I also got a hoof in my side. It was a bad idea from the start. The higher I climbed the higher I got. Jim had stopped following once the trail had ended and the real trekking began. I continue making my own trail climbing higher and higher. I had stopped and took a picture of the other side of the ravine. The dozen or so hikers walking the trail looked to me like ants walking on a string. Only the wind and occasional bell in the distance broke the silence. Nature, sweetly to her worshipers, she sings. Pictures and words can't begin to convey the richness and depth of Switzerland's mountains. The fragrant flower of spring, calls to the wanderer to climb even higher, waiting for me to reach and fetch them from the heavens. I have seen angels.

*As above, so below; as below, so above, the pendulum swings
two extremes of the same event and here I hear them sing
to set aside the obstacles which hide the unknown from view
so that I can catch a glimpse of the other side, back to what I knew*

*Everything moves, everything vibrates, nothing is really at rest
I had no choice but to follow the piper or continued to be depressed
The measure of the swing to the left is the measure of the swing to the right
The rhythm of nature wraps me between, so everything's alright*

*The sun is so bright; the skies are so blue, birds sing as they fly by
their wings add sounds that tell of love true, so who could be lonely, not I.*

For the next hour or so I continued up the Eiger until a piece of the glacier who had surrendered to the summer sun struck me on the head. That was the reminder I needed, I had gone far enough. It was then I discovered that I couldn't take the same path down. Gravity doesn't work that way. I sat down to catch my breath and to survey the thousands of feet I could fall if I lost my footing. There was nothing in sight to stop a fall. I thought to myself "How in the hell did I get myself into this predicament?". I got out my camera to take a picture and at that moment a butterfly landed on my shoe. I was sitting up there praying that I'm not stuck. I have a hard time facing embarrassment. I then decided to zigzag to my right rather than to head down backwards facing the mountain. With patience I managed to make it back down to the snow line. It was there I luckily found Jim fooling around in some ice caves, so I didn't have to track him down. We still had the problem of getting back down to a safe level and decided that it wasn't by taking the path we took to get up here, we'd have to find another way. The landscape quickly changed and began to terrace itself into thirty-foot drops. We sought out trees and climbed down their branches to reach the next terrace. We knew what direction to head in but getting there turned out to be easier said. I was edging along a ridge about six or so inches wide, about thirty, maybe forty-foot above the rocks below, while Jim followed behind. I was attempting to maneuver past a large tree obstructing the ridge I was standing on. This tree didn't have enough branches to climb down on.

There was another tree about twenty yards down the same ridge that could accommodate us. While I searched for a place to anchor my foot, I placed all of my weight on the tree's branch which was at least eight inches in diameter. Once I placed my weight on the branch, it broke and dove into the rocks below. Its descent took the skin away from my armpit down to my elbow. I swear angels must have held me against that ridge. There was no other logical answer as to why I didn't follow that branch down. It had been supporting every ounce of my weight. Jim screamed out "You're dead! You're dead!" and refused to follow me any further. As I made it down to the next ridge, I stood there dumbfounded, reflecting on what just happened. "It's not a good idea to tackle this by yourself but I guess we'll meet at the bottom" I responded to Jim's refusal to follow.

I made it to the tavern at the opening of the trail, sat waiting for about thirty minutes and then decided to clean my wounds. I sat down to one beer, then another and began to worry about Jim. Shit, we were running out of time to catch the last train out of the valley. I was dead tired and didn't know if I could actually get up out the chair I had sunk into. At that moment Jim wandered up looking almost as tired as I felt. I'm surprised I made the walk from the train station to the hostel and I didn't feel like discussing today's events with anyone. I was still digesting what actually happened and really just wanted to be left alone. But no, Jim had to tell one person after another how lucky I was and how I should be dead, forcing me to retell the story of my ignorance.

We discovered Lake Brienzensee early that next morning. My entire side was bruised and I had scab from elbow to waist, even through the pain the lake's unique color of blue was almost hypnotizing. We docked at Glessbach to walk the falls. Fighting through the soreness of my abused legs was worth the effort. Actually I was in better shape than I had ever been in my life and felt capable of doing almost anything I pleased. Youth, I was told is wasted on the young and I suppose that's true. So I wasn't going to waste any opportunities. I crossed paths with an older gentleman who reminded me that these types of opportunities would vanish and change as I grew into an older man. It wouldn't be the same with arthritis or trying to catch my breath. I also realize that being a young opens up doors restricted to the old, I am trusted in a different way. I pray that my memories of days like this maintain their color and that I have the opportunity to share the things I have found. We planned on heading back into Innsbruck to retrieve my abandoned hostel card and then onto Germany to join in the Oktoberfest. We were keeping our fingers crossed that the rain had left Germany.

*Mornings among the halls, people come and go, while the day comes out to play, across those things I use to know
Stop awhile, wait for me, before it fades away, it's a long, long way, home*

*Outside the day's still shinin, where the children never cry, while I search inside for smiles, another passes by
People always come and go, across those things I use to know*

..... Stop awhile, wait for me, before it fades away, it's a long, long way, home

*Time has gotten shorter, in these new games they all play, windows closed and a bolted door, what is there I can say
People always come and go, across those things I use to know*

..... Stop awhile, wait for me, before it fades away, it's a long, long way, home

We arrived in Innsbruck later than we expected but we still had enough time to grab ourselves a bed. I regained possession of my hostel card and went right to sleep. The next day would be another early morning. The plan was to join the Oktoberfest in Munich. With our early start we were able to visit Munich's museums early enough to beat the tourist traffic. It was a bit of a culture shock being around so many American tourists.

It was a perfect day for drinking beer. We found shade within the Hafbrouhaus. While we downed a few beers alongside a couple of pretzels, our waitress dropped a hand full of mugs behind me and they shattered on the floor. A few pieces of glass had jumped up and cut her ankle. Since I'm a man, it was my job was to rescue her. I picked her up to the humming of the crowd and carried her into the kitchen. They brought Jim and me a free beer. Lowenbrauhaus was next on our list and there we matched our earlier consumption. I wandered about feeling as if I had drunk a couple of bottles of bourbon rather than just eight beers. I don't recall much about our bus ride to the local hostel. That night we were staying in a circus tent that accommodated somewhere around five hundred of us. I remember having a cup of hot tea, playing a few games of Ping-Pong. I discovered that I played the game much better when I was only thinking about keeping my balance. Jim again adopted the characteristics of the lost puppy I hadn't seen since Norway. This time it was a young German girl, who based on the conversation I had with her, seemed to be a few cards shy of a full deck. Perhaps drugs were involved. She changed her top in front of Jim exposing her womanhood and that's all it took to put the ring in Jim's nose. Once it got dark I went right to sleep. Nothing could stop me. Sleep? It was closer to passing out.

I was awakened very early to the un-orchestrated sound of hundreds snoring and/or other assorted noises, woke Jim up to set a meeting place for later in the day and headed out towards Englisher Gardens. Behind a cup of coffee, I watched the labor force migrate through the city in their usual day-to-day patterns. I wandered about and eventually ended up back in the park, planted myself under a set of trees and laid for at least an hour staring at the leaves until the warm sun came peeking through.

*I could spend days and days beneath these trees, just staring at its images swaying in the breeze
The colors are brilliant, the patterns run wild and inside I'm laughing, a passionate child*

Sun worshippers gathered along the canal that ran through the park waiting on the sun, waiting to discard their clothes. Following my eyes, I migrated a little closer but let me warn you, people that have bodies that looked like that shouldn't be allowed to walk around in public like that, it was scary. It was a warm day and the water began to look more and more inviting. I was in need of a shower anyway, so I joined in, laid my clothes alongside its bank and went for a quick swim. I've never been comfortable walking around in my bathing suit so once I was dry, almost dry the clothes went right back on. It felt good to relax and I enjoyed doing nothing. Our scheduled train ride was not that far off and I needed to track down Jim before the day ended. I watched Jim and his new friend from a distance. It was like this young German girl had put a spell on him. The three of us took a walk back through the park toward the train station. When we reached the main boulevard, we grabbed a set of chairs and spent our remaining time watching the pedestrians. We said our good-byes and headed into Nurnberg.

I can sympathize with the locals. I too would be upset if my streets and hangouts were infiltrated with foreign military personnel. G.I. Joe was everywhere and not always on their best behavior. The hostel we sought was an old converted castle that overlooked the city. Everybody who checked in before we arrived found the grass hill out front as the place to hang out. We decided to trek into the city rather than hang around. Along our journey we came across a small church, ordinary in almost every sense, until I came across a wooded crucifixion that drew my attention. I stood there and stared at Jesus, as if I were unconscious to time. I couldn't shake the feeling that I had been there before. The pictures that ran through my mind were like seeing a river meeting the ocean for the first time. They were a combination of clarity and disturbance coming together to create random patterns of emotions. That image along with the undefined feeling remained in my head for some time.

We checked in among a group of young girls, yea schoolgirls. There was one with a body Pygmalion would have been jealous of, a beauty, sporting her innocents amongst the men. What fantasies she could spin. Tempting thoughts ran through my mind, what would she see in me anyway? Once we locked up our belongings we set out to find ourselves some nightlife. There were few places that had live music and few assorted characters but really nothing to write home about. After curfew we got into a game of cards alongside a coke machine in what I'd term as a game room. A young lady recognized me from the hostel in Interlaken. I was not surprised I didn't recognize her. Everything outside my hiking incident was a blur. The conversation eventually chased me off to bed but in the horizontal position I discovered I wasn't really tired. I decided to wander about the castle searching in places I knew I wasn't allowed. I had opened a door on the tenth floor that lead to a pillar of stairs. I found a beautiful spot to enjoy the guitar. The acoustics were wonderful. I convinced myself that I actually sounded pretty good. I played gibberish until my eyes began to get tired and then crawled back off to bed.

In a middle of a dream a young man introduced himself to me, explained that we knew one another and that he had something to show me. I looked at his face and couldn't recall where we had met or when. He stated that he had been given permission to show me something and at that moment opened what could be best described as a door. Behind the opened door I saw billions of people of all ages, with all characteristics, moving frantically as if searching for someone important to them. As I moved closer I noticed that my mind did not perceive the physical characteristics of these people. I could see what I would describe as their souls, their true selves, with fears, jealousies, greed, kindness and love, both the good and the bad. My young guide never said another word. It appeared that each were lost and were seeking a loved one but could not locate them by the characteristics of their souls. It was a hell of confusion and sorrow. The memory of that dream remained with me for some time. Along the river I have learned that my family consists of those individuals, that if need be, I could identify. So from this point forward I tried to disregard the baggage people carry around and sought to identify the true characteristics of each person I encountered by focusing in on who they are before what they say.

With the new morning we headed south down the Rhine toward Mainz, which was like pulling branches back to let the sunlight through. The artificial forms of timekeeping were peeled back to expose the past. Those small ancient towns with their terraced vineyards opened up windows of curiosity and the desire to explore. By the time we reached Mainz the sky again opened up and handed us nothing but rain, buckets of rain. The dash between the boat and the bus made us look as if we had gone for a swim. There wasn't much of a decision, we weren't going to share Germany with the rain and decided we would head farther north towards Amsterdam.

We arrived into Amsterdam late and needed to find ourselves a place to stay but came across one "No vacancy" sign after another, after another, after another. Rejection made my feet feel even more tired. We needed to find a place to rest our feet and as you would expect, it ended up being a coffee shop. We were three days from the end of a three-month un-limited rail pass. The plan was to end up some place where we were willing to relax and take a break from all the train travel. So we decided not to hang around Amsterdam and would head west through Spain to the south coast of Portugal. The weather forecast was positive and relaxing on the beach sounded perfect when I repeated the word back to myself. We purchased a fairly large chunk of the best hash in town, a bag of Drum tobacco, a six-pack of beer and waited in a small pizzeria along the main boulevard. As we began to run out of time, I told the maître that I wanted my money back, we had a train to catch and we couldn't afford to wait much longer. Our waiter boxed up the first two pizzas that came out of the oven rather than have cash going in the wrong direction. We didn't get the two small pepperonis we ordered but ended up with a large octopus and a medium sausage plus something.

We managed to secure a compartment to ourselves, lit up, ate up, drank down the beer and eventually slept like babies. We arrived in Paris half-asleep with our shoes off and bags in hand. We scurried across the station to make our connection, only to discover there was no train. "Rail man said, you got the wrong location" and getting information from the French was like pulling teeth. If they thought they had a choice they kept their mouths closed. Eventually we

discovered that they rescheduled the train's departure from the southern station across town. Customer service didn't include updating signs or announcing changes in anything other than French. The hash, the beer, interrupted sleep, jogs through the subways all made it one long and tiring night.

We came to an unplanned stop at the border between France and Spain where it appeared the French weren't about to share their trains with Spanish rails. We had come to a complete stop and it was obvious they were ushering us through customs. Well there was no way I would attempt carrying our hash through customs. It just wasn't worth the risk. But leaving the hash behind wasn't my decision to make alone. I could almost hear Jim's voice proclaiming that he would have packed it across and how I owed him money. Then I would hear over and over again how he wished he could get high and how my decision prevented him from doing so. Jim was about three trains back and I was standing on the platform waiting for him to get close enough to address the question.

I must have been gesturing in some way or sending out unconscious signals because at that exact moment the General of all custom officials grabbed the bag of tobacco out of my hand. Jim walked right past me trying his best to avoid eye contact for fear of being pulled into the situation. I had no idea where the words that came out of my mouth originated. I did not consciously assemble them or determine their intent. In hindsight it was one of those odd experiences that are remembered in slow motion. Almost instantaneously as he grabbed the bag from my hand I backhanded him across his chest. Not hard but just enough to get his attention. His uniform was decked out in every metal imaginable. I emphasized my disgust with his improper behavior and in broken English, I stated, "You want, I roll, no grab". He looked back at me with an expression of disbelief, "Don't you know who I am?" he gestured. Before he caught his breath the words came again from my lips, "You want, I roll, no grab" and I made the gesture of rolling a cigarette. I noticed he squeezed the bag and angrily asked "Tobacco"? "You want, I roll, no grab" I repeated, gesturing again of rolling a cigarette. As his anger escalated he abruptly shoved the bag back into my hands. I opened the bag and rolled a cigarette in front of him and lit it up as I lingered towards the doors that lead into customs. My exterior remained calm but my heart was pounding a mile a minute. I reminded myself that I wasn't out of the woods yet. I still had to walk through customs and there could be real dogs in there. As it turned out the American passport was a ticket to ride. We went in one door and out the other. It took me a while to find Jim "Where in the hell did you go? I asked "Somebody had to tell your parents that you were in a Spanish Jail". Jim barked out. Thanks anyway.

When we finally reached San Sebastian we were both were excited to explore the bay and find ourselves some food. We started out walking among the festivities and slowly accumulated the inner workings for a few sandwiches. Once we reached the bay we began walking the boardwalk until we located some sand with a good view of the bay. Such beautiful boats lined the horizon. I questioned why, why I didn't own a boat like that? We did a little dancing alongside the festival and had another bottle of wine until we boarded a late train towards Madrid.

I woke up in the middle of a desert of reddish clay painted orange by the rising sun. As the ride wore on the sun converted our compartment from a cozy bed into practically an oven. Each hill looked the same as the one before it rolling one after another past my window. If one didn't know any better it could be assumed that my window was the backdrop to a movie set. When we reached Madrid we took a route along one of the broader boulevards, its edges painted with numerous café canopies. I walked for about an hour until I located the right place to eat. I had to be a little more selective when I'm combining dining and writing. I like place where I can relax, with enough room to eat and write, out of the sun but with good visibility of the foot traffic.

Once the bottle of wine kicked in we set off and explored the city. The subway was a real adventure. There was a pole about head high that ran down the middle of the train. What made this an e-ticket ride were the large gaps between rails that kept everybody moving from side to side. On the way back to fetch our bags Jim began complaining about his feet again and took that as an opportunity to escape the heat and read the novel he had been carrying. Somebody had to locate a room for the night so I headed back into the city alone. Jim got all bent out of shape at the price of the room I selected, like sitting on his ass in the train station made him an expert on Madrid's accommodation market. "If you don't like the arrangement you're on your own" I stated while handing him the travel guide containing the addresses of Madrid's hotels. Price was a major consideration but conveyance was also a priority. If I was only going to be there for a short time I didn't want to waste my time getting to and from what I planned on seeing. The place I chose was close to nice restaurants and places where the evening would bloom and was not far from the place I planned on visiting. Once we settled in the room Jim fell asleep, reading can be so tiring. I on the other hand sought out some night life. I wandered the city's arteries, Paseo del la Castelliana, Paseo de Recoletos and Paseo del Prado. Those open-air terraces abounded with young ladies and I stayed all night. On my walk back I thought to myself "Doesn't anybody sleep here?" There was a traffic jam at four in the morning. I lay down in an attempt to lose my head spins but I could still see the lights flashing. Even though I probably slept a couple of hours it felt as if only minutes had passed. I was still tired but that day was earmarked with a lot to see in a relatively short time. I checked out both the Museum, the Royal Palace and still jetted out before night fell.

8/18. Eventually we exhausted our rail pass in Lisbon. It felt good to slow down our pace and relax from the routines associated with traveling by train. We chose a place where the locks worked, the toilet flushed and the view down onto the street below was descent. By the time I reached for the second bottle everything had a rosy glow, and the food was excellent. I must have had quite a smile and/or my wallet was showing because every young lady looking to trade sex for money introduced herself. We were still sporting the hash we had smuggled across the borders but also carried an uncomfortable feeling, so we ended up smoking it a lot faster than we had originally planned. That night it provided a surreal mood that painted the streets like a bad dream and presented something to contemplate. The most difficult pill for me to swallow was to try and understand why some people came into this world with such disadvantages. I know

that the great lesson is that we each our brother keeper and I should never avoid giving assistance to those who ask for it. But when I look into the eyes of a man with no legs and no arms who for years has been propped up behind a jar and sign asking for sympathy in the form of currency, I ponder, why? Do they suffer to test? Do they suffer to teach? Do they suffer? I am so humbled. We hung around for awhile, enjoyed the food, wandered about and eventually headed north into Nazare, a small fishing village.

The train station was a short walk outside of town but after only about fifty yards or so Jim began complaining. I was at the point where I didn't even hear him anymore. He threatened to pack his shit up, fly home and didn't like my "Go or stay but just stop complaining because you're giving me a headache" response. My thumb attracted a truck that had also picked up a pair of French girls who, like us, got off at the campsite. We continued down to the shore where we were bombarded by every woman over the age of sixty, all trying to physically persuade us to stay in their home. Each woman we followed worked out the same. The accommodations were small, dirty and we weren't going to pay that much. We went up one street and down another, compounding complaints from Jim. Eventually we found a nice room with a balcony. I felt good that we had haggled down the price a few notches.

On the hot white sand under a clear blue sky the early morning fisherman lined the shore to mend their nets. This was nice place to relax, the people were very friendly and there wasn't much of nightlife outside of dining which is probably what accounted for the lack of young adults. It was a Doctor's prescription for me. Every day was a carbon copy of the last. I relaxed on the sand, slept half the day and wrote at night alongside a bottle wine and then the circle would repeat. I can do this for quite some time. While eating dinner, Jim was scoping out the crowd and noticed an older gentleman who had left his cassette player behind. Instead of running the guy down to give it back, Jim pounced on it and hid it in his pocket. When I called him on it he retaliated by attacking on another subjects. Yea, like I was distracted. Then he kept going on how nice it was that he could be listening to music again and how this was a reunion he needed. Put a sock in it, it's called stealing.



I was planning on heading north up the coast but Jim kept talking about flying home and how he could fly out of Madrid for about twenty percent of the normal fare. Since I disagreed he kept repeating it in order to needle me. "You either misread something or misunderstood" "Perhaps you would be a deck hand?" I teased. For whatever reason Jim liked to pull strings in the direction of an argument and then if you bit on any of the trolling hooks he would attempt to turn the situation around as if it was you who started the argument. That got old real fast. So I made a bet with Jim and agreed to travel southeast back through Lisbon, which from my perspective would eventually get him on a plane home. As we reached Lisbon Jim migrated back into his, I'm the only one who could possibly be right, routine. So I remained quiet and just followed him all the way across town to the southern station, where upon inquiry he discovered his price was incorrect. That it was the price to upgrade to business class or something of that nature, but not the price to fly home. He welched on the bet.

On the train along the Portuguese coast, I got involved with an Australian who had drunk himself into comical state and was helping me laugh at his expense. Jim too was humored but once we realized we had missed our planned stop, Jim shifted gears back into his blame game. At that moment a pair of young ladies wandered up, sporting smiles and an aggressive sales pitch. While trading smiles they successfully persuaded us to follow them to a local hostel. To be totally honest we had passed our stop by quite a distance and had really no idea of where we were going to spend the night anyway. They were a Godsend. A young Canadian and a young lady from South Africa were also rounded up in the same net. When we got off the train there were about twelve of us in total. They had a van waiting to commute us to the hostile but this was a good catch and would require at least two trips. To demonstrate that we were gentlemen we stayed behind for the second shuttle. There were five of us waiting and this gave us some time to get acquainted. I stuck up a conversation with a pair of young Swedish girls who were impressed that I had actually walked through their home town not too long ago and could recall a lot of details. We seemed to hit it off pretty good as we had something in common.

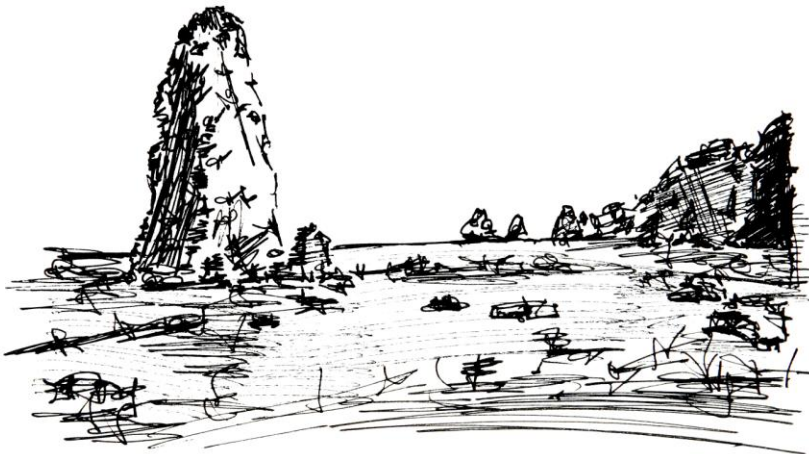
On the bus ride to the hostel I was gazing out the van's window at the terrain and noticed something lying alongside the road that looked to be an injured dog. Along with one of the other passengers we persuaded the driver to pull over

and back up to see if we could help. I was right, it was a small dog and it appeared that he had not been struck by car but he definitely hadn't eaten that month and had ticks all over his body. We picked him up, wrapped him in a blanket and carried him back to the hostel where he was greeted with sympathy and open arms. Poor thing, it was questionable if he would make it.

This was quite a gathering of travelers. I noticed the guitar attracted a few wandering eyes and I gave her permission to socialize on her own, while I made a b-line toward the bar. There were girls everywhere and on the surface there were all the ear markings of a toga party. With the alcohol things started to get crazy. Two girls in a seductive manner began taking the clothes off a guy on the dance floor. Two other guys entered the scene with a rope and tied him to a tree in the middle of the courtyard. He was having difficulty standing on his own anyway so perhaps the ropes were there to hold him up. As if performing a ritual, different girls with the changing of song would dance around and pour beer on his exposed body. There was a good possibility that he was not going to remember anything from that evening except for the headache he was sure to wake up with. Eventually I just couldn't hang around anymore. I was kinda off by myself and although I had met a few people, I was actually alone and just too tired to stay awake. So I left the edges of the party for some sleep.

I'm an early riser and that provides advantages. Like in the morning, there were no lines leading to the showers. I walked around until breakfast and then took the shuttle down to the beach where I planned to spend that entire day on the sand. When I reached the bluffs I began exploring. Jim followed duplicating every picture I took. It is just better to ignore his competitiveness than to give it thought it doesn't deserve. The wind and sea had carved coves into the sandstone and over time had deposited white tongues of pearly white sand against the backdrop of the two blues, sky and sea. It was like a rose, beautiful but with hidden thorns. I could see small openings below my feet that lead into the caverns below. Some dropped a good fifty feet or so, so I backed way carefully. A backdrop of sun worshipers began migrating to the sand so I sat at its edge. I thought to myself, this is the place. I'm staying for awhile. If Jim wanted to fly home, be my guest, cause I'm digging in roots. The water was cold and the sand was hot. Between the sun and shade I wasted the day by myself. The majority of the sun worshippers appeared coupled up. Occasionally I would gaze upon the topless girls that had all the ingredients of a good daydream.

Besides tying guys to tree there were other forms of excitement, sports. Behind the hostel's restaurant games of volleyball and basketball and more popular than the others, soccer. I watched them and were impressed at the talent displayed. In the company of the two Swedish girls, we sat down to dinner. Those two young ladies and I got along so well, it like we had all known one other forever, like I was their older brother. I guess if I was honest with myself I just hadn't had that much opportunity to get comfortable dancing and always felt it was in my best interest to avoid embarrassment. But hey, it was on that night's agenda and I had a young lady on each arm, so I swallowed my pride. It worked out to be an absolutely fun evening. I met a lot of people. Some were very friendly while others were just trying to get closer to the Swedish girls.



Thank God everyday was a sunny beach day. I began the day with some hair of the dog in a small grass shack that hugged the sand leading toward the water, just like yesterday. I struck up a conversation with a young lady who had given me a strange gesture after a fly had landed on her shoulder. We all look from different angles don't we? She was disgusted with the idea that the fly was attracted to something on her body. I on the other hand would be more concerned with what the fly might have brought to me. It's a

wonderful world that has more than one color. My two Swedish sisters would pull me into the cold water when they felt up for a swim. Now, I'm not exaggerating but one of these young ladies was the poster child for large nipples. When she came out of that cold water they stood at attention like little soldiers. It was like seeing a pair of UFOs. You just couldn't avoid spending the next hour staring at the space where you had seen them last. I could say they were incredible but it would be more accurate in stating how popular she had become with the young men of the hostel. Later in the day a young Australian that levitated towards our group and asked if I'd like to pitch in on the rental of a boat. Let's do it! It would be a great opportunity to explore the coves. We both felt as if we were ten-years-old again and that new discoveries awaited us. We chased schools of fish and even managed to capture a pelican within one of the larger caves. Some of these caves were larger than entire football fields. They were spectacular. I was damn quick to catch that pelican, I have to admit. I gave him a couple of pets to calm him down and then let him go.

I started out with shrimp cocktails followed by a few martinis. At that night's soccer game I met another pair of young ladies, one was Welsh and the other I think was Persian. I never did find out where the Persian was originally from but I did learn she had schooled outside of London and was extremely intelligent. She would continually steer the conversation from a casual subject to something sexual. In concert she would move her chair closer and closer to mine and then she use her feet. Question marks and exclamation points would be administered by her hand under the table. Initially I was focused on keeping a straight face in order not to give anybody else at our table any indication of what was going on underneath it. Then as if everything suddenly stopped, my eyes met the eyes of a young lady I had noticed on the beach earlier in the day and I found myself captivated. Every once in a while our eyes would lock and we would catch each other smiling. It was a bit of an awkward situation. She was sitting in the company of three guys and as far as I knew one could be her boyfriend, or even worse, her husband. I found myself concentrating more on keeping up with their conversation rather than ones circulating our table. "What does ERA stand for?" one of the three guys questioned. I explained how it was calculated introducing myself into their conversation. My shifting of focus put me in dutch with the Persian. She was moving way too fast and I hardly knew her. That night again escalated into a frenzy. Wood was gathered and a large ten foot tall man was constructed on the backside of the soccer field. The group danced around chanting and then he was torched in ceremony. It was quite a spectacle.

*Rhythms of distortion, dancing above the flame,
changing, behind the scenery, which never stays the same*

*It's inconsistency still dancing, as if it were the wind,
moving apart, the pieces, I once spent time to mend*

*Yet it still keeps flowing, upward, again and again
until all, is turned to aches, for it's the flame that brings the end*

We woke the next morning to a welcome change in rooms. Perhaps a good night's sleep awaited us. Our little dog was adopted as kinda of mascot. He had been eating and actually gained some weight. By the affection he was receiving his future looked bright. Every day was a beach day and today was no different. Luck did find us. I spent the first few hours at the bar down on the edge of the sand, hair of the dog like the day before and the day before that. About every thirty minutes or so, it was back into the water to wash off the sun. I laid my towel just south of the three guys and young lady who caught my attention during the previous night's dinner. On one of those water dips she and I were the only ones left behind to watch the abandoned towels. I took advantage of the two of us being left alone and took the liberty of lying down on the towel next to her. I struck up a conversation that lasted for hours and I found myself playing with the sand between the two of us, searching through for the smallest pieces of polished coral. With my fingernail, I would pick up each piece of coral, not much bigger than the head of a pin and carefully place each on the wrinkle on the first knuckle of her finger. We continued our conversation until I had stranded enough to complete the top portion of a fictional ring of about forty grains.

*The clouds have come, both rain and dew, the sun has left us wet,
my soul cries out, yet never knew and though I know, we meet*

We were extremely comfortable with one another and were having a pleasurable time. We decided to attempt a swim out to one of the rocks that jettied out of the sea. It was then I discovered three things. One, she used to be an Olympic swimmer. Two, the gentlemen who had dined with her the previous night and the one who happened to be following us on this swim were not her boyfriends. And third, she was interested in me. She was quite a fish and it took most of what I had just to keep up. The two of us reached the rock minutes before our third wheel. She explained that this puppy had been following her around and she had been unable to shake him loose. The three of us climbed to the top of the rock for a picturesque dive but our third wheel thought it in his best interest to climb back down. The two of us swam toward the opportunity to be alone. We had scratched our names into the sand and promised to return. Beauty with the line of a swan, she carried me on. "A little love, a little trust, a soft impulse, a sudden dream and life as dry as desert dust, was now fresher than a mountain stream". When we reached the shore we were literally the only ones on the beach. Everybody else had vanished. Only our towels laid out on the sand confirmed we were back at the right beach. I assumed Jim had taken possession of my gear, but still my mind entertained the thoughts of what if he didn't. I didn't like the fact that everybody had left and forced myself to wrestle away those negative thoughts. It had been less than an hour or so and they could have waited. When we finally made it back to the hostel, we each headed straight for a shower and then reunited for dinner.

Once I started hanging out with Ann I began receiving more and more questions about the Swedish girls. The girls were apparently telling everybody that they were both dating me in order to fend off advances. They did spend an awful lot of time together and were avoiding some pretty good-looking guys, so I started thinking perhaps they were partners. Ann thought so. The farther into the night we got, the closer the two of us became. She showed me her tent and we eventually ended up on the landing outside my room. We began trading kisses and stories from our pasts, contour and shading. Then through some unexpected chain of events we landed onto the subject of her parents and she began to cry. While I was kissing the tears from her cheeks, a thought raced across my mind. She had reached inside and grabbed hold of something in me. From a place I had kept secret. I don't know how to explain it. It was like she had key without my knowledge or permission. We were getting too close, too fast and I decided to back away slowly,

we would reunite the next day under better light. I walked her to her tent and reluctantly headed back to my own bed. I lay there in bed thinking about her tears and their cause, entertaining more than just the passionate thoughts I started with.

Before the morning sun, the minute I awoke and realized where I was, I went straight to her tent to wake her with a kiss. I knew I had placed myself between a rock and a hard place. Jim wasn't having as much fun as I apparently was and he wanted to leave a day or so ago. I had persuaded him to stay a bit longer on the promise we'd head west. Today was the day that I had promised to leave. I rewrote a poem from a previous attempt and traded it for her address. I kissed her again and told her that I would find her. Tomorrow will be ours.

*This is love, young lady, have I seen you here before
haven't our eyes meet, a secret kept, of hearts that need much more
together, life can be a dream, don't worry about the past
just let go and hold on to me, these memories will last*

*... I bring you flowers, this summer day, you won't be sad, I came to say ...
I love you, I love you, true*

*Is this love, young lady, I can think of only you
like the flowers of spring, have we meet again, would you say, that this is true
together, love is strong enough, the song they sing, is true and I hope
as I get closer, I'll hear you, sing it too*

*... I brought you warmth, a kiss today, holding you close, I heard you say ...
I love you, I love you, true*

With every additional westward minute, I felt like I was falling farther and farther downstream. Like I had forgotten something and my mind wouldn't let it go. I could have had sex!. Between buses we had enough extra time to place a call home. It was just blind luck that it happened to be my Dad's birthday. I was a lucky child to have grown up surrounded by love. To be embraced and nurtured by a pair of parents that attempted to create an environment of learning and safety. I must have done something right in a previous life. I believe this soil developed the roots of my pride, a pride no matter what the circumstances, "I always believe that I am capable". Happy Birthday, I love you..

*It's you ... my love, I'm thinkin of, a song that's pure and true.
and when I awake, I always smile, cause in this world, I know ... there's you*

We jumped another bus to Sagres. The wind was strong coming off the sea and brushed the peninsula clean of almost anything that wasn't nailed down. Towering sheer height, beaten by the strength of the Atlantic, locals perched with their lines dangling in hope of snagging the next big one. The castle walls were lined with street vendors pedaling wares. Among the shells, gold jewelry and many beautiful laced items, laid a pink coral necklace. This was a beautiful token and symbol of the first day I had spent with Ann. In my negotiation I had the merchant include a pair of gold dipped earrings. We took a walk along the eastern shore line. When we reached the hostel a small screw from my sun glasses loosened itself and dove into the sand at my feet. Though I attempted numerous times to find it, it managed to escape. Jim had his mind set on walking into town with some others for a beer, maybe two. I on the other hand was still disappointed in myself for leaving Ann behind and decided to stay there alone. I wandered about within the castle walls, talking to myself, which I often do. Even though it was dark outside, I still made another attempt to locate my lost screw. It was an incredible night. The wind commanded my attention but still took a backseat to the moon. I don't recall ever seeing the moon that large. It was at least twice its normal size. I sat out among the shadows staring up at that which was not only beckoning for me to appreciate its beauty but asked me to question. "Why am I standing here, where did yesterday's steps lead me to and where do I go from here?" I jotted down pieces of the puzzle that made up this looking glass.



*I. There is nothing to prevent a man, who cannot grasp a proof from accepting as a matter of faith,
the immovable point is that "I think" and as long as "I think", I exist
yet this existence lies exposed, floating on a body of water that appears to have no edges
like a leaf that has fallen into the river, I wander lost in the turbulence of my own thoughts
because the way in which "I think", isolates me, for I am unable to recognize true reality
except for the reality that I am confined to a road, a road that extends beyond my time and before my past
for I know not where it extends or begins
and the questions remain.*

A work in progress:

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Road Map:

Sweden	Stockholm [<i>Archipelago</i>], Hallsberg – Karistan
Norway	Oslo, Myrdal – Flam, Voss, Bergen – Oslo, Kongsberg – Sira – Egerson, Stavanger, Kristiansand – Olso
Sweden	Stockholm, Gotebereg – Helsingberg
Denmark	Copenhagan [<i>Trivol</i>], Norsturd, Nykobing – Lilland Island, Noestued – Slagelese – Korson Nyborg, Odenca, Frederica, Skanderberg, Arhus [<i>Trivol, Church of our Lady, Gardens, Beach</i>]
Germany	Randers – Alborg – Hjorring, Arhus – Jilkeberg, Frederica - Flandsberg Hanburg [<i>St. Micheals, Ahrearsberg Castle, Konsthalle Museum, Gross Meumarket Square, Rathus Lake, Hamburg Harbor, The Mouser, Red Light District</i>]
Netherlands	Amsterdam
Belgium	Bruxells, Gent, Brugge, Bruxells
Luxenberg	
Belgium	Rotterdam, Dehagg, Delft [<i>Nieuwe Kerk Church</i>], Utrecht
Germany	Dusseldorf, Koln [<i>Kolnre Dom, Koln Cathedral</i>]
Austria	Linz, Wein [<i>Stephandom Church, Karternerstrasse, Market Street, Staatsuper (opera house), Hofber (imperial palace), Kunsthistorisches Museum, Turkenschanz Park</i>], Salsberg [<i>The Dom, Colegianikirche, Schioss, Hellbrum, Zoo, Mozart's (birth place), Geburtshaus, Hohensalzberg Castle, Mirabell Schloss and gardens, Residenz, Artgalleray and Bursgwe room</i>], Schwarzach – St Veit, Badgastein, Spittal – Millstrattersee Liez [<i>Countryside, Dolomites, Tyrol, Verkehrsant, Zetterfeio Peak</i>], Innsbruck,
Italy	Bolzano – Trento, Verona, Milano
Switzerland	Lugano [<i>Cathedral of San Loperzo, Santa Mariareglo Angloli</i>] Luzern [<i>Mountains – Pilatus Rian Titus, Kapell Baucke, Sprungruske</i>] Bern [<i>Albert Einsteins Home and Patent Office, Parliament Bldg., Modern Art Museum, Bear Pit, Rosen Gardens, Cathedral and Clock Tower</i>], Zurich “Once around the Lake”, Feldkirch, St. Arlberg
Austria	Innsbruck
Switzerland	Zurich, Luzern, Interlaken, Matten Schreckhorn, Gringlewald, Elgler, Grissbach, Spiez, Burn, Zurich
Austria	Innsbruck
Germany	Munich [<i>Alte Piankothek, Neve Pinakothek, Engelscher Gardens, Frauenrirch, Peterskirche, Hofbrauhous</i>] Treuchtingen, Nurnberg [<i>Engelegruss, Wood Carvings, Kalsarberg, Castle, VH Roads, Churches</i>] Wurzberg, Frankfurt, Mainz “Up and Down the River”, Bacharach [<i>Strahlelk Castle</i>], Koblenz
Netherlands	Amsterdam
France	Paris
Spain	San Sebastian, Vitoria – Burgos, Madrid [<i>Prado Museum, Carson Del Burn Retiro, Picasso's “Guernia”, Elgreco Eequption</i>], Marvao [<i>Temple of Debod</i>], Evora
Portugal	Lisboa [<i>Alfama, Castle Sau Jorge, Old Circle</i>], Abidos, Nazare [<i>Fortruss, Nossa Senhora Da Nazare</i>] Lisboa, Almada – Setubal [<i>Carmochunch Torre De Belem</i>], Albuferia, “Algarve”, Lagoa, Porshes Logoa [<i>Fortruss, Slave Market, Moorish Fortification</i>], Sagres

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I awoke from a dream that I could not remember and found it difficult to head back into that sleep. My mind was overtaken with a feeling that I should not have left Ann. I felt that she had reached out to me and I in some way had abandoned her. At that moment I decided I needed to return to her. That thought combined with a lot of other ingredients lead me to the decision to leave then, not later but that moment. I wrote Jim a brief note explaining the circumstances along with a time and place to reunite. “When your rooster crows at the break of Oh yea, please pick up my hostel card and here’s a pair of ear rings. Find a young lady to give them to.”

So in the darkness I gathered my things and headed out into the unknown. The first thing I noticed was that moon, suspended above the cliff as if it were held on a string. The wind was still blowing hard, dancing shadows around my every step. Past the main gate I walked into what look to be a ghost town. First I located a phone to place a call to the hostel. Somebody was bound to be up. I wanted to leave a message for Ann to let her know I was on my way back and to stay put. After a walk about, I managed to locate a phone but it had been out of order and it appeared by its condition had been in that condition for some time.

While I was standing there deciding which way I should proceed I heard what sounded like a motorcycle approaching. I positioned myself in the middle of the road and attempted, as it got closer, to flag it down. The motorcyclist stopped. I tried to bridge our language barrier with common terms and hand gestures, trying my best to explain my situation. I suppose I got my point across because he gestured to hop on the back of his bike. We raced through the streets of that empty town until he pulled alongside a bus depot where he pointed out another phone, excellent. I paid him a gesture of thanks as he roared off into the distance. This phone was also uncooperative and it chewed up all my change. But at least I was at a bus stop and based on the schedule posted to the right of the phone, the early bus would be along in a few hours. So I waited.

It could be argued who looked the worse for wear, the bus driver or me. After about ten minutes on the road the rocking of the bus put me right to sleep. I don’t recall if I heard a loud cluck or if it was the smell of burning oil that woke me, but that bus decided it wasn’t going anywhere anymore. We were dead on the side of the road sending up a cloud of smoke that beckoned for help. Another bus eventually arrived but it looked even worse than the first and this bus had its own built in bounce. To my surprise it did make the trip to Logos. It was still very early in the morning and once the opportunity arose I headed straight to a phone. I managed to reach the receptionist back at the hostel. She explained that she didn’t think Ann had left, so I had her pencil out a message explaining that I was on my way

back and for her to wait for my arrival. It turns out that my little exchange of buses had pushed me back about a couple of hours so I took advantage and trekked about the city. I meandered along the waterfront and eventually found a place to sit down and eat. Once I had completed a full circle and was back at the bus depot. I was told that the new bus had also broke down and another was in route. In other words, another four hours wait. Although I felt my efforts were derailed I was still surrounded by unexplored things to find. I walked up and down the narrow streets absorbing the local color that presented itself until I noticed a poster taped to a wall. "Let's go see a bullfight". I had some time but had to keep reminding myself of the time, keeping one eye on the clock. It's my personal opinion that the words innocent, animal and kill, shouldn't be in the same sentence or cheered by a crowd. I'm also was more inclined to root for the long shot.

I was running out of time and I literally had to run to make my bus. Just making the bus meant that I ended up with the most undesirable seat. She was fat and I soon could confirm that fat plus heat equals sweat. "Can somebody please open a window, please?" I repeated in my mind until I got up and tried to loosen a few windows without luck. My mind kept feeding on the thought that they should be getting off soon but that never became a reality. Anybody else without the same goal as mine would have gotten off miles back and walked or just gave up. The memory of Ann's smile and the knowledge that a shower was not far off that kept my focus and got me over this bump in the road. So I held my breath until I finally reached my stop.

Once I finally reached the hostel I was met with another disappointment. "What do mean she left, did she get my message?" It was important to find out first where I stood. Sometimes perception combined with desire ads up to a misunderstanding. I could have read all the signs wrong. The receptionist found the message shuffled under a few papers so apparently she had checked out before the message could have be given. I was half way across this bridge and figured I'd continue along this path despite of the obstacles until I found her. I wasn't about to give up yet. I was given two clues. I knew which way she was heading and there had to be reason for leaving so early in the morning. My first assumption was that she had to be covering some distance and in order to do so she needed to make a connecting train. I knew from there I would require some faith and some luck so I prayed for guidance. Then I reviewed all the train schedules leaving from there and concluded Seville Spain was her destination. My best guess.

I was told that the hostel's van should be arriving any minute and they would be happy to give me a ride to the train station. After about three hours of turning my head at shadows, I decided to try my thumb. Standing out in the sun, I only received high-speed gestures. I even tried waving money. Right on the brink of giving up the hostel's van pulled up with a smile from the young lady who had originally solicited us off the train weeks ago. "We never did have that drink together" she said as she gave me her disappointed face. The clouds over my head still looked the same. Bad luck seemed to be following me around. The waiting game with the hostel's van placed me at the train station an hour after my train had left which meant that I had another hour to wait on the platform.

I had a new rail pass in hand but there was nobody in the train station to inquire as to how to start that process. I assumed the conductor would handle it on the train. About half way into Faro, I handed my rail pass to the conductor as he strolled through gathering up tickets. "Not validated" he screamed as he turned into a madman. It wasn't a pretty sight and I didn't appreciate him grabbing me by the arm. They actually handcuffed me and took me into custody. If you didn't witness the actual event you might think that I killed somebody on the train or committed some other type of violent act. When the train came to its first stop two policemen were there to greet me and lead me to a small room just off the platform. I could see my train pull out through the dirt of the window just to my right. I sat there like an angel listening to one speech after another. We had already crossed the bridge towards that famous place, ridiculousness. I wasn't intimidated and once I began to push back they stamped my pass and practically pushed out the door onto the platform to wait for the next train. I would have been all alone sitting on that platform if not for a young lady from Austria who was supposed to be soliciting people for the same hostel I had just left. That chore provided a free room and a bit of food but she didn't take it very seriously, rather she saw it as an opportunity to read. Anyway I was the only prospect. I knew Ann had a tent so I began earmarking every campsite between here and Sevilla. I made a few phone calls to see if she had checked in to any of those campsites and began to cross one off after another with no luck.

Finally I was on a train that was actually making up some distance. Our conductor had one hand on the handle and the other on the horn. I split my time between talking with the locals on the train and holding my head out the window watching us rattle through the countryside. Then unexpectedly, every four miles or so as the farm crops changed, our train would come to a complete stop. Almost every local on the train would run out into the fields and gather up whatever produce they could carry. The food flocked forth as if the dam had broken. I had to try what was offered or get hounded until I did. Everybody on the train had to be part of the festivities. It was questionable if I would make the connecting train into Spain considering all these grocery stops.

Portugal was really the first country where I felt I met less of the locals and more of other travelers. There were about seven other travelers who had gradually joined our compartment's festivities. Many remembered me from Porphes but honestly I didn't remember a single one of their faces. I blamed that on the alcohol. We opened up a deck of cards and reminisced on yesterday as if years had passed between. We narrowly made Ayamonte in time to make the connection and there arose another obstacle. The powers that be decided not to run trains to Spain until the next morning and by the way, we have rooms available. That was another unwanted card dealt from the bottom of the deck, a two of spades on the river. Where was my guardian angel? Why weren't these obstacles removed before I reached them? I began to question why so many obstacles were being thrown in my way. Wasn't what I was doing a good thing? My goal was to be in Sivilla by nightfall and I wasn't yet willing to drop that ball midfield. We as a group decided to dump the room solicitation and cross the river to the other train station for a second opinion.

Before they let us hop onto the ferry to cross the river automobiles rolled on first. I noticed a young couple about my age with an older VW van. The woman had long blonde hair and the guy looked as if had been hanging out that summer in Newport Beach. Only surfboards were missing from the van's roof. I struck up a conversation and tried my best to explain my crazy quest. After much persuasion they agreed to drive me as far as they could. That could have been a good thing or a bad thing depending on how far was as far as they could. I'd been down that road before but was willing to gamble. I gave a see-you-down-the-road salute and my smile most likely began to drift into an I-told-you smirk. The rest of the group was most likely looking at a nine-hour platform wait until morning arose.

The back of the van was gutted and there was nowhere for me to sit. There was only a small hole through a steal grate that separated me from my two chaperons. The smile I was sporting left as quickly as it came. The van had no breaks and it took some effort to secure it down onto the ferry to keep it from ending up in the river. When they couldn't get the motor to turn over the smile had shifted groups. Now I was part of the joke. Perhaps theirs was the safer of the two choices. Eventually we did get the motor to turn over but we were still lagged behind the anticipation of the other cars waiting behind us and then we repeated the entire scenario again at the border crossing. It felt as if I discarded a king and received a three of clubs. My hand was looking pretty bad. Would you believe it? Neither one of my chaperons had a passport. When the custom officials finally got tired of us we were on our way. To add insult to injury the van also had no working headlights and there wasn't a street lamp for hundreds of miles. If not for the full moon. Actually I don't know what we would have done.

Apparently this couple were on their way to meet his parents who were camping somewhere along the coast and that's about all they knew for sure. About every dozen miles or so, no, every time we saw somebody along our path we'd pull over for directions, always rolling pass them since we had no working breaks. Each encounter had all the ingredients of a comedy. In most cases these individuals expressed concern when a van with no headlights approached. Once they realized that we were not a threat the comedy continued, because we were unable to explain what we were looking for, because we didn't know ourselves. Looking through my rusted hole it looked as if we were asking these people to do calisthenics. They waved their arms trying to accentuate their point. If you didn't know what the intent of the conversation was or speak the language, you'd think they were arguing. I estimated that we had taken about twenty left hand turns and half as many rights. Somehow through this maze of indecision we did manage to reach a city. What city it was, I had no idea but thank God for streetlights. After two or three blocks into the city the police pulled us over. Apparently even in Spain cars require headlights. I don't know what was discussed but whatever it is they said we ended up getting a police escort to the train station. I think they used me as an excuse and probably over exaggerated my circumstances. I thanked them and we traded addresses.

I checked the schedules and discovered that on platform three my train would be departing any minute so I broke into a fast trot. I made it to the train just in time. I climbed aboard I received another bad card from the bottom of the deck. There wasn't an available seat in sight. I was now on the midnight train into Sivilla standing alongside others who were just as unhappy standing as I. About half way into Sivilla the train came to a complete stop. No reason was given. We just stood stationary on the tracks for about an hour and a half. Local attitudes began to boil over into quite a situation. The majority of passengers probably traveled for business and relied on the train maintaining its original schedule, hoping to get some sleep before morning arrived. It appeared that we would be arriving into Sivilla about two in the morning. In one hand I held the numbers of a few local campsites that were still on my list but I was dead tired and entertained thoughts of doubt. Why was I subjecting myself to all this? I felt like I placed my confidence in faith and was handed nothing but obstacles. There were just too many pieces that had hit the floor and scattered. Talk about being tired but at that point my priority was a shower, then a bed. I followed the angry crowd off the train and into the streets of Sivilla.

I walked into one place and then another with the same ridiculous results. Either the price for accommodations was five times the going rate or they had no vacancies. I was dead tired and in need of sleep. I continued on and walked up one dark lonely street to another, allowing all my doubts to consume any faith I had left in my quest. I noticed a small news stand with pair of phone booths out front, lit up in the distance and reached deep into my pocket discovering my need for change. As I walked toward the vendor on the opposite side of the phone booths all of a sudden there was Ann coming out of what looked to be a coffee shop, just off to my left. I placed the newsstand in-between myself and her group to remain unnoticed. I was unprepared to approach her. She passed by me and took the first left, south down the original street I had been walking. She was accompanied by two of the three guys she was previously traveling with so I remained in the darkness waiting to discover where she was staying. I stood off a good block or so to ensure I wasn't noticed, so I wasn't too sure where they had actually left the street. I couldn't believe it. I walked around the poorly lit streets for about another hour like an un-caged animal that had just escaped and didn't know where to go, until I finally located a room for the night. I was awake and thoughts were darting in and out of my mind. How should I approach her? Then there was clarity as if the clouds that obstructed my vision were suddenly removed. All those events, the combination of every obstacle, every step that I had cursed, all combined in the most likely and perhaps the only path that could have placed me there in front of her tonight. No longer did I view them as coincidences but rather an assembly of stones that made up a path toward the lesson that the reality that life is so much more complicated that I could ever imagine. I apologized for my curing and for my lack of faith. I believe that was the last thought I entertained before I fell asleep.

I was up early to the sound of the alarm aside my bed. Still half asleep my brain jumped into gear once it realized where I was. I was full of renewed energy and headed south down the empty street where Ann had disappeared. I sat behind a cup of coffee inside a small café across the street from where she had vanished. I had knocked on one of the

doors and then another but with no response. It was still early, especially for Spain. I turned to my left and noticed a large German shepherd who had chosen me as his curb partner. He had sat down next to me like walking him without a leash was common place. I started up a conversation with my new friend and began to explain my quest. Sometimes just saying things out loud confirms my thinking as if somebody else was actually listening. I think initially he had sights on my bread and didn't hear a word I said. Jokingly I had asked if he knew which door was she hiding behind. He got up from his relaxed position as if he understood every word I spoke, crossed the street and began scratching on one of the many doors that lined the street as if he smelled a cat on the other side. I thought to myself that perhaps it was just another coincidence but why not follow his lead. I knocked a little harder on the door he choose but again no one responded. It was then I noticed an elderly woman who had begun hanging laundry out on the third story balcony just above my head. I attempted to grab her attention; I suppose I looked like a demented windmill waving my arms about. I tried using my hands to gesture that I was searching for someone who might be sleeping in there, "Young Senorita" I repeated while outlining shapely hips. She reached into her apron and tossed down a large ring with a key to the door below. I quickly made it up to her loft. It was apparent she didn't speak any English and that she had the impression that I was looking for a room for myself. We both knew we weren't communicated so she gathered for me to follow her. She led me to another woman on the fourth floor who spoke a bit of English. She said she hadn't seen any young woman who met my description but suggested I try across the hall because the woman there also provided accommodations for travelers and perhaps that's the place you seek.

I knocked on the door across the hall and eventually a friendly lady greeted me at the door. I again explained the reason for me being there. She gestured that there were group of travelers in the adjacent room and suggested that I just wake them up. We'll I wasn't interested in waking anybody up that early but I was interested in seeing if that was the right group of travelers. At the exact moment I looked through the window Ann had rolled over in bed and turned to see me standing there. Absolute shock came across her face. "Don't wake up the others, just get dressed and I will wait for you outside" I whispered. "I don't understand, I don't understand, how did you find me? How is this possible?" she questioned. I told her nothing was impossible and to go get dressed. She ran into my arms while my shepherd friend watched waiting for a pet of his own. We walked hand in hand down to a park bench just around the corner. The shepherd followed. I explained the labyrinth I struggled through to get back to her. "Come travel with me. Gather up your things and tell your friends you're heading home then meet me at the fountain in front of the church." I explained that I would try to find us a room on the way there and kissed her goodbye.

Eventually I found the perfect place. It was a typical Spanish villa with numerous rooms. Each room had windows that opened onto an enclosed courtyard. The smell of freshly watered plants and the sounds from the many birds that called the courtyard home painted a romantic setting. I waited only minutes on the edge of the fountain before she snuck up from behind and gave me a kiss. We wandered back toward our room to settle in and to drop off her bags. Along the way we unfortunately ran into one of the two guys she had just said goodbye to. Perhaps our encounter had put her earlier comments in question but I didn't know or care. We meandered through the empty park left to ourselves. Along the river's edge we sunned on a small wooden dock and eventually found ourselves relaxing in the shade in front of the church where we had started. I managed to persuade Ann to climb to the top of the church's tower and was a bit shocked that we had to fork out money to enter a church but the view of the city from the tower was worth the expense.

White washed grace and jasmine balconies laden with orange trees. A "Perpetual avalanche" of romantic thoughts danced from moment to moment. It was the combination of the heat and fact we were both sweating that we found pleasure in pointing out all the pools located on rooftops. We did make three attempts to visit a few of the pools we saw from the tower, but on each occasion we got caught somewhere between the reception deck and the cool blue water that was our quest. We finally settled in front of a small café just off the main square nursing a bottle of water. Castanets heard with the evening breeze and shadows of the flamingo danced back from the reflective pools. Our conversation also danced from one subject to another until we again the topic of her family arose. A tear began to gather at the corner of her eye and her words began to falter slightly as if water babbling downstream over small rocks. I backed off and then slowly I approached a small window she began to open. She allowed just enough light to display only shadows and edges of those things that filled her room. She danced around a conflict between herself and her father. I listened.

A small badly lit room with no mirror holds a tapestry of where my secrets lie

Hell has followed my imagination and galloped into my sickness

Where its waves whisper terrible truths as they eat away at me and keep me from escaping

I hope I provide some guidance or at least some type of relief but what did I know. She would never reveal the deepest root, only the leaves and branches. I avoided the subject from fear of imagining the worst, so I let it rest. We gradually migrated back to our room and called it a night.

I began drawing lines across her body tracing the warmth I received through each of my fingers. While my conscious mind began appreciating the design of God's creation, she was made beautifully in every way. My eyes floated about her body like a cushion of air consuming me. Her beauty was made up of shape and form but also shown from within. Like a star. Kissing her was as natural as breathing and slowly my mouth wandered toward her ear "You only have to say yes". In a subtle, almost mourning whisper, "Yes", she whispered back. I lead her to the bed and while standing behind her I began kissing the right side of her neck while my hands memorized every detail of her breasts. Slowly,

very slowly my hand traveled downward and stopped where I discovered hair. I could hear my heart beating, echoing in every breath. I could feel her back arching away from me beckoning my hand to return to her breasts. She widened her legs while she reached around herself and grabbed hold of me. I touched her, slowly discovering her warmth. We maintained this position as we moved onto the bed. She reached into the air, braced her hands onto the top of the headboard my hands still embracing her breasts. Not yet penetrating I would kind of tease over her lips, inducing her to invite me in. Again and then again, like the opening of a flood gate I penetrated deep causing her to catch her breath and then slowly we worked ourselves into a rhythm, accompanied by a deep resonating moan. There is nothing more sexually exciting than the expression of a woman enjoying intercourse, the moan. On occasion I would intentionally slip out only to re-enjoy inserting again, to reconfirm the contract of her warmth to the rest of the room. I climaxed in rhythm to her moans and then collapsed like a parachute reuniting with the earth. We fell to sleep comforted in each other arms.

*In the depths of our garden, love roots its way into those precious memories, dreams
one has forgotten dreamt
there upon life with a smile, it crept in unnoticed*

*How love grows ...
I am yours and yours shall be, love, through all eternity*

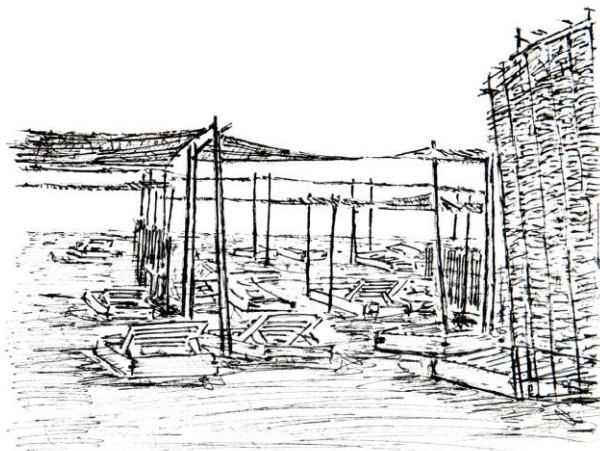
*We arose to the morning dew, made diamonds by the sun magnifying the memories, of life
and there aligned to the vision
as the sands of life run, we've become one*

*How love grows ...
I am yours and yours shall be, love, through all eternity*

We had awakened almost in the same position we had fallen asleep. But now the birds below sang that the morning was new and filled with joy. It was as if natural geometry and rhythms had aligned and everything was clearer than the day before. We traveled hand in hand occasionally catching each other smiling as if it was just a bit hard to believe that we had found one another. We continued southeast along the Costa Del Sol until we eventually reached Malaga and filled our stomachs. Neither of us had the desire to stay there longer than we had to. Our destination was Neria, an attractive little beach side community. When we arrived in Neria we walked about searching for a room, but there were either no vacancies or they were overpriced. Every time we expressed disbelief at the price of the room, each responded with the same phrase in Spanish. We didn't get discouraged we just got hungry. We sought out a nice restaurant for a meal and a bottle of wine. The Irish Derby running in the background. Before it actually got too late we decided to hit the pavement again and try to find a reasonable priced room before it got too late. As we turned a corner there was a well-manicured lawn adjacent to what looked to be an apartment building. We thought maybe we could pitch Ann's tent there for the night and searched around to locate someone who could give us permission. Eventually we found the caretaker of the building but his gestures were negative and he then repeated the same phrase in Spanish that we have been hearing over and over. Luckily he spoke enough English to translate the Spanish phrase in English for us, "Sleep on the beach".

We followed him down toward the water where he introduced us to an elderly gentleman. We still had our hearts set on the patch of grass above but he smiled and walked us over to a utility shed. To our surprise and smiles he had pulled out a pair of mattresses. How could we say no? It was just too perfect. We placed them side-by-side in a small bamboo cove just in front of an adjacent restaurant. The beach was ours. He also suggested we lock up the majority of our gear in the utility shed, explained that he would return in the morning and that they would be safe for the night. Once we set up our love nest we wandered back into the crowd for a few drinks and a little night life. Later we lay back in our nest, gazed out at the contrast of the stars against the backdrop of the dark night and watched them dance against the sea. We made love quietly so we would not draw the attention of the dinner guests behind us.

Skinny-dipping with the morning sun, passionate children playing as one. We didn't notice anyone but each other. The grounds keeper suggested that if we wanted to we could use the shower; they were located on the first level of the apartment complex. The idea of removing the salt we had accumulated seemed like a pretty good idea so we wrapped ourselves in towels and took him up on his offer. It was quite amazing this being together and in love. It showed in everything we did. Everybody saw it and people kinda wanted to be involved as if it would rub off and bring renewed joy into their lives. The best kind of love is the kind of



love that makes you reach for more. There was no hiding it. I was still toting the guitar so you could imagine the attention we received.

*Colors that tinges the clouds at sunset, gazed down onto nature's naked loveliness
the butterfly, the soul, who turns to greet the tidings with a kiss
she dropped the corners of her apron and let the flowers run, a curiosity too strong to resist
whose head is turned by the sun*

*Like Cupid wounding himself, I awoken hidden seeds of lovers so entwined
the memories, the melodies, in this hour of my deepest need, you are in my mind
emerging from Daedalus's labyrinth, where silence sits and shadows call,
your fingertips, your moistened lips, I find,
and in your passion I will fall*

*How sweet it is, the downward stream, from heavenly harmony
the tranquil landscape, through which it flows, the waters washed away and set my soul free
as if Clotho was spinning faster than Lachesis could measurer, beyond her shears,
immortality I could see, not minutes days or years*

We ended up heading back into Malaga and queuing for some time in their train station. Ann with her fingernails painted pictures on my back. The game was to guess each picture but my goal was to prolong the game for as long as possible. I love to be touched. We crossed paths with a pair of Italian gentlemen sporting some recently acquired hash but lacked ingenuity and couldn't figure out how to smoke it without a pipe. I emptied a cigarette, mixed in their hash with the tobacco and shared in their festivities. When I'm in the company of a woman weed spins me into an uncomfortable feeling. I suppose it's a type of guilt. Like a window being opened where they might see in and discover my weaknesses or secrets. I consider myself to have restraint in many areas and total disregard in others but they do all play out according to the same moral plan. The point I'm trying to make is that if I mix weed with the availability of the female body, I grow horns. What happens between my ears resonates through the rest of my body like a hunger pulling me deeper and deeper into the passions of the physical world. I guess my uncomfortable feeling has, without disregarding the other elements, more to do with me hiding that desire. But in Ann's company I knew that she was with me and required no convincing, which really pleased me because it usually always ended up costing me something or I was afraid it'll cost me something. But that wasn't the case with Ann. I felt totally at ease and comfortable even in the silence. Perhaps I was growing up.

*When you make love to me, it's something so divine
a touch inside, I've known silently. I feel but can't define*

and in that silence, I am more than answered

*You've painted me, a melody, a meadow of delight
the way the wind moves through the fields
an sings, a song of life*

where my heart longs for the refrain

We boarded a late train into Granada and wandered about with eight others searching for a campground. The campground was filled to capacity but accommodated us anyway by allowing us to setup our tent on what appeared to be a road no longer in use. The ground was so hard without a hammer or firm rock it was impossible to properly secure Ann's tent. Bottom line it ended up being a half ass job and would not have surprised me if a strong wind took it away. We hung around the pool drinking beer, staying cool and eating sandwiches off by ourselves. There wasn't all that much room in her tent but I'm sure the silhouette would have been something to remember us by.

A good shower and I packed up for today's trek. Our first stop was to see if we could check our bags at the train station but the area used for this service had been closed down some time ago. It was suggested that we try a hotel across the way. Typically hotel won't check in new customer until around noon but usually will accommodate us early arrivals by watching our bags until check in rolls around. We have done this enough times to know to take advantage of this hospitality. Ann felt quite comfortable and actually expressed some curiosity as to my motives for watching the movements of the locals. Jim on the other hand couldn't sit still for a second without questioning where we were going and when. He just couldn't relax and let things come to him. Along the path leading up to the Alhambra there were three lovely young girls selling flowers. They approached us saying something like "God loves you, you are wise and happy". When I explained we had no extra money they responded by yelling obscenities at us.

We saw many beautiful structures littered with courtyards and architectural splendor. There was a fire burning just off to the side that spread the pastel of orange across the setting sun. It was almost magical the way the orange played against the brown tones of the hills rolling away from us. It was like looking out onto a frozen pond. Our plan was to board the midnight train into Madrid so we sought out some music and food then hung around for the rest of day. While waiting for the train to arrive I wandered down into a tunnel that connected a few of the platforms searching for

a bit of acoustics. A middle-aged man wandered up and sat down beside me. My first impression was that he was up to no good but Ann was up top watching all our possessions with the exception of the broken guitar I was making noise with. He started a conversation and seemed friendly enough to tolerate but then there was his hand between my legs. A second later it was his face that bore an expression of surprise. I think I broke his nose. There was blood everywhere.

Many times when somebody states an opinion or has a view on a subject they are misunderstood. I hope that wouldn't be the case with my views on homosexuality. I believe in and support people loving people whether it is men loving men or women loving women, it makes no difference to me. But I also believe that in our existence lies God's intent and that intent must revolve around the relationship between a man and woman. We are mentally, emotionally and physically different for a reason and for those reasons we both need to learn and grow from within that union. I also don't see love and sex being one and the same. I don't consider that a penis was created and intended for a rectum or that love and compassion need to be commingled with lust in order to be considered real. Love is safety. It seemed to me that sex is the commingling of many things including visualizations, our expectations, desires, as well as the intent to please and can be expressed for many purposes including love. The preference between oysters and snails is a matter of taste except for when it comes down to its visualization. It is the visualization that precedes it all even if only by a fraction of a second and that defines true intentions, intentions subject to morality. I don't intend to pass judgment. I can and will accept other's choices concerning their own affairs and to each its own. We had been all over one another and tonight's train trip into Madrid was like bell between rounds.

We both had traveled through Madrid on our way into Portugal but neither one of us had our mind on sightseeing. We had planned on traveling through into Avila and then on to Toledo so we only got off the train to stretch our legs and find ourselves some food. When we first arrived in Toledo we walked around its outer wall. Ann was sporting a t-shirt minus a bra and again my mind began orbiting. We needed to find ourselves a room, but when my constipation needle pointed to full I need to do my business first. I assume we overpaid for our room but it was that, or well let's just say I had no other choice. We then constructed a pile of clothes in the center of our room consisting of every article we owned with the exception of what we were planning on wearing out for tonight's dinner. The Nile had never seen dirty water and anything that could substitute as a clothes line did. Our room was littered with wet cloth.

Toledo reminded me of being in the desert back home in California. With the coming of night the life returned. We followed the stream of renewed life and eventually ended up sitting across from one another separated by candle light. The restaurant was upscale and we were both under dressed. I was staring into her eyes knowing she could never hold back a smile from me. I kept reminding myself that our time together would soon to come to an end but didn't want to bring up the subject. School would soon be starting for Ann and she needed to get home before the first bell. On the other hand I committed on reuniting with Jim back down towards the south of Spain. We spend the next day relaxing and just settled into the scenery. Our last day together.

We didn't exchange any words in regards to our separation, until I was holding her in my arms at the train station. I whispered in her ear that it didn't have to be an end and that whatever happens, would happen because it was supposed to. Then I watched a slow tear travel down towards her chin. I shared that tear. It would be a lonely train ride. I continued watching her from my window until I could no longer see the platform. I sat alone in kind of a dead zone feeling like somebody hit me up upside the head.

*The morning passed, like strangers on the road, out that same window, I watched the rain roll down, a distorted view
It reminded me, of yesterday's tears, how the years, have passed away*

*As if in a single day, I got caught up in the stream, I've seemed, to capture the words,
but I can't remember, the faces, Just traces, of yesterday's dream*

*Looking back, I see the reflection of the face, frozen, like those many framed windows of the past
Only a stranger looking back, through the cracks, of myself*

*A fool, obedient to a vision, from behind the window, watching, a changing world that's not my own
Only the birds, I hear sing, about such things, how they'll never be alone*

It was a about half way into Cartagena when the unexpected presented itself. I can almost remember him tapping me up the side of my head, "No reservation, No sit here". Keep in mind that it was a non-stop train, no one else was getting on and it was less than half full. I followed the conductor into the next car and sat where he gestured I should sit. Each seat had a flip down desk attached on the back of the seat in front and they were not the most comfortable of seats. I wasn't interested in an argument so I took his directions and tolerated the seat. After about ten minutes a young lady arrived and had tried to place a meal in front of me. I explained that I did not order any meal and wasn't hungry so she passed me by. Two young ladies to my right thought the opposite and assumed it was a complimentary meal and that free is always a good thing. After the meal trays were removed from those who ate the conductor came through to collect money. When he got to me I refused to pay for something I didn't receive. "You pay, you pay", he screamed, gaining the attention of everybody in the car. He then repeated this request again, that time at the top of his voice. He had placed me there and he knew I refused the food so on principle only; I was unwilling to yield to his so called authority. I wasn't about to line that guy's pocket with a twenty-dollar bill. Once he mentioned the word "Jail" the young ladies began searching their purses in attempt to assemble a payment. I handed him my first class train pass and again explained that I did not eat any of his train food. At this point the entire car was involved if they wanted to

be or not. His yelling was in Spanish which was probably a good thing and helped to keep me calm. If he wanted a fight, he had it. The next step he took almost came to blows. He opened the window and held out my rail pass, threatening to drop it if I didn't yield to his demands. At that point numerous other passengers were standing. A very large woman approached me from the far end of the car and volunteered as an interpreter. Back and forth they went. There were a few moments when the lady was actually louder. On the other hand I had no money on me. Not a penny. The conversations continued between the conductor and five passengers who were still standing. Since these conversations were conducted in Spanish I was left out of the equation. Then all of a sudden just like in the movie "It's a Wonderful Life" one gentleman who apparently thought that this entire incident reflected badly on Spain began to pass a hat around and collected enough to persuade the conductor to give me back my pass and go away.

How does one say thank you for this type of gesture. I started feeling uncomfortable and knew I still needed to locate another seat so not to repeat that episode again. I decided to refocus my attention to writing out post cards but when I looked for my post cards they were no longer where I expected them to be. Perhaps I had left them back behind in the "You pay" car. In my searching, I discovered a young man sitting in the seat directly across from where I had been originally sitting. He spoke perfect English and explained that he was a Pasadena, California resident. Then I had felt a pat on my shoulder, "Are these your?" Apparently my post cards had slid down in-between my seat and down a couple of rows. The young man I had just met had noticed the name of Tim O'Connor addressed on one of the post cards. Through the obstacles of inquiries we discovered we both knew the same Tim O'Connor. What a small world it really is. After sharing a few more questions our worlds became even smaller. We discovered where and how each of us knew Tim. Tim had lived with his parents down the street from where my parents lived in Arcadia. At one point I had tried to persuade Tim to attend college and felt his reluctance was tied to the possibility of failure, so I suggested a Political Science class as a starting point. I had all the tests and all the test answers. Maybe they wouldn't be the exact test questions but he'd have a pretty good idea of what to expect. As it turned out, the gentleman recognized my name from those tests. He was Tim's so called study partner. Well it was very nice meeting you I acknowledged before I settled back into my post cards. The most important of those was to my Grandmother who I always affectionately referred to as "Nanny". I understood that Nanny enjoyed poetry and had actually published a few of her own. So I thought I'd express a perspective on my travels that would meet with her approval, like how sometimes you wake up in the middle of it, ending up learning things you didn't set out to learn, or expect.

*I have grown, like a bird who's flown, from his own garden, accepted and who listens to my song
in the gardens of others, to me, so much beauty, singing in life, hearing its song*

*I've been walking and wandering, as a wind through the world, time, it has gone away and I'm the one,
who's following smiles, this world I'm loving today*

*I wish I could tell, all that I've seen, the beauty in the people I've meet but every piece, would seem like a dream
if I spent the time, to explain every step, It's love, really couldn't say any more*

*God has been there, showed me the way, his hand has opened each door,
and I've been collecting these things, that he's shown, allowing each step to bring change
now like a feather, no longer the stone, I'm free, as a bird on the range*

Finally we arrived at our destination, Valencia. I tracked down an exchange to ensure I had cash in my pocket for whatever might lay ahead and paid back two of the young ladies who donated towards my meal ticket. Jim and I had earmarked the next day to reunite. We were to meet at noon in front of the local American Express office. So I circled a hotel within walking distance, checked in and then sought out some night life. I asked a few of the friendly faces for directions but many times they contradicted what I already knew. Up one dark street I came across a familiar smell so I closed in and questioned directions. Once I had started up a conversation I inquired about the hash. "Expensive". "Well that's the best kind and I'm interested in forking out some cash if you can obtain me a little". I struck up a good deal for just enough to make up one very small cigarette. I searched out some tobacco and headed towards my room. Hiding in the darkness of my balcony I lit up and ended this night watching shadows pass on the street below.

I woke early to the jingling and jangling of the vendors setting up the local market and was up and out in minutes following the caravan of wagons and carts down through the streets to the market. The strategy was the same, I looked for food and if I could obtain it for free, all the better. As long as we both got what we wanted out of the conversation, I could play the game. "You picked them all by hand did ya? Your fingers are too big. I think this one has been bruised. I'll give you this much" and driving the vendor's last pitch down in price. Hagglng is simply the field on which the conversation takes place. Sometimes if I was really good and appreciated they'd hand it over to me for free. After I ate I followed a pair of good looking young ladies, searched through a few local shops and eventually ended up in front of the American Express office. The plan was that if either one of us would be late we were to call ahead and leave a message with the receptionist. I sat there like an idiot for three hours until I decided to leave a note of my own. Last time Jim didn't even show so I considered myself pretty stupid for investing any time at all.

My hair had grown relatively long over the past month or so and had begun looking a bit unruly. Actually it had been unruly for quite some time and the sun had given me a pretty nice tan. May time when I was in the vicinity of a train station, English-speaking tourists would commonly mistake me for a local. Initially I would refrain from saying anything until I could no longer tolerate the destruction of the English language. Then I would respond with a precise direction in English.

I smoked the roach left from the previous night and crawled off into late afternoon nap. It felt as if I was asleep for just seconds when I was awakened by a knock on the door. Jim had gotten my message. I got dressed and we wandered into the night in search for food. Eventually we settled on Chinese again. It didn't take long for Jim to get on my nerves. While he was complaining about the service I sat there listening to him and wondering what possessed me. Why am I back in this same situation? Yet, the other side of my head kept me reminding me that friends forgive friends. That's what friends do. But please change the fucking subject, I could care less. Okay. You had sex so let's change the subject. When he finally did change the subject he chose another sour topic comparing his unlimited funds to my dwindling budget. It's like he shot an arrow at a barn and then began placing circles around it. Why did I always have to remove the second domino to keep the rest standing?

*The cry rose high, the dimness of the woods, me, me, me
evidence almost reaches the sky, we know it by, hear say, what a day, what a day*

I was still a bit burnt out. My mind continued to waste the present on yesterday's thoughts and I just meandered around Valencia until a mid-day trek towards Barcelona. I had been reading a travel guide and came across the description of a nice hostel about midway along our route which worked out great because I didn't think either one of us wanted to arrive in Barcelona late into the evening. It was a nice place right on the sand with a view of the sea. It had both a basketball court and a swimming pool. There was only one problem. There were two of us and only one bed available. I offered Jim the bed on the condition that he would lend me his sleeping bag and I'd take the floor and he agreed. Once we got ourselves settled we made a b-line to the pool, shot a couple of baskets and actually met up with the two young ladies that were kind enough to finance a portion of my meal debt on that unforgettable train ride.

When it came time to sit down to a meal Jim began sporting his cart-blanche attitude. "I'm not eating in this place, I can afford much better". I can understand wanting to eat in the best restaurant in town but my budget wasn't open to every desire and we have already rejected four restaurants, see there was no Chinese food. When I refused to join Jim he threw a little tantrum and stormed off. It didn't bother me at all to eat in separate places. I spent the rest of the evening along the sand with a beautiful view of the sea and the food was excellent. Not expensive but excellent. When I arrived at the hostel Jim was already there. He had spread his possessions atop the sleeping bag he had promised I could use. When I reminded him of his agreement he welched. It was like taking something away from someone else's little baby. His crying was embarrassing to be associated with. I came real close to beating the shit out of him and would have felt good doing it but instead I decided that was it. The moral last straw. He was on his last chance and that all I needed for justification. The next time he made a wrong turn that road was his and I'd be gone. I wrapped up in my jacket and tried to get some sleep. From that point forward I started keeping one eye on the road ahead looking for just one more sharp turn, and then I would leave everything in the intersection because Jim chose to be a fucking asshole.

After a morning cup of coffee I took a direct route to the train station and boarded the first train heading towards Barcelona. I didn't offer Jim a single word. He either followed or went his own way and at that point I wasn't going to give it too much consideration. I wasn't interest in continuing the conversation from the night before so sat in my own compartment. About a quarter of the way to Barcelona a group of travelers from North Africa joined in and donated some hash for the ride. That was an invitation I needed along with a window to refocus my attentions. The music and laughing to each other's stories was like stopping time yet it flew like the wind and I was disappointed that we arrived so quickly. Luckily we found a small room with a balcony looking over one of the more picturesque squares and I enjoyed sitting there, watching the socializing below.

I grew up in a much different social structure. We had no central location were those living in my general vicinity gathered to socialize. My parents had no idea where I went or what I was doing and they just trusted I would be home on time. There was almost no chance we would cross paths. I loved how here everything is centered on the church and like wheel spokes reached out into each of the community square. Meeting new people every day, saying hello or introducing myself was almost second nature. Today it was a smile from a Belgium gal. She was traveling with a friend from Berlin. The four of us wandered about a few of the nightclubs but it seemed as if nobody would share their secret password. We followed the young ladies letting them choose a place to eat which was a mistake. I spent money on food I should not have eaten. We relaxed on the steps in front of the church that had a beautiful stained glass window. I often wondered why they never lit them up from the inside on nights like this. It would have been beautiful. One of our new lady friends was surprised to learn we were sporting some hash. Bringing it to the surface kinda put a damper on the evening if you were looking at things from Jim's perspective but I didn't care. I was looking for a bed and a bit of sleep. Ten beds, ten guys in one room, all with different agendas, I was in and out of sleep all night long. I had earmarked seeing the Picasso museum. Jim wasn't interested which I considered a blessing. I started the day with a cup of coffee and relaxed out on the balcony observing the ebb and flow of the people below.

"Life is not a work of art, this moment cannot last, this journey is one we must embark and this too shall pass".

I enjoyed how that museum laid out Picasso's works in progression of his development. With Picasso, I agree. I have only myself to blame if I cannot understand what I know nothing about. So with open eyes and an open mind I too will give each color its own significance. At that moment I have already changed. I am already somewhere else.

We go without direction, carefree, the wind may blow, chasing down the dreams of youth, where ever they may go.

We met up with two young ladies, a German gal and her girl friend was from England. The English girl was kind of funny if you didn't take her seriously. She sported an attitude that she was better than everyone else. But on the walk towards the castle it was just at too slow of a pace for me. Once you factored in Jim's attitude on top of hers I bolted down to the Santa Maria. "I still think Columbus is pointing in the wrong direction, isn't he?" "Didn't the Vikings discover America before the Spanish?" My questions didn't go over so well, but I had that kinda attitude and it needed to come out somewhere. Before heading out into the night I stopped by our room to change into clothes that at least appeared clean and again sat on our balcony and watched the foot traffic before heading out into the night. There was a comedic occurrence between a black man and his woman. They would throw punches at each other. I mean she would really throw punches. The farther apart they got the louder they would scream at one another creating quite a scene considering the amount of people in the square. I avoided Jim that night and wandered in-between the bright lights and the shadows by myself. I retreated into the darkness to dwell on my own loneliness and to reminisce on Ann's embraces. I was left just watching others. I always see faces in the crowd that I've think I've seen before. I suppose I commingle similar characteristics of the patterns that make up my past and find myself from time to time fantasizing about her, or maybe her. I talked somebody out of a cigarette and wandered about until I made it back to my room. I realized that banging my head on the walls of the maze defines the shape of my life.

I wanted to make an early start and head into Algora but it was a bit out of the way and didn't poise enough of an attraction to make the detour. We did manage to make it out early and followed the rails into the Parenoes and eventually made it into Polgceria, La Tour the Carol. When we reached the border between Spain and France again they were still unwilling to share trains so we were forced to exit and board a new. We took advantage of this opportunity to gather up some traveling snacks. I told Jim on two occasions that he ought to pick it up but all I got in return was an attitude. "I'll see you on the train then." As the train began to pull out a young man in full stride latched onto the handrail of the last door and it wasn't Jim. To my surprise the conductor pried his fingers from the rail and he hit the ground moving at about fifteen to twenty miles an hour. The conductor must have known that individual, but either way, I was not going to cross paths with him.

It was a peaceful ride and gave me an opportunity to catch up on some writing. I had hours to burn before Jim would be pulling into town and decided to wander about to get a feel for my surroundings. I ended up down along the water's edge smoking cigarettes and passing around a bottle of red wine with the local bums. I tell ya, they may sport clothes that had seen better days and the jury was still out if they had a recent bath, but the conversations were interesting and they really enjoyed each other's company. I tied on a bit of a buzz and wandered across town to the station to meet up with Jim's train but he wasn't on that train either. It was kind of a long walk for nothing. Eventually I ended up in an underground pizza restaurant. If I ignored the language and were just relying on my eyes I would have thought I was back in California. The clothes, the gestures and the mannerisms were all the same. Outside the hostel they had gathered around the guitar. It seemed if I wasn't the only one who had spent a good portion of that night in a local bar. Apparently the hostel was full and there were no more available beds. When Jim finally arrived I suggested that he sleep in the floor in our room but he insisted that a park bench was perfect. Suggestions only made more bent out of shape. He ended up being more bent out of shape since his attitude got in the way of his common sense and found out the hard way that a hard surface and cold weather equals very little sleep. After we tracked down some food and a cup of coffee in the morning we boarded a train towards Carcasconone.

All day it looked like it was going to rain but as the day wore on the sun managed to win its battle. I extremely enjoyed wandering about and touching things from the past. Touching the walls of this castle allowed my imagination to transport me. This was quite a place for a child to explore. There was a small church and I found myself staring at the altar for quite some time which began to irritate Jim. It didn't matter where we were he always wanted to be on the move. He couldn't just relax and take a breath.

It was getting late when we sat down to review the train schedules and decided to head into Nargonne. I followed my ignorance and hopped on the wrong train, heading in the opposite direction. While we were waiting on re-connecting to correct my mistake I discovered a hostel in Sete which seemed better suited to our new time frame and Jim agreed. We arrived late in the afternoon but still had ample time for meandering through the park. We spent some time watching the locals play bocce ball. Those guys were good and I mean really good. It showed what sixty years of practice could lead to. Even though it was quite an exhibition of skill it still didn't match the spectacle of the hundreds of jellyfish that danced below the bridge that lead to the hostel. I find nature so fascinating. Occasionally, like today, we spent some time waiting for the hotel to open its door. It's not always a waste of time because it would provide an opportunity to meet and socialize with other travelers, providing an excellent trading post for ideas, cultures and travel tips.

We headed out to explore the industrial port and gathered up the ingredients for tonight's dinner. A little cooking, a little relaxation and a little writing were on my agenda for the evening. We began talking with an American couple bicycling across France. The way they explained their travels made it all sound so romantic. Even though I have a passion for riding bicycles the idea of facing multiple days of rain painted a picture of my journal turning into a sponge of lost thoughts. Just about the same time we opened our third beer some Germans were drawn to the guitar. Their sing-along-quartet was quite comical and with each new beer the laughs grew louder. Eventually I wandered in and lay down in bed. There a young lady was rubbing her breasts with moisturizing cream and she took advantage of her audience. I watched. Hey I didn't get that type of opportunity often enough.

As we crossed into Montpellier, we were followed by a young Austrian girl after crossing paths on the platform. The three of us wandered through the gardens and down along the Roman aqueduct. Eventually we ended up strolling down the narrow streets gazing into the many store windows. I was attracted to an antique brass figure of a dancer, very Degas. It was absolutely gorgeous and about a hundred years old or so I was told with a price tag to match. I managed to haggle down their asking price about thirty percent and gave it a second thought, but then discovered they only accepted cash and the bank was closed through lunch. I took that as a sign. Jim and our young lady friend were across the way at the Brasserie. Jim was purchasing a pair of decorative eggs and while I waited for his purchase to conclude I wandered across the street into a marionette's shop. It was cluttered in curious items of all different colors and shapes. My eye was attracted to a kaleidoscope by Apres Ca Pluie. What interested me was that it did not use pieces of colored glass to create its rainbows but clear glass. It utilized the surrounding colors to make its mural. It dawned on me that it was the perfect souvenir so I bought it. I carried it into Nimes and when I located the post I wrapped it up and sent it home.

We wandered about the countryside like on a kind of scavenger hunt, through Marseille, Alxen Provence and Toulou. After a few days we ended up in Aries. Down along the river's edge I found what I was looking for, another Picasso museum. I enjoyed the way the exhibit was sequentially numbered and laid out to the progression from drawing to porcelain. It was worth the trek. I tried to persuade Jim to check out a small hostel along the Rivera named "Letrajas" but it required us to take a private train off the main line out of Cannes. When we reached Cannes we made a few attempts to call ahead a secure a reservation but had no luck getting through. I didn't think it wise to blindly spend money on train ride that could turn into a quick round trip so we decided to hang around Cannes for the day instead.

It was mid evening and we were still searching for a room through the streets of Nice. I knew my way around but that didn't help. Eventually we crossed paths with a young man who explained that he had a friend that knew a guy who had a cousin who was married to a guy who runs a place that he thought would have vacancies. Typically the ingredient for an unsavory long walk but it was at this point the only choice we had. We made a phone call and followed the directions we were given. Well they sounded easy enough but it did take us some time to find the place and when we got there the rates were a bit higher than had been quoted over the phone. If I wasn't so tired and it wasn't so late we wouldn't have stayed there on principle alone, and I'm sure that that's what they were counting on. We ended up on the fourth floor as close to the roof as possible. The rooms ceiling were about seven feet and slopped down to four feet over the beds.

The guitar was obviously not well and could no longer hold a tone so I removed the strap from her. I planned on keeping it as a token of our relationship and placed her broken body over an air vent extending from the roof just above our window's ledge. Then we headed out for dinner but, damn, Jim was impossible to get along with. He didn't want to eat here so we walked up the street to another place and he didn't want to eat there either. It was like riding a carousel. I told Jim I was just going to leave to go sleep if we were going to keep walking up and down the street. "Pick a fucking place. Chinese food again! Well there's an unexpected change of pace!" Once the meal came he disliked the taste, got all bent out of shape and continued on loud enough to not only offend the staff but to make me feel uncomfortable. All my entrees still hadn't been delivered. "Jim if you don't like the food send it back to the kitchen politely and preferably after they bring everything to the table. If you don't like the service, don't leave a tip." Jim perceived that advice as an invitation to spew all over the place. He just stood up on his soap box, called out a lot of names and four letter words. I was either too tired to do anything or maybe I had just gotten to the point where I could successfully tune it out. I did tell Jim that I would no longer tolerate his childish behavior anymore and told him

point blank that if he felt that way he should just go on his own merry way and save me the trouble, but one more issue no matter how small I'm gone. I walked back to the room by myself. When I got up to our room I decided that a air vent was not an appropriate burial for such a loyal friend and guide so I retrieved the her broken body from the air vent and headed down towards the shore. I met a small group of locals that were kind enough to share a cigarette. They inquired about my broken guitar so I shared our story. They agreed that a proper burial would be by flame, so we gathered round and performed last rites.



*Burning in the twilight, where the wild geese flew crying, into the night, when spring arrives in a woman's eyes
burning in me as bright*

I know, she'll fly away from me, into the setting sun, on the wings of another dream, before the night has come

Last of the leaves have fallen and touched the untouched snow,

where the cold blowin wind, where I have been, has come and soon must go

I know, she'll fly away from me, into the setting sun, on the wings of another dream, before the day is done

Like an enchanted gondola my guitar had meandered me through the channels of life. Even though I lost a good friend I shall remember and carry the lessons and memories we shared forever.

I woke with that taste of too many cigarettes and one too many beers and wandered toward a morning coffee before it was back on the road again. We started down the coast searching for another room, kind of back tracking over the previous day's plans but we ended up in Monte Carlo instead. It had just begun raining as we headed up one of the steep hills looking for shelter and a cup of coffee. We sat down alongside a window and while we sipped our coffee I noticed a motorcyclist get hit from behind. That stood me straight up out of my chair but he appeared to be okay. At that moment the sun began peeking through so we decided to walk around the bay and trek up to the castle. First we thought we had gotten lucky because we were out front of the residence when the royal family arrived home. Kind of like a circus event, but it turned out to be more of an inconvenience since they wouldn't let us leave when it began to get boring, and it got boring. When they finally let us go we headed back down to the bay, the best place to relax. Jim wasn't interested in playing in the casino and criticized me for risking money but I was actually more interested in experiencing its atmosphere. You're here, why wouldn't you want to check it out? We had already secured a hotel room back in Nice so we made plans to meet up there later that evening.

I was hanging around and not much was happening so I changed plans and started to head back toward Nice myself, but the sun and hot sand was inviting so I decided to get off the train at La Trayas, Villefrance / Sur-Mer. This turned out to be a wise decision for someone who enjoys young women in bathing suits. I sat along the wall playing with the sand between my toes and with my eyes smiling at all the young ladies. I got into a conversation with a pair of young ladies that were kind enough to provide a few insights and persuaded me to look them up that night in Nice. They explained that there was an exceptional band in a small club they frequented, so they wrote me out directions. I was feeling much better and the idea of wandering about a casino reentered my head so I put my shoes back on and began to retrace my steps. When I first reached the casino I decided to check out the grounds first and ended up down along the water's edge staring out at the many boats. Who were those people that can afford such luxuries? Nobody related to me.

This was nothing like Vegas. The atmosphere was more like a funeral home where celebration lacked class. It was dead quiet and almost too clean. I was just standing around when I noticed a tall Arab had entered the room all dressed up for show. He had three gorgeous women grappling for an available arm, a blond, a brunette and a redhead. That was a scene that could only have been scripted in Hollywood. I was standing alongside the roulette table and I still don't believe what I had witnessed. In hindsight I was sure it was all staged for the ladies. The Arab gentleman approached the roulette wheel and without even the slightest gesture the attendant slid over a stack of chips. I can only imagine their value. He slid the stack over onto a number. After adding up the numbers in my head I'm wasn't sure if he placed them on a single number or covered the corners of four adjacent numbers. The ball spun around that wheel and when it came to stop his number came up. He expressed no excitement or surprise. Only the girl's eyes got wilder. One giggled but recovered quickly so as not to show any emotion. Then he made a gesture with his left hand and then dealer only moved his original stack to number he pointed to. I don't recall the dealer adding chips to the table or slide his winning toward him. Again, his number came up. At that point the girls were all over him, giggling quietly, smiling and touching his arms. That was the only sound breaking the silence of the room. Again he made the same gesture to the dealer and his chips were moved to another number. Like the past two his bet came up a winner. He then kissed two of the three girls, picked up two of the original chips off the stack and flipped them to the attendant with a gesture of thanks, leaving the rest of the chips on the table. At that moment a side door opened just right of the table and the four of them disappeared. I stood there wondering if he had rolled over his bet or had just maintained the original stack. Either way that had to have been staged for the benefit of the girls. I suppose I levitate toward craps because of the emotions the crowds bring to the table but not there. If you cheered it was probable that they would ask you to leave. Not my cup of tea and I prefer Scotch anyway.

On the way back to our room I stopped at a dance club and the girls were there as promised. One of them seemed very interested and I was attracted to her but her girlfriend was demonstrating jealousy and it just started to get a bit weird. I explain that I had to meet up with a buddy and we both would return later that evening. The idea of a dance club didn't go over well. Jim would rather skip rocks into the moonlight. After a few drinks I decided I was tired anyway and needed my sleep so I crawled off to an early bed.

Being out on the streets early was kind of like having a secret, observing things happening while the rest were sleeping. I searched out another hole in the wall for a cup of coffee and a few pieces of bread. It was quiet and things outside moved at a slower pace. I could absorb it all without losing my concentration. As we headed back to La Trayas, we skipped along hilltop villages overlooking the Riviera and darted between orange and olive trees. We arrived early and took advantage of the beautiful coast. It was a beautiful day and the sun beckoned us to swim. We were extremely lucky to have met an older gentleman who offered his diving mask and fins so we could explore the coves. I swam and relaxed all day until it was time to head up to the hostel. Jim again found something to disagree with. Apparently he hadn't gotten enough sun and wanted to remain behind. I wandered up the hill and confronted a group hanging outside on a picnic table setup in front the hostel. Some were waiting on available beds and others were waiting to buy meal tickets for dinner. Meals were only prepared for the number of seats available in their dining room. Thanks to Jim, he forced me into another no-win situation. If I bought two tickets he wouldn't show up in time. If I bought just one ticket for myself he'd show up and complain. So like an idiot I watched them eat. Luckily a young German arrived late and was in the same boat as I so we both walked down to the local store and picked up some food and a lot of beer. We claimed one of the coves and since we were sporting extra beers and the market had closed our conversation grew

to include six others. We traded stories all night. I was given some addresses or phone numbers and told when I arrived in either Paris or Rome they would put me up for a night or two. We gathered again around breakfast that next morning and said our goodbyes. It was a good group but as it turned out all of us were either traveling in opposite directions or were at the end of their holiday.

We traveled into Cote D'azur, then into San Remo. The weather was just perfect. It couldn't have been any better with the white sand, blue water and cypresses dancing in the breeze. Another day beckoned us to swim. We stopped off in Ventimilia in search for an open bank. There too we hung around the waterfront and just let the days slip away. We arrived in Genova late one night and ran into a bit of difficulty locating a room. This is par for the course. We walked quite a bit and discovered very few room accommodations to choose from. We began to get tired and since we hadn't eaten all day food also became a priority. We found vacancies at a less than desirable place but when the guy at the front desk offered us a discount in a local restaurant and we bit. He explained it was run by a friend and was just around the corner. That was ideal since I had passed my daily quota for walking miles long ago. The food wasn't that bad but they ripped us off a bit on the bottle of wine making up for any discount they provided on the food. I didn't like the fact that they thought we didn't notice so I decided to let them know I was disappointed. The waiter tried to explain that the label didn't represent the contents of the bottle, whatever in the fuck that meant. After I expressed my point to the waiter Jim felt that he also needed to add his two cents. Jim just wouldn't leave the incident at the restaurant's door. On and on and on, he went and when I asked him to just drop the fucking subject he decided to redirect his anger toward other subjects. Somebody must be blamed in order for Jim to move on. Then out of the blue it was my fault because I alone picked the restaurant and Jim didn't notice the nose ring he wore.

The last straw had been left with Jim's sleeping bag and since then I've simply been waiting. I no longer had any desire to continue along that path or waste any more time dealing with Jim's attitude. It was over. It was evident that alcohol and Jim just couldn't coexist and maintain any type of normalcy. I explained to Jim that I was leaving in the morning. I left all the maps and guides I no longer needed on the table between our beds. Read it forwards, backwards, or across, it still spells the same thing, relax, take a breath and everything is not a competition. That was absolutely the worst bed I had ever tried to sleep in and eventually I just gave up trying. It was about two in the morning when I began packing up my stuff. I left Jim and his attitude in bed and said my goodbyes unnoticed. The streets were dark and empty but were now mine alone. I had no feelings of regret like in Ireland just the sense of freedom. Along the river I had learned to be patient and to tolerate the actions and abrasive attitudes that in the past would have set me off then and there. My only immediate plan was to follow the good weather. The rain had left Switzerland so I decided to head north.

The echoes of my footsteps, reminds me I'm alone, down this endless street of silence, rains a melody, of home and it's this emptiness that fills my steps, for these nights I've slept, alone

These streets, there all wet with rain, I stand alone here, callin out in vain, can't ya hear me through the silence callin out your name

The shadows shorten, as each street light nears, a passing spotlight on loneliness, another tear

Each day goes by, like this walk through the rain, though my hearts and dreams, consume me each day still ends the same

These streets, there all wet with rain, I stand alone here, callin out in vain can't ya hear me through the silence, callin out your name

I found a good cup of coffee on the square in front of the Duomo, sat there and caught up on my journal while I watched Milan wake up around me. The morning light danced past its arches onto the adjacent building. It was a breathtaking sight, absolutely gorgeous, a very unique structure. I spent some time queuing inside and then sat along the edges of the square. I discovered an excellent restaurant just not far from the Duomo and relaxed to a bottle of wine. I spent a day roaming around the Lago Di Como and visited the Santa Maria Delle Grazie so I can say that I have seen Leonardo's last supper. I suppose its popularity came from the controversies surrounding it, mirror image, dagger, challis, that type of stuff. It was in very poor shape. The hostel was across town which provided me the opportunity to wander around some of the residential areas. I enjoy taking those long walks out of the city, and eventually I found myself with my back to a tree inside one of the city's many parks. They always provided a fresher perspective on the people who called this home. I had a couple hours to burn before I could check in for a bed and fell asleep. Slowly people started wandering up and once there were eight of us I began debating over what to have for dinner and ended up convincing the group that by pitching in a little money and we procured all the necessities for sandwiches and alcohol. We were all on a budget so any suggestion that saved money was embraced.

We were all hanging around talking, when somebody interjected the topic of religion. These types of discussions usually take one of two courses, either there's an effort to exchange ideas or it's used as a vehicle to attempt to convert or justify somebody's belief system. Somebody once said that the problem with an opinion is that everybody has one. It is my opinion that if you can't first agree of the definitions these types of discussions sometimes can be like reading a map; it doesn't do much good if you don't know where you are. I sat back drank my beer and listened to the conversations. An older gentleman wanted to debate Genesis's creation theory versus Darwin's theory of Evolution. He portrayed himself as some type of professor and went on and on trying to convince the others why evolution was

wrong and sacrilegious. I thought it strange that somebody would think that evolution lead to atheism. Everybody I know that views evolution as factual also believes in God and views God as the creator, a creation governed by rules, rules created by God. He kept pounding that drum so I jumped in the water. Evolution is not a creation theory I said. It's the observation of variances of life and pointed out that Darwin never tried to define the origin of life or the reason why life exists. It's the interpretation of factual evidence.

I believe our DNA contains both the word of God and voice of variation past and future. Life has structure. I pointed out that comparing the theory of Evolution to the stories in Bible is ridiculous. I have read the bible many times and in no way do I take it literally. How could you take it literally? Where did Cain's wife come from? It doesn't even tell the whole story "Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man". John's facts conflicts with the other three gospels and the violent images in Revelation conflicts with Jesus' message of peace. I told them that I view the Bible as the foundation to a religion, a religious seeking control of not just theological, but a social and political order and that its power is based not in the truth, but rather the authority of whose words are they.

I ask "What the true message of the Bible." Nobody ever agrees and in almost all cases the person sitting across from me explains their view eloquently. Then I question, don't you believe that if God wanted to communicate something wouldn't it be perfectly clear without the need to interpret or guess what was meant? I have always believed that the stories in the bible don't have to be true to convey their meanings. Misinterpretation and false interpretation is what leads people astray. The Genesis's story of creation is by definition an allegory. There is a delta between the story teller and the reader's perception of time. The reader's perception is based on the natural environment in which he resides. God in his creation has provided examples where man can prove and test this perception. The creation of water consistently obeys specific principles represented in time and by those rules could not have been accomplished in what man defines as a day. In fact, water is a byproduct of heat. Yet in Genesis's creation water is created before light and how could a day be measured if there was no light?

My church has no doors. The truth is the truth no matter whose mouth it comes from. I view God as everywhere. That his purpose is true and consistent and he doesn't play hide and seek in words written by man. I believe in the message of the prophets who told stories with the truth about patience, forgiveness and peace. But these words have been used to segregate, enslave, to remove and to reward. And at its foundation lies a flaw, the belief that man is so smart that we interpret our environment. That what we see, measure, perceive is what is true. It was getting a bit too heavy for the group and became more of a debate and a discussion or inquiry, so I attempted to steer the group toward a local dance club instead and we made a memorable evening of it.

I must have had too much to drink because I didn't remember this room being so fucking cold, like a jail cell. I showered, shaved and waited in the lobby until the front desk opened. Retrieved my youth pass and escaped. Then I spent the morning walking about the Dinaloteca D Brera which was mostly an unemotional glorification of history. I understand Michelangelo, I admire his work. I stopped by to get another meal at the same place as before, boarded a late train north into Switzerland, opened up my deck of cards and invested some time in a game of solitaire. Then our train came to an abrupt stop. I stuck my head out the window to try to locate the cause. It looked as if we had entered a logging community and perhaps we were picking up a few of the loggers. About the time I sat down a large almost Santa type gentlemen entered the compartment with a dog. I quickly responded that there was no room for the two of them. Having to protect space on a train was par for the course and had become almost second nature to me. It can get crowded and I had learned that if I gave up space I'd never get it back and maybe even lose some sleep. He interrupted me as quick as I had responded. "Are you sure you're not hiding any...Cognac?" he asked with smile. It was a drug search.

I enjoyed traveling on trains through the darkness of those mountains. When there was nothing else to do and I was tired of writing, I just stared at the passing shadows from the darkness of my compartment. I reached Lausanne early in the morning and walked into some confusion. Apparently the airport in Paris was on strike and that had a domino effect across Europe. Every form of information service had a line leading out its door. I noticed a young Finnish girl waiting in one of those lines. She had an interesting combination of beauty, an innocent type of shyness she wore and a smile in her eyes that only raised questions. It appeared she was looking for a place to stay. With my usual grace I suggested we could assist one another in that trek. I was sure we would find the hostel together. A short bus ride and a short walk and we managed. It was nice to have somebody to talk with along the way. While we checked into the hostel the receptionist made it a point, actually mentioning it three times, that we should watch our belongings because there had been a number of thefts. When I entered the room they had assigned me there was a young man who wandered up and mentioned it again. His eyes told me he was the guilty one and perhaps this was his way of justifying his actions; I was warned. I looked him straight in the eye and told him that if somebody wanted to steal my shit they'd have to wash it, maybe twice and you'd still might not get the smell out of them. Once we settled in my lady friend and I met up out front. We took a walk along the garden and ended up alongside some tennis courts where we talked into the night. It was interesting comparing our different paths in life and what brought us both to the same bench looking across the same setoff tennis courts.

We decided to explore the city together. After a relaxing cup of coffee the two of us started the day by climbing to the top of the cathedral. From that vantage point we identified a lovely park that we earmarked for that afternoon's picnic. We wandered about the city checked out a few of the shops and eventually ended the day in the Del' Ara Brut, an art museum for the mentally handicapped. That was an enjoyable surprise. I just wished there had been more commentary on the artists, like what made them crazy? We spent the evening meandering along the water's edge. It was just an evening of relaxation.

We got another early start and took the first train into Geneva. Across the bridge and past the white swans we found a nice outdoor café. I had a nice glass of wine and enjoyed the shade of the trees. The train ride was not too long and I thought that living in Lausanne and working in Geneva would not be a bad plan for an international banker. I attempted to place a call home and was surprised when it only took a minute or two to make the connection. Half the places I had tried took practically a half a day or failed while trying. We headed back so that I could check in before curfew. My lady friend was heading home and needed to gather up her things and make her train. Our extra day together had cut into her time to get home and had left her with only two days to make it back to work. A kiss goodbye and again I was alone sitting in a dining room staring at a blank sheet of paper. Then I heard a woman's voice, "Can you help me open a bottle wine". Things always turn up positive for the optimistic, for a smile. Along the river I have learned that no matter how dark things may seem if you are optimistic the light will eventually find you. Almost everybody is looking to involve themselves in that light as if it could rub off on them.

A trip to Zermatt was next on my agenda, so the next day was nothing but train travel. When I finally reached Visp I hit a fork in the road and needed to make a decision on whether to fork out an extra nineteen dollars for a round trip train ticket or to thumb my way into Zermatt. The rail to Zermatt was a private railroad and not covered under my rail pass. I looked around and since there was not a single car heading in that direction my decision was made easily. Both windows provided a spectacular view of the countryside. The houses looked strong with their slate roofs illustrating the hard winters they were built to endure. Everything seemed so permanent. When I reached the hostel's door it was apparent that they were going to be closed until early evening. Adjacent to the entry was a storage room that contained a lot expensive ski gear so I wasn't too concerned leaving my bag of clothes behind.

I wandered about and came up behind an older gentleman putting the Matterhorn on canvas. It made an interesting picture. We talked for a bit about art. He had told me that the face of the Matterhorn is never the same and that's why he paints it every day. I walked among and read the many gravestones that gathered around the church. Many unfortunate people had failed while touching its face. As I made a circle and wandered back to the hostel I met a young lady sitting out in front. She said that its door wouldn't be opened for another three hours or so. I mentioned that I had enough to put together a few sandwiches and perhaps she would be interested in joining me on a trek up the river. We picnicked along the river's edge and took the opportunity to do a little exploring. Surprisingly she was willing to go off-road and held her own. Still I had to be careful that she didn't take a misstep. The water was very cold and if one unfortunately fell in, it wouldn't be good.

Then oh my God! As I was standing in front of the hostel just after I had checked in and claimed myself a bed I looked up and there stood an absolutely beautiful woman. When she smiled the world lit up around her. She stood there with another young man and it appeared as if they were deciding whether or not to stay at that hostel. I couldn't help myself from persuading them to stay. It turned out they were boyfriend and girlfriend, on vacation from the States. She was originally from Iceland but had been living in the States for some time. We struck up conversations that lead to a dinner invitation. The young lady I had met earlier also joined us making it a foursome. After dinner we ended up at a local bar called the "Brown Cow". The stories got better after each drink. About half way through the evening when her boyfriend went to pick up another round and my young lady friend wandered off to the ladies room, the goddess inquired why I carried that small bag everywhere I went. I explained that I was writing a journal, used film, my identification and currencies. Those things I couldn't bear losing. That opened up a flood gate of new topics.

A line from a forgotten movie entered my head: "I'm just a man walking through the deserts of life, searching for water and I'm only finding sand" then he paused and waits to see if it hooked. If she says anything close to "I didn't know you were lost in a desert" then deliver the line "I didn't either until I met you". I think it was Paul Newman. Hitting on a young lady at the table of her boyfriend is in bad taste but I enjoyed the thought and probably smiled at something she said. I came to realize that beauty, true beauty, requires many defenses. It seems as if every guy crawled out from under a rock to try their luck. They planned to go skiing the next day and I had earmarked a trek up the north side of the mountain. We ended up continuing the conversation in the darkness on a hill just within yelling distance of our hostel.

I woke up about three or four in the morning. There through my window stood the Matterhorn under a bright full moon. The painter I met yesterday was right. It did look completely different and now seem larger than life as it towered over this tiny village. It beckoned me to climb and to listen to the stories it had to tell. I got the impression that it did not know the meaning of words such as war, violence, or bigotry but was well aware of words like, exhaustion, fear and cold.

I was up before the sun and headed out to get an early start. At the beginning of my trek I crossed paths with the boyfriend from the night before. Apparently they didn't make it back before curfew and ended up spending half the night locating another room. To compound that inconvenience he explained that the room they found had a cement floor and had been just too cold to sleep comfortably. I suggested we meet up again that evening for dinner and started off along the river's edge making my own trails and capturing a few nice pictures. It all seemed so peaceful and it was obvious that this was a special place. The hills were beautiful blankets of green stretching in both directions spotted with wandering white sheep that made it look as if they moved with the wind. The jiggling of sheep bells created an almost surreal mood and there stood the Matterhorn overlooking the valley as if it were its king. When I hiked in the Alps I mostly passed older German couples, that would smile and say "Gus cot" or something like that and when they were a little short of breath it sounded to me like "Hey Scott".

To my surprise a small restaurant presented itself in a clearing apparently built as the destination for hikers. For me that was the ideal place to rest and since they sold cold beer, even better. After a few beers I continued up the

mountain. The higher I climbed the more the more the landscape started to resemble the moon. Trees began to disappear in the distance and the ground change from vegetation to rocks. When I reached the snow line my steps began to slow. I knew the oxygen was getting thin. I could only take a few steps and then needed to rest to catch my breath and then there was this humming like sensation in my head. I didn't hear anything; it was something I felt between my ears. I knew something was wrong. I rested, climbed a bit higher but after about another ten minutes or so the humming sensation returned. I figured that I wasn't getting enough oxygen and that something was definitely wrong. Then it happened again. I must be too high I thought so I began to head back down. I sat down to absorb the view of the valley below enjoying that special spot. It was like being outside myself, having a religious self identification. The sun's light was then dancing with each blade of grass creating a symphony of notes I could see.

*Emerging from her hiding place, she seek from me a warm embrace,
honest approach that held no lies, seeking love but applies no ties,
standing naked in both our shame, removed away by passion's flame
captured me in this morning tide, golden beauty of a new sunrise,
this need inside she could see, touched my heart and setting me free*

I paid more attention to the changes in color and vegetation as I trekked up the mountain than keeping track of how much unused film I had left. I should have better rationed my picture taking on the way up so I could have taken pictures on the way down. It took a couple hours to reach another beer. When I approached the restaurant a group of older Germans were waving and gesturing that they had been watching me climb through their binoculars. They offered me a beer and suggested I join them at their table. One member of the group was on vacation from New York and spoke the best English. During our conversation I explained the head trauma I experienced while up on the mountain as the reason why I didn't climb higher. One of them laughed and responded in German. I think he asked if you were part dog, the New Yorker commented. They explained that what I was experiencing was the sonar. Every so often they aimed it at the glacier to break it up slowly. The sonar helps reduce the chances of large avalanches. That was a relief. During my life I was never provided a guide book to the human experience that explained things, in most case it's always a surprise. I took advantage of that location and did a bit of writing. Who could not inspired by all this beauty?

*Love took this blind eye and thrilled it, emerged me in natures stream
played round my mind and filled it, with the songs of butterfly wings*

*Beauty entangled me into the moment, I found myself staring at her hair
lost in the sea of her sent, the fragrance of roses filled the air*

*Over her body with thoughts of caress, looking back into these penetrating eyes
while I just stood there speechless, as her white gown she unties*

*Our fingers danced between us, in search of a broken line
fallen in the trance that lust will provide, between the walls of her design*

*A palm tree in my desert and thy glance, like the stares above
after the death of the sun in its glory, a canopy of youthful love*

That was one long day and my legs had taken a beating. I would admit they had never been as strong as they are right now. In the last few months I've done a lot of walking, some real walking. My mind was quickly shifting to the enjoyment of a shower and soft bed. When I finally made it back the couple from the night before were waiting out front of the hostel door. They were both exhausted and as soon as they saw me they began sharing every element of the day's adventure. "You should come with us tomorrow, oh come on". I explained that I have never skied before and perhaps a glacier wasn't the best place to learn how. In the back of my mind I was also concerned with what that might cost me, a small fortune? They kept on me and eventually we ended up at a local ski shop. I was surprised at how inexpensive it actually was. The cost totaled about eighteen dollars for all the gear and lift tickets for the day, everything I needed. "What was I doing? She said please and I said yes". That was about the size of it. I'm not even too sure after today's hiking if these legs of mine wouldn't wake up cramped. That evening I picked out a music box and sent it home to my mother with love. My mom's an angel, really she is an angel. I like to believe that sinners like me only get brought into Heaven by angels like my mom. I pray that's true. With the darkness we decided to hang around and drink beer on the same hill as the night before. I agree, every time I see the Matterhorn its face takes on a different expression. Tonight it was smiling.

I was up in the early hours staring out my window at the full moon and the Matterhorn bathing in its light. I had awakened drained, partly hung over and in need of food. But it was Sunday and on Sunday nothing was open. I obtained just a cup of coffee and a bit of cheese, which was hardly enough to provide any additional strength. Well here I go, one ski lift to another and the valley below disappeared in the distance. I guess you could say I was kind of a novelty being a first time skier and the group was set on taking me to the top of the mountain. This required a group

effort and without that effort I wouldn't have made it on my own. They had spaced themselves out about every four or five t-bars. I concentrated on trying to keep my skies parallel but each time I got comfortable and demonstrated some confidence one ski would follow a rut in the snow and I would end up on my butt, again. I quickly got back on my feet and waddled over to be picked up by the next volunteer. I think I ended on my butt about five times before I reached the top.

What in the hell was I thinking? It was as if I was standing on top of an elevator shaft looking down. Oh but standing right beside me was this beautiful young lady with no hesitation in her eyes, smiling at me. It was obvious that I had only one choice and that was to head down this mountain. I grew up with a skateboard in my hand so I didn't see myself having any difficult in keeping my balance. I kept my skies parallel and with my knees bent to keep my balance I even picked up more speed. I was absolutely flying and had no idea of how to stop. I kept reminding myself over and over, stay away from the right side. Although the signs were blurred I could still make out the skull and crossbones warning of the potential danger. Before I took my second breath I was closing in on another group of skiers that had left minutes before I did. I knew I needed to choose an area to lay myself down and I knew it was not going to be pretty. I left a hundred yard scar in the



snow behind me which made it easy for my group to locate my body. I surprised the entire group when I jumped back up on my feet. I told the group that there was no way I would sit still like a bowling pin for the next crazy person coming down that mountain. I was getting pretty good at falling down, but every time I was lying in the snow the face of an angel would be hovering over me to return my sunglasses. That was above and beyond anything I read in the brochure. Eventually I traded in the high speed demonstration on the best way to break a leg for a lounge chair and a beer. Actually once things flattened out a bit I started getting the hang of it. I was told that snow is much easier to ski. I'm sure my body would have appreciated snow. I sat down to a beer and the opportunity to check out the gathering bunnies. After a couple of beers the group wanted to go down one more run before the day ended, but at that point my body was tightening up and there was no way I would put my dice back on that table. They explained to me the way back to the viewing tower and I was on my own.

When I came around the last bend I could see the lookout tower. That was the place where non-skiing tourist would come to view the Matterhorn up close. I was standing atop the last slope which was at a very steep angle, 45 degrees, all ice with water running down in streams on both sides and it ended about three quarters of the way down into exposed rocks. That was not good. I hadn't yet mastered the art of stopping, so there was no way I was going to risk skiing down it. So for over a hundred yards I swallowed my pride and walked down edge to edge. I must have fallen at least thirty times. That was the most embarrassing moment of my entire life. I was cold, wet, bruised and humiliated. I snuck into the hostel early to shower and remained undetected to avoid paying for another night. I gathered up my belongings, checked in the ski gear and escaped on the first train out.

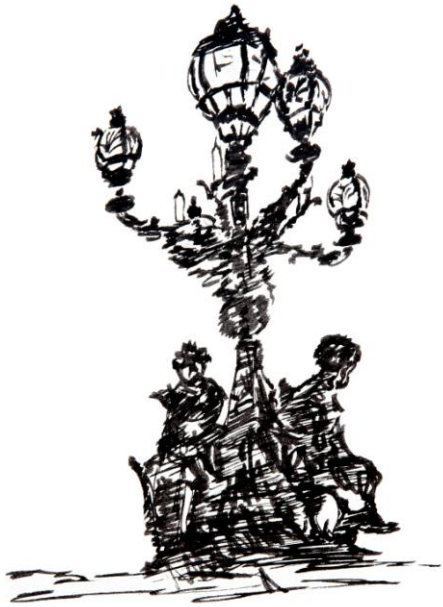
The train to Visp this time traveled through the darkness of the approaching valley. Then I took another train into Brig and another to Burn. On the train into Burn I met a young lady who put down her knitting to keep me company. I was standing at a crossroad and needed to decide what my next steps were going to be, where I would go next. I was considering heading into the Black Forrest or north into France so I took out a train schedule and searched out the most accommodating train that would allow me to get a fair night's sleep. I decided to wake up in Paris. I couldn't begin to explain how sore my body was. I could hardly make the walk into Burn for a bite to eat. Even though I arrived early to get a good seat on the night train into Paris, every compartment was filled and provided me very little if any room to stretch my legs. I chose to share a compartment with five girls. After about an hour of sitting there I just couldn't take it any longer. I told them the story of my ski adventure to lead into my reasoning why I going to lay myself down on the floor of the compartment. "Please try your best not to step on me."

When one of the five young ladies left one of the girls suggested that if I got off the floor I could lie down on the seat next to her and place my head on her lap. Seemed like good enough offer. She was sweet and I once I got conformable I fell into a deep sleep. I was exhausted. Eventually the two of us had one whole side of the compartment to ourselves. Later I discovered that she was from Newcastle England and was heading home from holiday. When we reached Paris I noticed that she was sporting a few too many bags so I went out of my way help her trek her bags across the city to her next train. We shared breakfast across from the station. It was a good spot for me to kick around in after she

boarded her train for home. I had an extra hour to burn until my train was scheduled to leave so I sat around and caught up on my journal. I had decided to head west to Rouen to see its cathedral. Walking in Monet's footsteps.

Sometimes when I take photographs I place more value on where I am standing than what I am looking at. In Rouen I stood where Monet stood. I preferred the light and shade of a subject, the dark spaces that define its character and capture the surroundings of the moment, revealing its alternations. That evening's twilight was a symphony colored in grey and rose that I watched as I waited for the sun to set.

After hanging around the church I boarded a local train towards Reims. As hard as I tried I just couldn't find a smile anywhere. I felt as if I were trespassing or something so I took their hint. I sat in the back and watched as many offered two cheeks as our train stopped at every crossing to pick up students. I on the other hand kind of was raised with the reluctance of touch. Sporting a cigarette was the sign of popularity here and maybe nine in every ten chose that path. A little misinformation and a couple of wrong turns yet I ended up where I needed to be, in front of a glass of wine. The desk clerk suggested a place to grab some food which turned out to be an excellent suggestion. I considered myself lucky with all the excellent meals I had stumbled across. I had some difficulty reading the menu and the waiter wasn't even going to try to help. Luckily a foreigner intervened and provided me some needed guidance. A woman sitting across the way caught my eye and I kept sneaking peaks. I don't know why maybe it was my bruised body but I wasn't about to make any type of move. I was in a rehabilitation mode, injured.



The next morning I awoke early and watched the sun rise from the steps of the church and waited for the city to wake up around me. I headed back to the hostel for breakfast and then proceeded to tour the champagne caves, the soul province of starry nights and sun flowers. I started out exploring Jaittirgers and ended the day at Ronnery's. When I use the word exploring, I mean exploring. Those champagne cellars extended miles like roots under the soil. If I stumbled across somebody questioning I would explain I was searching for the restroom. That worked every time. There's something to say for pledging ignorance. It takes a man to do so and it sure helps in avoiding turbulence. There was nothing much they could do but kick me out. I purchased a few bottles on my way out and once I settled in on the train I opened one up. I was sitting in a first class compartment by myself. As I was removing the cork from the bottle of Champaign it jetted straight into the mirror across from where I was sitting breaking it into pieces. Since champagne was now dripping down the compartment's wall and the seat across from me was littered with glass, considering my history with conductors has not been good, I gathered up my things and distanced myself. Every time someone passed by I hid my bottle. When I finally reached Paris again I started out by followed up on a few invitations I had been holding onto, but quickly discovered that two young ladies were off at school and the third number I was

given was incorrect.

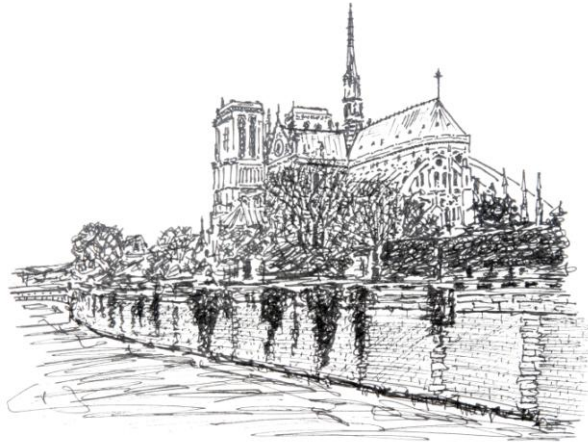
I love France but that, "Why don't you just go home and leave us alone" attitude had to go. I threw away the need for directions and wandered through its streets. Eventually I located the line that lead to locating an inexpensive room. It almost wrapped around the block. Since I was alone I began looking through the crowd for a possible roommate and struck up a conversation with a lovely young lady and her mother. Through the course of that conversation I also met a gentleman from the States and found out that he only lived about a block and a half from where I had stayed in San Francisco. The room they had given us was one hell of a trek across the city. My new roommate had permanently damaged his leg from a motorcycle accident and his top speed was about the walking pace of elderly man. Walking across Paris with one slow gear was not easy and very dangerous. There are a of lot corners where the cars show up from out of nowhere and the streets are wide. Our room turned out to have the makings of a nightmare. It was dirty, dark and you could tell that rats had passed through on more than one occasion. If by God's hand we were to experience an earthquake someone would need to dig us out. My luck didn't stop there. There was only one single bed. So I took the floor and took my chances with the rats.

The two of us wandered through the parks and down along the river, eventually resting along side a beer. My roommate decided to head back and catch up on some sleep. I on the other hand hadn't seen enough of the lights. Following the flow, seeking out smiles, having a couple more drinks, a few conversations and before I knew it I was on the other side of the city with tired feet. I decided to sacrifice all that and try the subway back. I discovered that it too had a flavor of its own, music. Miles Davis like tones echoed through the tunnels and I found myself follow groups of local youths traveling from one artist to another. Many of those acts were pretty good and for just some spare change. As long as I didn't head up to the surface I could go from station to station and check out one act after another. It was like I had joined an underground of characters. Sometimes traveling with those types are just as interesting as the acts themselves.

*Scepter and crown, come tumble down, now it rises from the underground. Can you hear the music?
Beauty in this world, she lies, hidden in its home, there once, then gone again, with the wind she roams
An echoing song, like the leaves dance with the wind, I've seen them, pass in silence, or stand and watch again
I have seen it, grow and die there, in these places where it's free, a walk, along the subway, I can still hear it's melody
It's an easy way to get there, in and out again, yet me, like lots of others, who wander to its end
Beauty in this world, she lies, hidden in its home, there once, then gone again, with the wind she roams*

I got in late and getting sleep was difficult at best. Besides being on the floor, one argument after another echoed between the buildings. It was like a bad comedy. I couldn't understand the language but I knew what those arguments were about. I awoke to a teeming city, my head full of dreams and ready to commingle reality with my web of myths I have collected over time. I chased the changes from the edges of the city and then worked my way back toward the center.

I attached myself to the rear of a group touring Notre Dame. After I came down from the tower I found myself sitting among delinquents in the square just outside the church. After I finished a cigarette I proceeded down to the Louve. It took me all day to wander its halls, a maze of inconveniences. I planned on coming back in a day or two to catch up on what I missed. I always wanted to learn how to paint, so I enjoyed watching the students copy the masters. Sometimes my honest curiosity would be embraced but there was just too much to absorb in a day. I like the rain; it's those damp chestnut trees that give Paris that sweet smell. I was surrounded by the dancing colors of the Seine as I meandered about. Crossing path with lovers made me a bit sad that I was sharing this with no one, walking alone.



Paris is a beautiful city with all its parks and I took advantage resting alongside a glass of wine on my way to the Toude Plaume. If I was a painter I would be an impressionist. I believe the reality lies within its distance of clarity. Photographs can never quite capture the mood of the artist.

I even gained a new perspective of rush hour traffic, Paris style. There was no courtesy when it came to the French. Pushing and shoving, even the lampposts have their arms crossed. One man while trying to get off a subway car got entangled with a ladies purse straps and he actually turned and struck her. I was shocked. Everybody standing within view had the expression that his actions were not out of line but common place. I place all my weight on one foot, crossed, had my hands in my pocket and a shoulder wedged against an arm pole and let my body sway with the movements of the subway train. Looking length wise through the door into the adjacent car, I still have flashbacks of Jacob's Ladder playing over in my mind. Eyes were staring back with that blank look and trying to make as little contact as possible. Twenty, forty, sixty, sometimes they made me feel like a ghost. Since I planned on taking an early train into Versailles tomorrow, I kind of curtailed my consumption of alcohol. I loved those streets, their width, brass lamps and beds of flowers. Paris demands an awful lot of walking and I slept like a baby.

The wind blowing through the trees surrounding Versailles whispered voices from it past. Is it a revolt? No it is a revolution. Words. Words that had challenged the cast system of the church and the rich. Science, literature and invention tore the fabric of the aristocrats. It started here. A revolution now and then can be healthy thing. I followed an English speaking tour to gather additional information. It was a beautiful home but the maintenance bill must have been outrageous. I guess it is good to be King? I spent a good deal of time wandering the grounds, relaxing under the trees and since the day was warmer than normal, I enjoyed the mist from the many gorgeous fountains. With a late arrival back into Paris, again like the night before, I enjoyed a cigarette from the top of the Eiffel tower. It was such a beautiful view. But let me tell ya, it is quite a height and for anybody who might be afraid of heights, this would definitely be good material for a bad dream. After another long day that dragged the life out of me, I was tired and decided that any type of partying was out of the question, I headed straight toward a pillow and a dirty floor.

*Through the darkness and the mist, sadness, grows and somehow my soul, it just can't resist,
those many things, it does not know, the pain, the anger, within these waves of violence, still they remain
unbroken by the silence*

*The candles wax burns, as it drips down the sides, slowly we turn but I can't close my eyes
The sounds, the pictures, with every step grow intense and remain,
unbroken by the silence.*

Along side the rising sun and took the early train toward St. Malo. On that train I caught up on filling out stories on post cards and when I finally reached St. Malo the post office was my first destination. I was still disappointed that I

had lost my address book back in Scotland, but on the other hand I had fewer cards to fill out. After I got situated in my room, I took a walk along the shore. The ocean was crashing against the wall with an authority that made me feel alive. There is nothing in this world that makes me feel more alive than when nature shows it strength and I love it so. I was surprised at how reasonable prices were for groceries here in comparison what I saw in Paris. Every once and awhile it was nice to have access to a kitchen. I have a tendency to start up conversations and began talking with a pair of young ladies using the opposite stove. Our conversation migrated into the courtyard alongside a few bottles of wine and our party grew at the rate of about one new member every ten minutes or so. It's kind of funny how things work out. It always seemed that the larger the group the less interesting the conversations. The night progressed into that dullness which gave me a good reason to catch up on some sleep.



At the breakfast table there were rumors of another train strike, so about six of us headed out early to attempt to board the last train prior to any stoppage. Our destination was Mont-St-Michel. When the island first came within view I stood there for some time and gazed at its glory. It had more a look of a cover to a picture book than something actually real, a castle right out of some fairytale. There were endless fields of mud waiting for the imprint of somebody's foot. I wandered outside its walls, in and out of a few shops but the best sight was in the church where I found an unexpected flower dancing in the colored light from a stained glass window. I tried to capture it on film but it was pretty dark and I didn't carry a flash.

I trekked along Michel's outer wall and stubbed upon a small church on its back side. This small church had the look of an album cover from the seventies and I'm sure made a really interesting picture. I would have enjoyed staying here for the night but there were no accommodations and since the tides like galloping horses began rushing in I needed to get moving. The trains had stopped as expected so I sought out a bus back to St. Malo. I asked a local how long I should expect to wait. Thirty minutes seemed reasonable so I sat alongside a beer and waited. But it never came. Sitting in one place seemed to me like a waste of time when the countryside was gorgeous and inviting so I began to walk. I think the thing that had struck me first was that there were no telephone lines or poles to obstruct the view of trees and fields of corn. I tried my thumb on a few occasions but I ended up almost walking the entire distance. I guess it's kind of funny when you think about it. I had walked for hours and hours and when I finally hitched a ride we were in town about the same amount of time it took me to attach my seat belt. I was dropped off at the waterfront and it was incredible, the ocean had vanished. The few small pools that were left behind were almost dry from the sun. I met up with a few locals who were kind enough to teach me some of the finer points of wind racing. There were groups all sporting large sail three wheeled carts. This was the perfect place and it looked like a lot of fun. The sand was dry and flat and the wind was strong and consistent, they really could maintain some speed. I struck up a conversation with a young lady I had noticed in one of the shops on Mont-St-Michel. We kind of shared the sunset and wandered about the coast until her bus arrived. After a kiss on the cheek I ended up in a small local bar alone but felt right at home after a few beers. Somebody had even persuaded me to write one of my poems on the wall of the bar.

*She was but a child of the wind, free to play in the leaves, time was hers, life was pretend, a forest from the trees
she'd run along the river's edge with her imaginary friends, the days were long and the current strong,
and they never seemed to end*

See's only what she wants to see, cares not about the pain, nothin ever changes, in the eyes of the estranged

*She was taken to the city, where the faces always change and she discovered very quickly, here, a smile's not the same
they took to her like bees to honey, saying what she wants to hear, wandering eyes, in search for money,
a trade in silence for her tears*

See's only what she wants to see, cares not about the pain, nothin ever changes, in the eyes of the estranged

*She's always said, "my love lies sleeping" cradled in his arms, cause she remembers a better place,
where it's all so peace and calm*

I wandered about the northern coast of France skipping from hostel to hostel and enjoying their fine cuisine. Finding excellent food was easy but locating a smile or a friendly gesture from the locals was sometimes impossible. I felt that the rudeness the Northern French dished out actually provided the glue that bonded us tourists closer together. I came across a nice room in Blois and utilized it as home base to visit the chateaus in the area. The room was so picturesque but cold, still, my imagination wandered. Living around that much wealth, I couldn't get rid of the feeling like I had stolen something. "The best investment is in the stomachs of the hungry". I wished I had more resources.

Eventually I ended up back in Paris and I found myself in the company of the local elderly. They too enjoyed watching the many colors of children roaming the many passages that networked the parks. My plan was to head back into Germany. The local paper predicted sunny weather. I also had a few friends and a relative that were stationed with the US military in Germany just outside of Frankfurt. I thought I'd look them up while in the area. I sat in a small café looking over a cup of coffee onto a street, catching up on my writing and waiting until it was time to get up and board a train into Amsterdam. There I planned on picking up some hash on my way through so I would not arrive empty handed but bearing gifts. I grabbed a bite to eat and was back on train heading into Germany.

2. *I have followed the river, it extends and leads to the paradox of man and his will
 For I am free only to choose from the available options that nature presents, presents along its banks
 I do not control the outcome of my own choices nor are these outcomes aligned with my intentions
 but rather controlled by an environment I am not equipped to understand
 You could come to believe most anything, in an endless pursuit of the answers, who am I to say
 but I have come to know that at the root of every single strain of my being, lies fear
 because the most fundamental questions to my existence have no answers and I fear what I do not know
 The Biblical conflict of Adam summarizes, he being told that all doors remain open but one
 curiosity would eventually grow towards such an obstacle
 our nature is at conflict.*

*We must know the truth and we must avoid error and we cannot escape this reality
 before us extends an endless choice between directions,
 and if we are to grow and to survive, we are to choose
 for if I stand at the crossroads and remain skeptical, waiting for more light before I decide between directions
 I would be allowing my doubt to be cast between the light and myself
 to remain, hiding in the darkness between, "neither hot nor cold"
 "such a man would not gain what a trusting man would earn"
 and this choosing between truth and error
 we create apart from nature.*

XX

Road Map:

Portugal	Faro, Ayamonte
Spain	Huelva, Sivilla [<i>Palace, Cathedral, Giralda, St. Carrona Church</i>], Antequera, Malaga, Nerja " <i>Costa Del Sol</i> ", Malaga, Granada, Jaen [<i>Alhambra, Cathedral</i>], Madrid, Avila, Toledo, Valencia, Barcelona
France	La Tour De Carol, Toulouse [<i>Toulouse Castle</i>], Carcassonne [<i>Bezler, Nile Castle</i>], Narbonne, Sete, Montpellier, Nimes, Aries [<i>Roman Arena, Church, Picasso's Collection</i>], Marseille, Nimes, Aoulon, St. Tropez, Cannes, Nice, Monaco [<i>Casino, Prices Palace of Monaco</i>], St. Raphael, Ventimigia
Italy	San Remo, Savona, Genova, Milano [<i>Leonardo's Last Supper, Sota Maria Belle, Grazle, Cathedral, Michalangeol's Piet A Ron Daliny, Raphel's Marriage of the Virgin, Museum, Turino, Milano, Como</i>
Switzerland	Brig, Spiez, Friboura, Lausanne [<i>Cathedral Notre Dame of Lausanne, Lake, Museum "Metally Distrubbed"</i>], Morges, Geneve, Lausanne, Angles, Sion, Visp, Zermatt [<i>Matterhorn, Cemetery, "Sking"</i>], Visp, Brig, Burn
France	Paris [<i>Eiffel Tower, Champ's Elysee's, Notre Dame, Arc-De-Triumphe, Palace Des Vosques, Oureit Square, View - Musee De Jeude Daume, Musee De'Orangeria</i>], Versaillie [<i>"Palace of the Sun", Trianous, Lehamen, Marie Antoinetts Play House</i>], Fontanebleau, Roven, Amiens, Reims [<i>Cathedral, Champagne Caves</i>], Paris, Chartres, Le Man's, Rennes, Dol, St Malo [<i>Le Silion Beach, Ramparts</i>], Mont-St-Michel, Dinan [<i>Medieval Town, Vieille Ville</i>], Dol, Remnes, Savenay, Labaule - St. Nazaire, Nates, Angers [<i>Tapestries of the Apocalypse, Cathedral St. Maurice, Moutee St. Maurice, Surrounding Walls</i>], Blois, Paris
Belgium	Brussels
Netherlands	Rotterdam, Amsterdam

XX

With all the time I've been spending on trains I started to find it difficult to sleep without the cluttering of wheel against rail. I had an address of a hostel in Frankfurt that somebody had suggested along the way. It was late and dark when I reached Frankfurt and I didn't have the best luck making sense of the piece of paper I was carrying. Once I felt that I was walking in the wrong direction I gestured to a young man on a motorcycle that had pulled over along side of me. I soon found there was a language barrier that divided us, so I showed him the address. He looked it over and per his suggestion I hopped on the back of his bike. I should have worn a helmet but on a positive note he knew and dropped me off right out front of my destination. That place had the look of a crowd with people going every which way. A pair of my roommates suggested that the three of us go out and hit the town's bars. It was obvious that it was not their first time and they had a pretty good idea where things were happening. I ended up crawling home that night. After a half dozen or so bars I had no choice but to call it a night. I had met a lot of friendly faces and a few nice pairs of legs. It seemed as if every time I bought myself a drink somebody matched it. There was one young lady that followed me around like a puppy. She was sexy and willing, but perhaps too willing. She invited me back to her place but there was a little voice in my head telling me to stay away. I don't remember falling asleep just fighting off bed spins.

I got up early to catch a train for the short ride to the local military base. I soon discovered that sporting an American passport and a signature from any American I crossed path with could get me into any compound. I was surprised how easy that was and the fact that I was never searched struck me as odd. I didn't quite know what to do when the horn first blew but since everybody else stood still I did the same. I entered my cousin's room to learn that he had taken leave and they expected him to be gone for a few days, bad timing on my part. They first didn't believe that Bill was my cousin and were quite shocked at the differences between the two of us. They explained that he would occasionally visit a young woman living in the city and sometimes would stop by for a change of clothes, "Who knows he might show" said one of Bill's roommates. I took their advice and agreed to hang around for the day in case he did show. I joined in on a game of basketball, had the weight room to myself, relaxed in the sauna and even swam a few laps in the pool. It was like I had joined club America.

Talk about impressive, I was surprised how fast the tanks could move. I stood just feet away while they were making a forty-five degree turn. The sound and power was overwhelming and demanded respect. As I wandered about the grounds I felt as if I was that little redheaded boy from the twilight zone that could send anybody he disliked to the cornfield. I suppose my long hair and outfit was left of the norm and nobody knew who I was or why I was there.

I thought since I had some time to burn I'd tried to find a friend from high school, Xavier. I understood he was station somewhere in the Frankfurt area. Through odd sequence of events I ended up in a Generals' office. He made several attempts including a few phone calls but since I did not have Xavier's social security number his efforts came up empty. Before I headed back into Frankfurt, I made one more attempt to see if Bill had shown up. "No, we hadn't seen him but why not hanging around a bit and join the party". One of Bill's roommates opened up a bottle of champagne and I surprised them all with some hash I was carrying as a gift for Bill and Xavier. "Shit yea", after a few hits my paranoia surfaced and I began thinking about the consequences of getting caught here. Actually I didn't have any idea what the repercussions would be. They didn't seem at all that concerned but I decided to be safe and hit the road.

On the way back to Frankfurt I met up with a few of the young ladies I had met from the night before. There was a German demonstration that was beginning to conclude. Along its fringes things got a bit out of control and somebody ended up dead. That day's path started and ended at the train station. I had planned on taking a late train out to reduce my expenses and dropped off my bags so I could avoid carrying them around while wandering the city. It was a repeat of the night before with the same young ladies, except that time we ended the night at their apartment. I wasn't really hooking up with anybody and chose a ride to the train station instead of a bed. I woke up just before it entered Heidelberg station.

First I sought out pastries and then a cup of coffee to the day. Watched the city wake up in kind of in a dream like state. I was still a bit drunk and very tired. I searched out the address of local hostel that was suggested to me and located it just between the main square of the old city and the castle. It was a great location. I knocked on the door and was greeted by an angry frown. She was not a happy person. When she began to spell out the rules of the house, I began trying to recall who had given me this address. I now viewed that suggestion in a completely different light. "No other people allowed in the room. No women. Don't hang out in front. No noise. No noise. No noise." OK, OK, OK! I couldn't wait to get out of there.

I walked through the old square checking out the shops. Even though I have no musical ability I always had a liking for the harmonica, so I picked one up as a souvenir. I trekked up to the castle and sat outside the walls that remained. Looking over the city I caught up on some writing and waited for the sun to escape the clouds and then I called it a day. With dusk I ended up back along the river's edge. With a cigarette in hand I leisurely watched the white swans navigate the current. As the rain began to creep in I headed back toward my room. A few of the guys had suggested we go looking for some action, some beers. The three of us settled down in a small bar on the older side of town. We were sitting at a table that looked to have a century of names carved across its face. I don't recall how it got started but our group enlarged to include a bunch of Germans and few Australians. The Australians started drinking games and challenged the German's manhood. It must have been fun to watch. In hind sight I don't remember a single rule but I do remember that we stacked up glasses and plates and drank a lot of beer. We were having fun and carried it out into the streets when the bar's doors closed. I was the last of the original group and walked about a half block behind the majority of our crowd that had left the bar. When this group had reached the place I was staying, they began screaming and pounding on her door. Apparently the proprietor was not well liked. Others avoided her all together by crossing and walking on the other side of the street. I guess what comes around goes around. There's a lot to be said about being nice to everybody, to be liked.

I woke up with a serious problem. I don't know if it was the combination of the exercise the other day, the consumption of alcohol or both but my arms had stiffened to the point where I could not extend them beyond a forty five degree angle. I tried carried my bags first in one hand and then the other using the weight of the bags to help stretch out my muscles, very scary.

I headed south into Baden and made a nutritional stop of berries and nuts, along with a long mineral bath. It was a well needed vacation from the flow of large groups and moving from place to place.

I made believe that I actually had a room in one of those upper class hotels; I actually took advantage of their patio furniture. I tipped the waiter heavily a few times and then practically owned the place. My table overlooked the river and beautiful willow trees. It was the perfect place to take a break.



I located a hostel in the countryside just down the B500 Schwarzwaldhochstrasse into Kreudenstradt. My scenic bus ride ended on an empty street in rural Germany which was a little eerie since there was not one person to be found on their streets. I got the feeling that they were looking from behind curtains watching my every move. I took advantage of the Hostel's large kitchen table and laid out all the maps and notes I had accumulated over the past month or so and organized them. I was at a kind of crossroad. My next steps were not yet defined and needed to be. I decided to continue south into the Black Forrest and then further south into Italy. I got a good sleep and lightened up my bags a bit.

I stopped in Karlsruhe for something to eat and decided to head through Offerberg and then into Strasborg for a day or two. I had had four consecutive days of good weather and today was no different. The water just smiled back with the reflection of the autumn leaves. I loved the way the city was broken into pieces by the water. At the end of every one of my wanderings I ended up strolling upon lovers in the act of romance, which reminded me again I was alone. I eventually located the ideal spot alongside a grassy hill and under the warm sun took a nap. Sometimes day dreams continue after sleep. I sketched out a lot of notes that day. There's a lot to be said for the environmental influence of certain locations. I have begun discarding unfinished poems and notes into the garbage. Mary Jane may be a muse at times and there are a lot of "What was I thinking? or perhaps "Did I read this someplace else?"

*Leaves of autumn, burning through the gray, your leaves, that reluctant branches stray
how many seasons, has this tamed heart known, the bright leaves, lying where the flowers grown
this world grows cold, as crystal and as clear, as a leaf, in season falls this year*

I got into an interesting conversation with a young lady while heading back into Germany. I enjoy conversations where all are willing to expose weaknesses and to share personal details, especially when those conversations included an attractive young lady. That conversation earned me a goodbye kiss.

I found a gorgeous room in Fribourg that overlooked the main square that surrounded the church. It had a lovely café out front and was an ideal location to watch foot traffic and to catch up on my journal. There was a gentleman who showed up playing the harmonica and really put on a show. Talk about envy, "I wish I could play like that". I liked wandering Fribourg's narrow streets, the rows of small close-set shutter windows, tall dormers covered in fish scales and the gutters that line each street brought back fond memories. On rainy days when I was about six, I was allowed to go into the street in front of our home and race boats against myself down the curbed gutter. I had a blast challenging the local kids to boat races.

I decided to head deeper into the black forest and boarded a late afternoon train heading south into Titisee. Rich meadows, dairy farms dotted with gardens, villa's set among orchards and well-wooden hills stretched away into the horizon as I entered into the mantle of the forest. There stood the tress that hid where Hansel and Gretel were left to stew. "Mysterious spreads the forest where strange shy creatures bide, within its dim remoteness who knows what wonders hide?" I don't know where I heard it or who had told me that the Virgin watches over those who travel in those dark places. Those were the thought that stayed with me as I walked under their shadows.

I ended my trek at a large hostel overlooking a soccer field and sat alongside the hill allowing my youth to rise up and fill myself with the desire to join in. This was quiet place and clean. I must have stood in the shower for at least an hour. It had been a long time since I had found hot water under that kind of pressure. I decided to make this my home base for a few days as it made an ideal location from which to explore the Black Forest. It was nice to settle down somewhere for a time and to know where I'd be sleeping and to avoid having to carry my dirty clothes around with me. I spent a day at the lake, went in and out of cuckoo shops after cuckoo shops and took hikes into the forest. I love trees and always get the feeling that they are looking over me. I had the opportunity here to wash everything I owned and once packed back up, I headed towards Basel.

On the way to Basel somewhere between Zurich and Chur I met a young Italian sporting jewelry from head to toe. It appeared that he hadn't showered in about a week or so. He wandered up and asked me if I had a light gesturing with his pre-smoked cigarette. He didn't have to get too close for me to notice that he wasn't just smoking tobacco. I turned down sharing his wet cigarette but introduced the idea to him of selling me some for the road. I then realized that I only had traveler checks and not enough pocket change to make any kind of impact. I guess between the toes is the place for hiding hash in these parts. He pinched off a piece and handed it to me saying "Have a good time". I got off the train in Chur to search for food. Late that afternoon I headed into Innsbruck and arrived relatively late. Everything was closed up. The skies were cloudy but surprisingly it wasn't all that cold so I headed towards the hostel I had stayed in before, to find that it was also closed for the night. I picked out a park bench just north along the river and with my pillow and jacket I managed to fall asleep, but that only lasted for about an hour or so. I laid there debating on what I should do and that debate woke me up. Sleep began to look as if it were no longer an option. I had no idea what time it was but assumed it was about three in the morning, so I decided to head back to the train station for a hot cup of coffee. Talk about good timing, the exact second I walked into the station the sky opened up and rain literally bounced off the pavement. It's funny how things that looked as if they're against me actually turned in my favor.

I managed to get some sleep just prior to boarding an early train into Villach. I didn't have anything to read and I was getting a little bored. I got out some colored pencils I had been carrying for some time and began coding a chart of guitar chords. I was focused in on what I was doing, dreaming about something when I noticed a strong feeling that I

was being watched. I looked over to my left and sitting a couple of rows down the car were three of the cutest little girls all dressed up for Sunday church. I guessed the oldest might have been about six. The three of them sat there in a row staring at me with the same smile on each of their faces, as if they were waiting for me to smile back. When I did give them a smile, each of their faces bloomed like spring flowers. Their parents could not get over their obsession with me. Their mother explained how out of character her girls were behaving, "Usually they are so shy". In that moment they made me feel special, really special.

As our train headed south the valleys of green that once surrounded us slowly began turning gold. I got off that train in Villach and spent about four hours wandering about searching for a place to sit down and eat. Even after I finished a rather large meal I continued bouncing between pastries shops, devouring in seconds items that most likely took hours to prepare if not days. I reminded myself how important it is to savor every second, every breath and every pastry. Life is delicious. Don't pass it by. What I didn't eat I carried onto my train to Venice. I was alone in a compartment with a young musician who was leaving Austria to compete for a seat in an orchestra in Rome. She seemed a bit nervous at the idea of competition but I'm sure this wasn't the first time nor would it be the last time she'd be fighting over a seat. She shared her past and it was laced with stories of luxuries and opportunities, well bred and well financed. Her only real responsibility was her dedication to the violin. Different worlds meet on a train.



A thick fog had embraced Venice. From the station I could see the top of a few building and the edge of a bridge that led into the clouds. I stood among numerous other travelers hanging out on the steps of the station. They gave me the impression that it was the inexpensive way to go but I walked across the bridge in search of a room anyway. As I was crossing the bridge I overheard a conversation in English and latched onto it quickly. I inquired if they knew where I could locate a room for the night. Those two young ladies thought it would be easier to walk me to where they were staying rather than attempting to map out directions, alcohol was involved. When we reached the desk clerk we were in conversation, laughing and that gentleman got the wrong impression. When I asked for a room he said he would not allow one guy with two girls in his establishment and my explaining that he had the wrong idea fell on deaf ears. Venice is not an easy place to wander about at night. Everything is boarded up and most of the street lights are dim. Still I located a room that was pricey but it was late and I was tired. Like in most cases I did manage to haggle a few dollars in my direction. The room was small and it was almost on the roof but it did have a balcony overlooking a canal. I sat out onto the balcony, rolled up a joint and smoked it looking into the fog that filled in the space in

between the buildings. I sat there thinking, wrote down a few thoughts, pleased myself and went to sleep.

I finished last night's joint out on the balcony and then spent about an hour watching the taxi jockey for position and transport the masses from place to place. A unique perspective on canal life. I passed a few dollars into the hands of a boat owner who showed me around the channels. I figured that was a good first step to accustom myself to the island. I traced the labyrinths of narrow streets and waterways and watched gargoyles pass under arches where the king of ghosts and shadows once danced. I sat in St. Marco's square watching the locals until the pigeons got annoying. Eventually I located a nice little café, had a very good meal and wandered about the shops. Sometimes shopping could be a drag for somebody like me who has a good eye but lacked the necessary funds. Venice would be a grand place if one could just turn off all the tourism. What things must have once been like back when Polo returned. I blended into the night and finished a long day gazing down on the canal from my balcony.

Venice gave me a feeling like I was stepping back into the past, allowing myself to be influenced by its colors and mood. I would intentionally lose myself in the labyrinth of canals and squares. Penetrating deeper into its heart, I found myself captivated by the colored lights from bird cages, vases of flowers and the passing of gondolas that danced against the canvas of sun drenched paint and exposed brick. I followed the voices that echoed of great events and resonated in striking the hour of the day and pulled me into the main square.

*Disrobed down to a child, I've dreamt outside the gate, no feathers for this head I lay, no pride, nor fear, nor hate,
the world is my home, yet, I'm so alone, imprisoned by the wait*

*Far inside the day has risen, deep inside echo's a cry, as if a silent voice from heaven,
was seeking out, this place I lie*

*I stood beside the table, for a scrap to fill my plate, then melted into the night alone, no pride, nor fear, nor hate,
the world is my home, yet, I'm so alone, imprisoned by the wait*

*Far behind the day has ended, in the breath of another day,
with a withered body & tired feet, I seek out, a place to lay*

The world is my home, yet, I'm so alone, imprisoned by the wait

Took a morning boat to Giudecca to visit a glass shop and took advantage of the weather and the sand. The hostel I went to check out was over crowded with mostly children running about, so spent the remains of the day back on the main island. Before dark I had gathered up my things and boarded a train towards Padova. Across from me sat a beautiful young lady with a twinkle in her eye and I caught a smile or two. Sex was in the air so I broke the ice. "Will you have lunch with me?" I asked. She explained that she was on her way to meet a friend and that the two of them had a law exam in two days and were going to do some studying. She leaned toward me, planted a kiss and handed me an address. She explained that the address was her sister's place and she would be there in a few days and would look forward to get acquainted. This had all the trimmings of a date to look forward to.

When I reached Padova I headed straight to the hostel to ensure I had myself a bed for the night. I had been given some bad directions and ended up in front of a church instead. The church was covered in a cloud of depression. Everyone coming or going was dressed in black. There was not a smile to be found and I cannot recall if anybody even looked me directly in the eyes. It was like they had just been, or expected to be, scolded. There was a long line of people waiting for the opportunity to kiss a glass case which contained a body part of St. Antonis. I could sure agree with those that might think such a practice as odd. I stood over to the left and wondered why the human soul doesn't get up off its knees and do what is right. "My soul was like a leaf, wrapped up in the morning tide" My view is that Gods prefers loving actions over prayer and ceremony so I brought a few beers and sat across in the park waiting for somebody in need. It didn't take long to locate a conversation and once they discovered that I did not speak Italian and was from the other side of the world they began treating me like a novelty. "Do you know here he is from?", "Say something". I made curfew but the jury was still out on if that was a good thing. That place had the feel of an institution and the food solidified that conclusion.

I was out at first light and headed toward Bologna. While standing in the train station in front of an electronic schedule I noticed three young ladies behind me looking over my shoulder. They were three young Americans also looking for the train to Florence, so I introduced myself. Since the four of us had three hours to burn until our train departed, I accompanied one of the young ladies through the streets in search of a sweater. Her mother had purchased her father a sweater from Bologna years ago that he had always enjoyed. She thought it would make a great gift so we went searching. When we returned to the park to meet up with the other half of our group they were surrounded by men, each taking their shot at romance. We kind of provided the needed excuse to say goodbye.

I don't recall how we ended up on the wrong train. We were on the correct platform and the train we boarded left at the expected time. We were having a good time, the conversations were interesting but then it hit me. We were traveling in the wrong direction. When I first mentioned it everybody thought I was teasing. Once they knew I was serious we tried to communicate with the locals on the train to confirm my notion. Shit! I quickly began reviewing the train schedules and decided our best bet was to get off at the next stop and head back the way we came. My three new lady friends had intended to meet some friends in Florence but the best we could do under our new circumstances was to arrive two hours late if nothing else went wrong. So we got off the train in a small station with time to burn. Thank God they sold bottles of wine.

We ended up in Florence exactly two hours late. We looked about but didn't see any of their friends. So instead of walking around searching for them I suggested sitting in front of one of the restaurants in view of where we were to meet. That way we could take advantage of the situation and get something to eat at the same time. The food was excellent but I almost lost a tooth. I ate a Canzone and the olives hidden inside still had their pits. Now I know better. We gave up on their friends and decided it was best to head toward the hostel to ensure we had beds for the night. So we crossed the river and located the front door of the address in hand. The gentlemen at the door explained "There's room for the ladies but you'll have to look elsewhere". So we made arrangements to meet up the next morning there at the clerk's desk. I was given an address of another hostel on the opposite corner of the city that possibly could accommodate men and I headed out alone into the night. I stopped along the way to enjoy some of the life gathered in the Plaza Della Signoria. There were acts on every corner and the music echoed between the buildings. I circulated between acts and meandered toward the hostel. A young couple approached me and said something in Italian. I respond with a look of curiosity. They attempted again. It was apparent that they were begging for money, or more accurately making fun of begging for money. I reached in my pocket and pulled out my change purse exposing what change I had available. Their laughter increased when they realized that I had less money than they did so they offered me some of theirs to continue the joke. When I finally arrived at the address I was given I suppose I had to consider myself lucky because only one bed remained. I was to share a room with seven others. Florence was currently experience a drought so house rules were established regarding showers; they could only be taken between seven and nine in the morning. Well, that mean I need to be the first up and first out. It didn't take long for somebody to start pounding on the door.

I'm up and out first almost everyday. I enjoyed walking the empty streets before they were taken over. Today this gave me an opportunity to see the entire church floor without anybody cluttering on top of it. I've seen a lot of churches and considered this one boring but there's something to say about being alone in a church of that size. As my time approached I meandered along the river walking among groups of school kids gathering before class. I managed to find my way back to the girl's hostel. I considered myself early so I made myself comfortable in an adjacent lounge and accepted the free coffee. I was catching up on some writing when a gentleman started up a conversation. Eventually I checked the bulletin boards to discover a note addressed to me. Apparently the girls didn't think to check the lounge. They headed into town early and suggested we meet up later that day. I headed to the museum and wandered behind a group of students to take advantage of their guide. All of the students were from the United States

and ranged from about nine to maybe eleven years old. They were each given an assignment sheet to fill out in association with their trek through the museum. I thought it in good humor to provide some of the students answers with perspectives that would shock their teacher, some correct and comical. When I got tired of walking I took a break and rested at one of the windows looking out from the third floor onto the square below. I noticed below a pick pocket casing the crowd. I pointed him out to two others and we had fun trying to warn anybody he was about to make contract with. He got annoyed with us and scampered off.

Somewhere in the middle of trekking around the city I came across a pair of young ladies from Rotterdam. They suggested since it was so hot outside that we should relax and put down a couple of drinks. We got to talking and were kind of hitting it off and decided to explore the Giarmino before dark. Apparently somebody was killed there a few days back and over the past month there were a couple of rapes, so they had administered a curfew over the area. We actually got chased out. We sat up on a sill at the entrance the Del Pitti and talked into the dark trading ideas on morality and life. "When it comes to, I just can't say no", she whispered in my ear. Well I say "No. No thanks". The two were on their way to Pakistan to meet up with Mother Teresa's efforts and invited me to come along. A venture like that would compromise my original plans and budget so I declined. Time took us in different directions and I eventually ended up alone in the same square as the night before. After goodbye kisses I headed across town towards my bed. By comparison that night's crowd looked as if it was prisoner's night out. Most of the crowd appeared to have avoided bathing for some time and most of their clothes looked second hand Vagabond at best. In passing by they would reach out and try to grab a hand, attempt to read a palm and aggressively attempt to solicit for money. I kept my eyes open all day and had cased the location we were to meet. But in the end there was no sign of the girls. Perhaps they never saw my note or came across it too late in the day.

I was told of a nice beach just outside of Pisa so I snuck in an early shower again and took an early train out. Tuscany provided an enchanting landscape painted in pastels. I followed the tourists to the tower in Pisa, gave my two cents and climbed to the top. With all those people hanging all over it I was surprised it hadn't fallen and decided to head down before it did. After strolling through the Duomo and viewing Ramous's doors I wandered across the river to get a feel for the countryside and sat along the side of the bridge thinking. Truth, like art is sometimes in the eye of the beholder. I was watching a young child, a girl playing with her doll. I couldn't understand the language but I knew what she was thinking. I began thinking about all the people that must have crossed that bridge, who stood in that exact spot and how short life really is. Every step, everything I do is engrained in who I am. I am here because of the path behind me. I took a late train into Tիրրeria, enjoyed sleeping in the sun and took advantage of the cold water, a nice meal, bottle of wine and a beautiful sunset. I needed days like that to recharge my batteries.

*Weight of the darkness, surrounds me, north winds begin to blow,
but the spell of another has bound me and I cannot go*

*Though the storms, she's fast descending,
and the rain has turn to snow,
still I see no bending and I cannot go*

*Clouds upon clouds, above me, my steps are becoming slow, though I tried,
I still could not see and I could not go*



I had earmarked a hostel on the outskirts of Siena but the travel guide didn't provide a good description of how to get there. I asked a young lady who was sitting across from me on the train if she knew the best way to reach this destination. She made a few attempts to explain but probably the combination of her hearing herself and the expression on my face persuaded her to just show me, so I followed her off the train. She explained that she was teacher and was early for class so she had some time to walk me across the city. She played tour guide and explained some of the sights along the way. Once we reached the other side of Siena she had written me out directions and placed me on a bus. Too bad she had a husband at home. We'll it turned out that I ended up at the hostel before it opened its doors so I took advantage of the surroundings and took a stroll through the vineyards. Beauty surrounded my every step. There was peacefulness about it. I noticed an elderly lady maintaining a garden adjacent to the local hostel and inquired when it would open its doors. She explained that wasn't going to be open for a few hours. I explained that it was rather hot outside and asked if I could be allowed to dwell inside so I could catch up on some writing. She agreed and let me in. I was sitting inside while others gathered outside in the sun. I claimed a room, washed my clothes in a nearby sink and then headed back down stairs. I met up with a group of travelers and we ended up migrating across the street where we could sit down and get some food. Once finished we wandered down through the fields of grapes. We sat down on one of the many hills and watched the sun set in the distance.

After packing up my clean clothes I headed off early into the city, sat behind a cup of coffee just off the main square, with pen in hand I watched the city wake up around me. I found myself staring at the unique inner walls of the St. Catherine's church. The inside was different from what I expected from its outside. It captured my attention and soul. The contrast between the dark and light was not like others churches I have visited. I sat off in one of the corners and



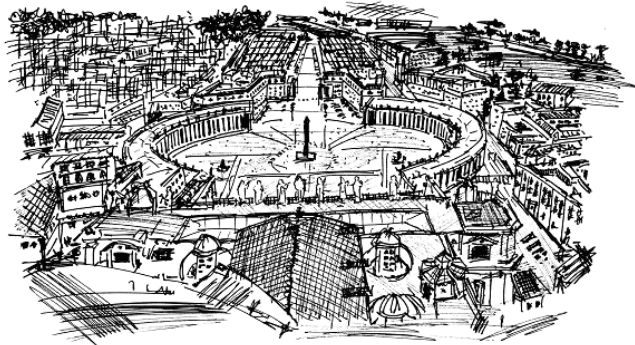
for some time stared at the many faces looking down on me. I walked around the outer wall of the city and meandered through its small narrow streets. Such a beautiful location. A group of us from the hostel gathered out in the square to enjoy the sun. Piazza del Campo still echoes with the pounding of hooves, whose beats are just ahead of the drums and colorful processions of flags. It was a good day to be in the sun. I wandered the shops and headed back to the hostel before dark. We ended up again across the street drinking and who would have thought I'd enjoy fruit cake, if you could call this fruit cake.

I headed back toward my carnal fantasies, a young law student. I showed up with a bottle of wine but it seemed that nobody was home. I sat outside for awhile but grew tired and impatient so I headed into the heart of the city. Festivities were in the air tonight. Dancing, singing and the smell of food filled the air. I assumed she too was most likely wandering among those same streets enjoying the atmosphere like I. I wandered back and made another attempt at her door but still nobody answered. I sat outside waiting when a gentleman approached. It turned out that he was the older sister's boyfriend who had just arrived from Switzerland. He was perturbed that his girlfriend wasn't home. He was not an easy guy to hang out with which was a bad sign. Even the bottle of wine didn't loosen him up. Eventually I gave up and began wandering towards the train station towards a new designation. In the back of my head I still wondered if

she was hiding up there in her room avoiding me, looking down on me through her laced curtains. I suppose we are all a bit insecure at times. We'll it looks like all these thoughts of sex only lead to where I am now, staring across a train station at two drunks that could have used a bath weeks ago. I did leave a note but I was going in one direction, south. The good news was that I had good timing on a late night train into Rome. The ideas I had entertained will only enlarge my eyes and allow the voices in the back of my head to become a bit louder.

It was an early arrival into Rome. I had in my pocket a few phone numbers and a couple of addresses handed to me along the way. After two attempts at one of these addresses there still was no answer so I obtained a map and began walking towards Saint Peter's square. I jumped on to the subway surprised to see all the graffiti. Unnecessary scars. As I entered the St. Peter's courtyard I heard whispers, like the voices of the past that never really left. Each pillar that surrounded me gave me the impression they were watching my every step. Just stones but they did have a way of making me feel connected to the past or were perhaps, just perhaps, waiting to greet. The first thing I noticed as I entered through the main doors of the cathedral and approached the altar was that there were no stain glassed windows. As I reached the main dome just left of the alter I laid down on the cold marble floor to get a unique perspective on the cathedral's dome until a priest wandered up, kicked me and asked me to remove myself from the floor.

I took advantage of being alone and added myself to the rear of a tour. I thought it always valuable to follow around someone who knew all its secrets. I suppose I got lucky because this tour I kind of joined included a walk to the roof. I tried to pay but they gestured for me to put it away. Not only was the view of the city worth the climb but to get a look down on the altar really gives one the perspective on how large this building is. Wandering down through the catacombs, I eventually ended up in front of the "Pieta" and must have stood there for quite some time, studying every curve.



Marble white as still moonlight, a dream carved from shapeless stone. I am convinced that this is the pinnacle of all human art. Like trumpets heralding the coming of judgment day, lifting the Christ as our witness. To take not just a moment but a pivotal moment in the human story and to focus the audience's attention to the beauty of the knowledge and to place that moment in stone is unparalleled. The posture in her hand and the look from her eyes conveyed both a gesture of sacrifice and offering captured at the same moment. I understand something about human pride but I have a hard time understanding why Michael would place his across her blouse and blemish something that was so perfect.

*Bless those hearts, who wish me well, who bring words of beauty back
no make believe, or mockery but everything, a rose should be*

*So beautiful, my little rose, who waits for spring, till love proposed,
Keep your thorns, save that sweetness, for awhile
and in that perfect date, unfold, spreading easily, that smile*

Beautiful rose.

I began wandering the streets just south of Peter's square. With a map in hand and another address I sought out some locals. I spend roughly ten minutes knocking on one door trying to get somebody to acknowledge me. I ended up meeting his mother, who explained he was still serving in the military and that she didn't expect him back for a few more weeks. We'll, so much for best made plans. I noticed a line outside the Vatican wall was beginning to grow but it was still only about 25 percent of the designated queuing area, so I decided that this was as good time as any to see the Vatican. I got caught wandering through the gardens and was asked to get back in the building. I used the looking for a restroom excuse again. From Rafael's brush, to the statues that lined the corridors, every corner bled wealth. I had to question the scales between the palace and the solution, it got me thinking. There is a creative force that has established all the rules in which we live; I refer to this a God. Clear, consistent, never contradicting and most of all with the intent of love. I believe the praise and worship that God seeks is the loving we give to one another and nothing more. I have read the word of others and some perspective on the subject rub me the wrong way. I find it hard to accept that God's design for humanity was based on the human laws of slavery. I find hard to accept that God seeks a blood sacrifice in order to forgive or to bless. I only know these facts: (1) I only know my environment by its appearance, (2) It appears that my space is in motion, (3) I can and will eventually die, (4) I have no direct knowledge of what death entails, (5) I value life, especially my life (6) Men and women are different, yet joined in life, (7) In order to survive, choices must be made, (8) I am curious by nature and seek truth, (9) I understand the difference between right and wrong, and the effect it had on others (10) I cry and recognize suffering, (11) I must sleep and dream to renew my strength, (12) children are our priority and (13) I am my brother's keeper.

It seems to me that religions places a lot more emphasis on the deliverer or the delivery and neglect the actual message. I guess it comes from the word ritual, so why would I be seeking a solution or even the truth. Eventually those walls need to come down and be exposed to the sunlight, or we will die in its dark corners. In the Sistine Chapel they didn't provide anywhere to sit. It appeared that they wanted people to come in, view the ceiling and leave. Nobody stopped me from sitting against the wall. I sat there putting all the pieces together in my mind and sketched out a small prayer.

*Merciful God, forgive me, evil thoughts run through my mind
and I have followed in their direction, too many times
I place my faith, my love, my soul in you, for I know that in your guidance, a light will see me through*

*Merciful God, forgive me, all those things that I have done
I never stopped and thought of consequence, only thought of having fun
I place my faith, my love, my soul in you, for I know that in your guidance, a light will see me through*

*Merciful God, forgive me, I have avoided many things
Though given the opportunities, I still let it slip away
I place my faith, my love, my soul in you, for I know that in your guidance, a light will see me through*

This day was beginning to come to an end and I needed to start looking for a place to spend the night. Luckily I kept some pages from the portion of my travel guide I left behind with Jim. I continue to reduce weight by removing sections of places I had already been or didn't plan on visiting. I found a nice hotel conveniently located but had to share a room with seven Americans. These were the type of Americans that gave the rest of us a bad name. They were loud, obnoxious and the dialog of fucking Italian chicks ever eased. I claimed a bed and began trekking across the city, back to the train station to retrieve my bags. When I returned my roommates suggested that I join their little group of chick hunters for dinner. Bad idea, it was like hanging around with a bunch of fifth graders. It's my experience that when one fifth grader gets in trouble the rest are punished too. They would argue which way to go, where to eat and they would rough house each other prior to approaching a young lady. It was embarrassing. We did managing to come to a consensus and sat down to a really nice meal and a few bottles of wine and a lot of beer. After dinner and when our wandering reached the Spanish Steps, I had decided to hang out with the crowd there rather than continuing on their hunt. After a few conversations I walked the Trinita Dei Monti until overlooking the Piazza Del Popolo, danced between clubs but before the sun rose I was in bed, dead tired. Rome demands a lot of walking.

Early morning trekked across town and I followed the cats to the Coliseum. I was disappointed it was a ruin. I would really have enjoyed if it had been rebuilt and had the opportunity to see mock gladiatorial games or mythological dramas within its walls. When I was young my exposure to that type of history was either through reading books or viewing movies but to actually stand in such a historical site awakened the senses of my imagination. I could almost make out the roar of the lions and the cheer from the crowd. There is an obelisk that stands between the ruins of Troy and the womb of a vestal virgin that separates the invincible sun and the truth, casting it shadow to the west. The biggest fish in the river gets that way by never being caught.

*Outside the walls and across the river, it took hours to bring down the bricks down
we painted ours red and adorned with graffiti but still on the outskirts of town
then between the horns of the golden alter, stood the emperor, robed with the sun
a white horse, a red horse, a black horse, around the obelisk and down the stretch they come*

*The locust rose out from the smoke, awoke the dragon and his seed
not a crucifix but a silent witness, change their words, the emperor decreed
they said they were singing a new song but it was the same that I heard before
Babylonian vines, Egyptians wines and images you just can't ignore*

I tossed a coin, and then chartered a bus to Tivoli to take in the water gardens. It was nice to take some time and have a meal in the countryside, the local vineyards. That night I ended up sharing my time with a bottle of wine just below Convento S. Maria in Aracoeli overlooking the old city. It wasn't until after the tourist sites were visited, that I took advantage of my time and freedom to slow down and absorb Rome's atmosphere and culture. I took the same approach as if I were a painter in selecting a table and a bottle of wine, as if it was my next subject. At the end of that day I decided to abandon my domicile, hopped on a late night train towards Pompeii and ended up in the first dive with a light on within walking distance of the train station in Naples.



I rose early to get a head start on the tourists and encountered a thief with a taxi. Once we reached Pompeii he tried to double the rate we agreed on. I wouldn't give him a dime more so the argument continued until I was imposing on his next victim. A few impolite gestures and more than a few choice words as he sped off. I looked around and noticed I was the only person wandering about the ruins but it was still early in the day, which was kind of a weird feeling. After about an hour or so I saw another individual and then two young men wandered up to me and inquired if I had any hash to sell. A question like that out of the blue made me wonder, do I smell like hash? "What gives you the impression that I would have hash on me?" I asked. Apparently they weren't marks but rather members of a country band traveling with the USO between US military bases. I got the impression they asked

everybody who crossed their path, hoping they might get lucky. They were also circulating news that an Italian cruise ship bound for Israel was hijacked and a ransom was being demanded for the lives of the passengers. Apparently the hijackers had thrown overboard a wheelchair-bound American to demonstrate that they were serious in their demands. At that moment to my surprise, the three girls I had lost in Florence wandered up. It was obvious that one of the three young ladies liked the idea of musicians and those musicians liked the idea of three attractive young ladies. They invited the four of us to see their next concert in an attempt to get closer to the girls. They explained that they were going to be performing at the US military base on the outskirts of Naples. My imagination was heightened by the dying shapes of Pompeii's residents, evidence that things can change quickly and unexpectedly if the warnings are ignored. As it turned out each group, except for me, was staying in a different area of Naples and taking different forms of transportation back to the city. We agreed to meet later in the evening for dinner after taking showers and cleaning up.

Since I didn't have a room back in Naples the band members persuaded me to save money and sleep on the floor of their hotel room. I was handed an address, headed back into Naples, sorted out their subway systems and rode it to the end of one of the lines. Already I could tell that my map was a bit off reality but on the positive side I did have an address. It appeared that cabs didn't service this area and hitching wasn't going to be much of an option either, so I decided to start the long walk. Just across the way in front of what appeared to be a military facility were a few people hanging out. I asked if one of the gentlemen who I assumed was an American, if he could point out how to get me back on track. Between sentences he decided to just drive me there. I hopped into a car full of baseball hats. We even handed out a few along the way. "You never know when you need friends, especially among strangers", he said while handing out another hat to the policeman directing traffic from the middle of the intersection. He knew where the hotel was and like the map said, it was right across the street from the military base. I walked past the receptionist and sought out their room. I knocked on the door but had to wait until they could open the door. Once the door was wide enough for me to enter, the cause was evident. They had half of Pompeii spread out across the floor of their room. Besides trying to establish where I would be sleeping I explained that taking stuff from Pompeii wasn't a good thing and I was sure doing stuff like that could put them in prison. "How are you going to get all that on a plane?" We took ownership of a bottle of wine and a small table in the rear of a restaurant just around the corner from the hotel. I was told that their band was scheduled to perform tomorrow night so the girls' decided to catch up on their sleep and we made plans to reunite the next day around noon in front of the museum.

The national league playoffs were being televised in a bar across the street on the military base so when dinner was finished we wandered across for a beer. We ordered a pitcher and grabbed four seats around a TV set in the corner of the bar. I love the game of the baseball, the design of the ball, its seams. I love the way the ball feels in my hand. The one-on-one aspect of the game is much like poetry. Baseball's silence is as much an integral part as the action. No

other game is like it. Maybe cricket but I have never had the patience to watch a game that took three days to finish. Growing up I was never really a fan for any one team. I mostly followed players on teams I would choose to win that year. There was only one exception. When I first entered little league at about the age of seven I was assigned to the Pirates. Every year our little league team would take a field trip to Dodger stadium to see the Pirates beat the Dodgers. I would always chase down my favorite player Roberto Clemente, to see if he would sign a ball for me. He signed three balls for me over the years but as I grew older they were abused in games of over-the-line or something else along those lines, gone. Only my memory remained.

The bar was almost empty. We kind of had the place to ourselves. Then things abruptly changed. Apparently two aircraft carriers had docked and like cattle they populated the bar. Beer was being opened with such consistency it began to sound like popcorn being made in the distance. Before we knew it they began arguing among themselves. The "A" team is better than the "B" team, "Yes it is", "No it's not" and before we knew it a bar fight broke out. Then just as fast as it started the MPs marched in and broke things up. It was like I was sitting on the edges of a movie set. Chairs were flying, MPs swinging clubs and then there we were again, having the bar to ourselves, watching the baseball game in the corner of the bar. The bartender told us that the hijackers on that cruise ship had been apprehended and had actually been brought to this facility, and then they were delivered into the hand of the Italian Secret Police. We ended up the night in the late night showing of a "B" movie in the base's theater before he headed off to sleep.

I assume it was somewhere around two or three in the morning when we staggered across the street towards sleep. When we were passing the desk clerk he reached out and grabbed me by my collar. "No room, no sleeping here tonight", he screamed at me. Our argument escalated to the point where it was either about to get physical or we would be dealing with the local authorities, so I was left with no other option but to grab my bags and hit the street. It was too late for local taxi and I knew I had a long walk back to the subway station. I was the only thing moving with exception of controlled burning on the distant hills. When I finally reached the subway station I discovered it had stopped running hours ago and would not resume till around four thirty or five in the morning. Shit, I was tired and really needed some sleep. I noticed just west of the subway station stood a military complex with a guard posted out front. I walked across and asked the guard if he knew where I could get a room for the night. I have walked miles and he was the only soul I had seen. Apparently he didn't understand English and gestured that I should follow him inside. After passing down a long hallway and through a pair of doors we were confronted by who I assumed was his superior.

He was sharply dressed and confronted my escort the second their eyes meet. I could tell that he was being scolded and told to get back to his post. Then he turned to me and gestured that I should follow him as he pointed down the long hallway. Through one door and then another and I ended up across a desk from a young lady. Dialog in Italian went back and forward between the two then she turned to me. "Do you understand where you are?" she questioned. She quickly answered her own question to inform me. "This is the Italian Secret Police and you are not allowed to be here". The Italians that had gathered behind me and thought the entire situation was comical. There was an inside joke I was not briefed on. Then the young lady who had explained she was from Kentucky and that I needed to be removed from the facility. After a brief interrogation she interpreted what the group was asking, "Was I was interested in finding a room for the night". One of the group that had gathered around me began to make a phone call. He was contacting a local whore houses to see if they had an available bed. That escalated the atmosphere into almost a frenzy. "Twenty minutes tops?" was broadcasted over the group and incited more laughter. When I explained that I wasn't interested in that somebody suggested that I could sleep in one of the cells. But then another guard smiled and said "But we'd have to handcuff you". That was my signal to go. "No, I think it's time for me to leave" and on that note I began gesturing towards the door. Across the street I entered the subway station again and tried to go to sleep on one of the benches but no such luck. I was still trying to rid myself of the thought of being handcuffed. I took a short walk searching for a better location and ended back in the subway on the same bench. I worked on some notes I had sketched out earlier while watching the baseball game and spent about an hour or so till my eyes began to get tired. I decided to sleep with my knife available for defense, just in case I needed to scare someone off.

He watched her moves, followed her rounds, from one park to another, he made his move, standing his ground, with an offer like no other. She'd be the one, starting each day, yea, he could give her fame showed her how fun, when in control of the play, as long as she showed up each game

He showed her his park and told her his plans, told her of glory, with diamond in hand someday in the future, they'd be the team, making all her reality, seem like a dream

She made her pitches, ball after ball, time he would never quite yield in each follow through, while her back was still turned, he was still playing the field

She waited not knowing, still questioning when but the reply was still later, she sat down once again with splinters in hand, she searched through for reasons, wondering why, she was benched for the season

One night in the rain, she cried out for the score, he held up his hand, she was down one to four and if she disagreed, she could protest the call but there was no guarantees, she could win them at all

They spent time in taking, exchanging their words but he kept on balking and she dodging curves then she got hot, with heat there belt high, he was caught looking, just questioning why he tried to defend but missed with all four, she and the diamond, walked, walked right out the door.

When I woke up I notice that my knife was unchaperoned, sitting all by itself. Most likely it was pushed away by me while I slept. There were two elderly gentlemen sitting alongside the same bench staring at me and the knife. I had gotten less than an hour of sleep and was still very tired and in need of a shower. I followed those two gentlemen back into the heart of Naples. All I wanted was a room and shower but there wasn't a single hotel that would let me in before noon. I was tired of walking and not in the mood for hanging around and waiting so I changed my plans and decided not to attend tonight's concert. It wasn't like Willie Nelson performing anyway.

I continued down toward the docks to see if I could charter a ferry across to the Capri, located an office and bought myself a ticket. The only problem was that a couple of boats were in repair and the next wasn't scheduled to leave for some time. So I took that opportunity to tour the castle. Along the way I met a beautiful energetic young lady. I just couldn't keep my eyes off of her and after trading smiles we struck up a conversation. I explained that I was heading to Capri. She smiled and suggested that I join her and her family instead of taking the ferry, "There boring" she said "They don't serve wine" She offered to talk with her aunt who perhaps would accommodate me with a room when we reached the island. Boy, things changed so quickly! In the mean time I had also found myself an educated tour guide. We continued our conversation down toward the dock. Stopped by where they were selling tickets and gave mine to somebody in line. I was introduced to the family, handed a glass of wine and given a tour of the boat. Marry a millionaire's daughter? That could be the ticket. We ended up throwing out the anchor in a small cove on the north side of the island. We jumped ship and swam to the shore, sat and talked, while the rest of the family watched over another glass of wine. Just after sunset we docked in the main harbor. They introduced me to their aunt who agreed to let me a room. I dropped off my bags, locked the door and followed them to the restaurant that they had been bragging about since we met. We had a few more bottles of wine and a fabulous meal. All the tourists that were hanging about had taken the last ferry back to the mainland and left that jewel to the few of us left behind. It was nice, quiet and the moon provided just enough light to make it romantic. They were all heading back to the boat and I was left with only the memory of a kiss.

I awoke the next morning, took an early walk and just couldn't believe how beautiful everything was. Every so often I claimed a bench with a view and sketch out some thoughts. I headed down toward the harbor to catch a bus to the other side of the island. I planned on seeing the blue grotto. I couldn't figure out where to pick up a bus and nobody would give me a straight answer so I decided to walk. Once I got up the first hill the road kind of leveled off but I had to keep an eye on the traffic heading up that hill because there wasn't much space for me to walk. One car pulled alongside and asked if I wanted a ride. I almost said yes since I had no idea how far I needed to walk, but I on the other hand I wanted to take a few pictures along the way, so I continued on my own. I passed by one small farm and then another. Each farm had a barking dog who greeted me at their fence. When I finally reached the grotto I was disappointed to discover that due to abnormally high tides there wouldn't be any tours. I sat down with my disappointment alongside a beer at a bar on the opposite cliff. There were also two Americans officers on leave who joined me in my grief. About halfway through the first beer the bartender mentioned that they had towels available. I understood him to mean I could swim into the grotto if I wanted, so I questioned to get some validation. Hell yea! The officers followed me down to the cliff that led to the grotto. When I reached the cliff there were also four other Americans, two couples, enjoying their vacation in Italy.

Nobody thought that I'd actually do it. We couldn't even see the entrance to the grotto from where we stood on the cliff. It was under water somewhere. I came there to see the grotto and this was my opportunity, so out of my way. The group stood waiting to take my picture so I knew it had to be a somewhat of a good dive and not a belly flop or something embarrassing like that. I held my breath, swam into the grotto and surfaced inside for air. A marvelous color of blue illuminated below my paddling feet. While I was treading water inside, my mind entertained images of sea monsters. I guess that was only natural with numerous images that television had planted into my head. I found a ledge inside the cave where I could almost sit down and take in the view but I think I placed more importance on keeping those watching up on the cliff in suspense. I've always been someone who enjoyed swimming. Back home it wasn't uncommon for me to put on a driver's mask and fins. I'd tape a florescent tube to my snorkel, smoke a joint and swim a few miles out into the ocean. A couple of years prior I had visited a friend in Seal Beach California. I swam about six times the distance of the pier and while I was swimming something large hit my legs from below. My heart sank and again images filled my head. I discovered that it was an automobile tire which had bobbed to the surface. Even though I knew it was just a tire, I never swam back to shore as fast as I did that time.

I learned that the two couples waiting up top didn't live far from my home in California. One of the husbands was kind enough to offer potential employment when I returned home and if I gave him my phone number upon his return to California he would contract my parents to let them know that I was doing O.K. The two officers had hesitated and I suppose my prolonged underwater venture reinforced any fears they were entertaining.

The two officers were sporting driving equipment and planned on exploring the other side of the island closer to where my room was, so the three of us trekked across to the other side of the island. While we were walking back toward the harbor something caught my eye that made me look twice. My mind wasn't playing tricks on me. It really was a Tiger. There was a young lady who had a Bengal Tiger on a leash and was attempting to drag him in a direction it didn't agree with. I inquired if I could pet him. His tongue was like sandpaper and when he licked me it, actual took a couple of layers of skin off my arm. I was just fascinated with how large he was. His head was so big he'd have no problem swallowing my head. She explained a few time that she needed to get going and play time was over. The thought of actually having played with a tiger lingered in my mind for hours. I had come to the realization that I had gotten very lucky to find that place and combined with the fact my young lady friend hadn't returned I decided to kick around that

island for few more days. There was a pair of topless swimmers whose egos needed attention. I don't think those officers ever stopped smiling and peaking over the rocks like young school boys. They eventually packed up and managed to just make the last ferry back to the mainland. Traveling sometimes can almost be a job and every once and while I needed to sit back, relax, take a holiday and recharge. So when you locate a place like this, relax and take a breath. I did a lot of swimming and a bit of just laying under the sun. I ordered a bottle of wine but that night it was just going to be me and my pen. It was quiet and peaceful. I drank into the night and had another excellent meal. They were right. That was the place to eat.

*3. Nature in its beauty is complete, simple, elegant and yet complex
I ponder in amazement at its detail and order, the conformity to law
It is the totality of rules, the seed from which it all comes
It encompasses my life and still I look upon it as a stranger, have I lost my way?*

*Nature embodies this external environment I interact with daily
I am conscious and so taught by nature
But these ideas are not entirely dependent upon my will; they are frequently presented to me against this will
"We are chosen to react and survive by nature's own pressures"
For there is an interaction taking place, where the environment actually takes the initiative
An environment I shall never know, for I am not equipped to understand.*

*I must not imagine, that I understand this environment
That I understand the infinite by its true idea, but only by the negation of the finite
In the same way I comprehend repose and darkness by the negation of motion and light
How can it be possible to understand a single grain of sand with no knowledge of the beach, a piece from its puzzle?*

*I know nothing of this environment, only its appearance.
I can look at the tree and know its shape, dissect it into its parts
What I do not know, is what a tree is to a tree, or to itself, only its appearance.*

The next morning I took advantage of the locations that I had found the day before. It was another beautiful day with the sun shining down under a dense curtain of trees. I lounged around in-between the shade of the trees and the heat of the sun. At the end of the day I sat down in the harbor and watched the passing faces leaving the island.

*Dreams of wishes, like the trees, who know the wind, its melodies
with no desire, to move or change, a love like passion, to remain
So like these trees, I spread out my arms, to feel the wind, to know its charm
for I could never, plant my roots as deep, from day to day, the sun to greet
And I, just a single sand in time, placing memories, in rows, in rhymes
a dream of colors, of red and gold, a love like flowers, to unfold*

Eventually I too ended up at the harbor and boarded a ferry back to the mainland. When I reached Naples I only stopped for a bite to eat. While I was eating lunch I stuck up a conversation with couple of locals who suggested I rent a car and drive to Salerno rather than take the train. "You must drive from Amalfi to Ravello" they explained as I was handed another beer on the house. It turned out that his suggestion was actually a sales pitch because he owned the car rental around the corner. He provided me a map earmarked with where his other car rental was located and where I was to drop off the car. That made it really convenient and driving sounded like a good idea anyway. I loved traveling close to the road, it gives me an opportunity to stop whenever my heart desired, stretch my legs, take a picture or grab a bite to eat. Amalfi came into view faster than expected. I have a tendency to drive a little too fast. I was lucky enough to locate a wonderful room with a view and relaxed and enjoyed the Italian atmosphere it embraced. I wish I would have had more time to spend but the extra expenditure for the car forced me to push on through. I reached Salerno early and had plenty of time to seek out a meal and take my time before boarding a train towards Sicily.

Just as the sun was setting I was on a train bound toward Sicily. I entered a compartment were an older gentleman and two young ladies had made themselves at home. First I thought that he was a dirty old man trying to pick up two young Italian beauties. Once he found out that I spoke English he included a few English words in every other sentence as if he was trying to invite me in their conversations. Some of the dialog would normally seem inappropriate outside of a brothel and perhaps could have landed him in jail. But they would laugh, smile and giggle as if he knew what buttons to push. Those girls were getting hot and I kept finding myself staring at one of those girl's nipples. I swear they're three times larger than they were just seconds ago. Then the old man sporting a smile I'll never forget turn to me and questioned, "Would you like to date one of my daughters?" First I thought he was just pulling my leg, then he repeated the question in almost perfect English. "He is our father" one of them said while the other nodded in agreement. His mannerisms gave me the impression that mounting one of these young ladies right there was a good first move. I didn't believe them. My mouth opened and the word "Wife" just rolled off my tongue. "Me have wife" he replied and gave another smile that was just as classic as the first and then pointed to the ring on his finger gesturing that he knew what I was talking about. He reached down, unzipped a bag and pulled out a bottle of cognac. He

opened it up, took a drink and while handing it across the aisle to me he gave me a look as if he wanted me to know that he had been there also and then laughed. The four of us laughed and traded stories until we reached their stop. He translated everything I said into Italian so I never really knew if the joke was on me. About the time we had finished off the bottle the train had pulled into their destination, "One of my daughters?" "Sorry" I sighed. He shook my hand and I traded kisses with the two girls and watched them depart the platform from the window of my compartment wondering where that path might have taken me.

I was looking at an empty train with only my reflection keeping me company from the window that separated me from the darkness. I arrived at Villa Giovanni where I took a ferry to Sicily. I laid myself down along side one of the many windows. I don't remember closing my eyes but I do remember the face of a janitor who popped me a couple of times with his broom and told me to get the hell off the boat. Apparently it had been docked for hours and besides the janitor it appeared I was the only other person onboard. It was an odd feeling walking off an empty ferry. It was late and I wasn't up for walking so I walked in the door of the first florescent light I saw. It was quite a dive but I assumed it wasn't very far from the next day's boat. It all looked even worse in the light of day. I was surprised I wasn't charged by the hour so I distanced myself quickly so nobody would associate me with that location.

When I reached Milazzo everything started getting weird. People that I crossed paths with began treating me as if I had committed a crime, as if I was covered in blood. I walked among them naive of their reasoning. I asked one gentlemen for directions. Once he realized I was an American he spit at my feet and said something in Italian in a tone that was cause for concern. I then crossed paths with a German about my age going in the same direction and it seemed wise to follow and let him do the talking. We both chartered a hydrofoil to Lipari, an island just off the coast of Sicily. We started out following a pair of young ladies that successfully lead to a pair of cold beers along the waterfront. When we reached the hostel we discovered that its doors would not be opened until early evening so we decided to go for a swim. It was a beautiful sunny day and we found a jetty where we could do some diving. I think it was the third time we were climbing back up the jetty when my German friend had cut his hand on a barnacle. The cut was deep enough to require stitches and he was bleeding all over the place so we flagged down a gentleman in view that was sporting a moped. We persuaded him to transport our injured friend to a local doctor.

My destination was a small island at the end of the island chain called Stromboli. While in Rome I met a young man who suggested that even though it was kind of an inconvenient trek, the view of the active volcano at night was worth the journey. Thank God the hostel here in Lipari handed out blankets because I was sporting only a bed sheet, bath towel and a jacket. I had made my mind up to steal the blanket on my way out and take it to Stromboli. Well borrow it. I'll return it on my way back. That was my reasoning that made it OK. I claimed myself a bed and headed back down toward the harbor for a beer and to see if anything looked worthwhile. The company was not so good so I headed off to an early sleep.

The next morning I hooked up with a young married couple from the states, heading in the same direction. Since we had a few hours until our boat was scheduled to depart we headed into the countryside to get a feel of the island. My German friend from the previous day had not resurfaced. I snuck out quietly with my blanket tucked under my shoulder hoping nobody would notice. We survived our trek, successfully made it to the dock on time but there was no boat and we kept getting the runaround on when our boat was to arrive. Since based on our last conversation the boat would not arrive for another four hours so the three of us snuck into an abandoned restaurant that hung on the cliff of the opposite bay. Out on its balcony we played cards until the concern that we might miss our boat crept to the surface. Their indecisiveness began to plant lingering feelings of doubt. Perhaps the boat would show early and then we really be fucked. We checked out the local fisherman mending their nets, claimed a window table in one of the small restaurants and shared a pot of tea, waiting for our boat. There were a couple other guys sitting just across from us who were also waiting on the same boat. They kept on debating whether waiting was worth it or if they should begin heading back toward the mainland. I think Greece was now looking like a better option to them. I was sitting outside when one of those gentlemen opened up his bag, pulled out a tent and assembled it right beside our table. When it began to draw some attention he offered it up for sale. It wasn't long before he was short one tent and had a little extra pocket money or maybe enough to settle his beer tab.

Once the mainland boat arrived everybody gave up and decided to head back to Sicily. My plan was not to move one inch from that dock until our boat had arrived. They came and went and didn't wait around for anybody. Their time schedules were at best, guesses. I pretty much stayed to myself and wrote until my eyes got tired. When our boat finally arrived I was left with a new set of faces. There were two guys and a young lady traveling together down from Geneva, Switzerland. It's a good thing we were waiting on the dock because they showed up an hour and a half early. Once we got on we were gone in seconds. If I hadn't been paying attention or had gone to the bathroom I would have never known this boat came and went. I do love these Hydrofoils. They could really get up and move. We must have stopped at every possible port between Lipari and Stromboli. On two occasions we waited on row boats to make it out to us. The port of Stromboli was considerably smaller than I expected. As soon as we stepped on dry land we went searching for the local general store. We needed to purchase supplies for the night which ended up including a couple bottles of vodka. The four of us strolled along the black beach, enjoyed the scenery and stretched our legs before trekking up the volcano.

There was a slight breeze coming in from the west. It was beautiful to watch the reeds dance in that wind with the blue contrast of the sea below. It was difficult for me to slow down and stay with my associates. They were National Geographic grantees on assignment so they were packing a lot of film equipment. Every so often I could feel a slight rumbling from the ground beneath my feet. The sound was getting louder as we got closer and the smell in the air

began to change. We passed a couple of people on day trips heading back down but when we reached the face of the volcano we were alone. We claimed an existing rock circle and I spent an hour or so enlarging it so that the four of us could fit comfortably. While I was gathering rock from abandoned circles the German that I had last seen leaving on the moped a few days back unexpectedly showed up. He explained that he had continued through and had spent the last night on Stromboli. He had a few stitches across his palm and a pretty interesting story about a leather strap and the doctor that sewed him up. He had brought up a tent and offered sharing it, if I would modify the rock circle to accommodate him as well. I didn't have any intention of sharing his tent but adding him to our little village was without question. It started to look as if it would be one windy night so I put an extra stone or two in the direction of the wind.

Once things were settled I accompanied two the grantees sporting video cameras down to the mouth of the volcano. When the volcano would erupt rock about the size of softballs would be thrown into the air creating a glowing perimeter that would draw the line between us and it. But when they got as large as basketballs I began thinking that this wasn't the best place to be standing. I could feel the heat through the soles of my shoes so I decided to change directions and head back to the ridge. As darkness came the eruptions became more and more spectacular. It reminded me of flying over the Los Angeles basin at night. It seemed as if each new eruption was getting bigger and bigger. Stupidity can be dangerous. Where we once stood rock the size of microwave ovens was falling with a few the size of a refrigerator. God, what in the hell were we thinking? There was some moisture gathering in the air and when it mixed with those eruptions it kind of created a fog bank of sulfur. That was about the time the vodka began being passed around. We were about halfway down the second bottle when one of the two French guys broke out a hash joint. Vodka, hash, fog and the glowing of the volcano were the perfect ingredients for a surreal experience.

I was lying next to the tent when I noticed another group had arrived. They were equipped with head lamps and were roped together. When they got close enough to make out their features I was surprised to discover they were mostly young girls. They brought with them the news that a large storm was heading our way and suggested we head back down with them before it arrived. Those girls like dervishes would dance and chant and their chants grew louder with each eruption. Their white outfits were emphasized by the darkness of the night and glowed red from the rocks below. It was as if we had wandered into a cult. As mysteriously as they appeared they vanished down the mountain.

I woke up to the sound of thunder. I think my dreams had been incorporating the thunder and lightning for some time. When it began to rain it was unbelievable. First I was concerned that the poles of the tent were invitations to the lightning, but after thirty minutes or so the tent was shredded and gone. The lighting repeated every few minutes and would illuminate the sulfur cloud that was being created by introducing the volcano to rain. It was terrorizing. It was like being on the inside of a light bulb. After each hit I reconfirmed I that I was still alive. Then the rain came down in buckets, literally buckets and there was nowhere for us to hide. I took my blanket, rolled it up as tight as I could and placed it against the rocks in an attempt to make a small dam. I laid there with my important belongs under my belly. The others protected their camera equipment. Each of the other four sharing that experience did exactly the same, bundling up to one another. It was impossible to sleep. We were in a state of constant alarm and I prayed for my life the entire time. It was like trying to sleep on a railroad tracks hearing the train getting closer and closer but unable to move.

*They take pleasure from my pain, pushing everything, into their own,
Unimaginable darkness*

*With their fingers, they undress, pushing their teeth, into my flesh, pulling me, under and beneath,
into their orgy, of agony and pain, to remain, in this,*

Unimaginable darkness

The storm passed through very quickly. When the sun rose I gathered up my things and without even saying goodbye I headed down the volcano like I was escaping. I had just come out of a sulfur cloud, was coated in mud and must have smelled like shit. I sure felt like shit. When I finally made it back down to the residence below they too were cover in mud. I'm glad somebody could laugh at this. The first two people I saw were in the process of shoveling themselves out of the mud. When they noticed me coming down off the volcano they began laughing uncontrollably. Pointing to the top and then back at me gesturing that I was one crazy asshole to spend the night up there. When I reached the dock where I was originally dropped off I laid out what I could under the sun to dry. I laid there on my back and waited for the next boat heading back to the mainland. The sea was still very rough. I could hear the waves hitting the shore in the distance. When the boat finally arrived the rough conditions caused a the crew to struggle getting the boat's ropes around the dock's cleats. The first rope thrown was grabbed by an elderly man who attempted to secure it to the cleat to my left. The second he got it secured the rope snapped and like a huge rubber band and cut that man's leg off like a knife cutting through butter. My heart just dropped and before I could act two men had picked him and his severed leg up and had placed him into a small cart or wheel barrel and quickly wheeled him off to see the doctor. The images of my German friend biting on a leather strap and the sound of that leg coming off resonated in my head for some time. I couldn't shake it. My prayers when out to him. It was a good thing they had no mirrors on that boat. I could only imagine what I looked like, not to mention that I could smell myself. I needed a shower and everything I owned needed to be cleaned.

I went straight from the boat to a train and then straight to the train's toilet. While heading into Cefalu I stood in front of the sink for a good hour cleaning up whatever I could. People sure treat you differently based on their visual perception of you, or in my case the smell of eggs. I spent hours walking the street trying to find myself a room. Once they discovered I was an American they refused me accommodations. In some cases I actually got threats and left me wondering what this was all about. Tried Palermo, but only wore myself out walking for hours until I gave up and slept on the street. As it turned out circumstances kept me from returning the blanket I stole but it was still damp and didn't keeping me all that warm. I wandered around the city until I reached a point where I just needed to get the hell out. I boarded a late train heading back towards Italy. One stop after another I attempted to find myself a room. Nobody would, I mean nobody would give me a room. I started jotting down all the clues in my head trying to turn comments into complete sentences. It appeared that there was some negative dialog between the American Government and the Italians. I was told that the US military took into custody the perpetrators of the hijacked cruise ship and handed over those criminals to the Italian Secret Police. From what I understand they apparently let them escape through the underground into Yugoslavia. In their retaliation it seems I was tied to their whipping post. Thanks for the hospitality.

It was their off season and every one of their building were almost empty but still nobody gave me a break. My head itched so badly. I found myself again and again telling myself not to scratch and kept it covered under my beanie. Reggio Di Calabria and then into Taranto. I spent the entire day walking streets, or on and off trains. I walked along the shore and gazed into all the buckets full of fresh fish. Each bucket contained another surprise. Still I made an effort not to talk to anybody and just quietly passed through. "No I can't give you a room" the desk clerk said and then handed me a map of the city. He penciled out where I might find a room. That seemed like a positive sign and I prematurely began thinking that things were about to change but that map only led me to the more disturbed. The next hotel's manager threatened me "Better keep one eye open". So with that I decided to continue down the road and searched for somebody who was not so friendly. A man not only defines himself by the actions he takes but the actions he chooses not to take. I was very depressed and was considering heading back to Rome and hopping on the first plane home. Discrimination in all of its forms is a terrible thing. We are social by nature and any attempt to place someone into a position where they are to feel inferior, to me is a form of brainwashing. "So fuck them" I make my own path. I still had some cards in my hand and since I'd already made a few bets, no one else had raised, so I thought I'd stay in the game. I knew something good would eventually come from experiences like this. Thanks for everything and I'll show myself out.

It was about two in the morning when I finally found a place that was being managed by a woman. I explained that I had a train to catch early in the morning and I'd be out as quick as a cat. She agreed to let me have a room only if I would be out by five that next morning and paid twenty five dollars, which was easily twice the going rate. I washed everything I owned and scrubbed myself clean. Then like most men in that situation, I pleased myself and went right to sleep. A knock on the door awoke me at a quarter to five and reminded me to get the hell out. I felt like I had never slept and was still as tired as when I arrived. Everything I owned was still damp, even the clothes I was forced to wear. I purchased some bakery items and headed for the train station. It seemed like I was getting a second wind. Even though my clothes were damp it felt good to be clean.

I decided Brindisi was my next stop. I still had an active rail pass which provided free crossing to Greece. My rail pass and one dollar would allow me to sleep on the boat's deck. It appeared I was alone in that venture. Everybody else in line was getting themselves a room. Sitting in a small café along the main street a pair of young ladies asked if they could join my table. Two young Canadians with sleeping bags and glad to know they were not the only one's sleeping on the deck. We'll there is a silver lining. I explained that all I had was the blanket and they were concerned that it might be too cold for me out on that deck, so they suggested that I should sleep between the two of them and they would do their best to keep me warm. When we reached the deck of the boat I claimed a good spot in the corner with an overhang just in case it rained. We laid out our bags and then one young lady and then another enlarged our circle. By the time the boat departed it seemed as if every good looking young lady was sleeping out on the deck.

*There you are the only rose, living all alone,
all those lovely companions, either faded or have flown
like you at times I follow, when friendships all have frayed,
steppin out into the light but dwell at home in shade*

*Many times, that heart lay withered, when fond friends choice to go
but with each painful thought, that's conquered another bud begins to grow.*

XX

Road Map:

Germany	Frankfurt [Palmergarten, Old Hochst, Stadel Art Gallery, US Military Base], Mannheim, Heidelberg [Church of the Holy Spirit, Castle, Fortress], Karlsruhe, Baden Baden [Frleorichsbad Spa, Water Gardens, Bridges]
France	Strasbourg [Cathedral of Notre Dame De Strasbourg, Palais Rohan, Le Petite]
Germany	Freiburg [Freiburg Minster, Munsterplaz, Historsches Raufhaus], Titisee "Black Forrest"
Switzerland	Basel, Zurich, Sargans, Landquarts, Chur, Sargans
Austria	Innsbruck, Lieiz, Spittal, Villach

Italy	Treviso, Venezia – Giudella [<i>Campanile, San Marco Square, Galleria Della Basilica, San Marco, Castello, Santa Cruz, San Polo, Dorso Dure, Carnarrgio, "Bridge of Signs, many churchs</i>] Padova, Bologna, Rimini-Bologna [<i>Santa Maria Novella</i>] Florence [<i>Duomo Cathedral, Giotto's Tower, Baptistery, Offizi Gardens, Church of Baryello Museums</i>] Empoli, Pisa [<i>San Lorenzo, San Marco, "Leaning Tower", Baptistery</i>] Siena [<i>Plazza Del Campo, Cathedral of Siena San Gimignano</i>], Florence Roma [<i>Fountain of Trevi, Spanish Steps, Villa Borghese, Pincio S. Maria Magliore, Mausoleo Augusto, Castles, Angelo, Colosseo, Foro Romano, St. Peter's – "Pietà", Plaza, Catacombs, Mausoleo D'Adamo, Sistine Chapel, Vatican Museum</i>], Naples [<i>Museo Nazionale Archeologico, Museo Di Capodimonte</i>] Herculaneum, Pompeii, Naples, Capri [<i>Via Pizzolungo, Porto D'Ischia, Faraglioni, Arc Naturale, Marina Piccola</i>]. Anacapri "Grotta Azzurra", Naples, Amalfi, Ravello, Salerno, Sapri, Positano, Villas Giovanni Sicilia Italy
	Taranto, Bari, Brindisi

XX

Even though all the other guys had paid for a room joining the ladies outside became a priority. Good looking women typically have that effect over men. We all traded stories and passed around a few bottles of alcohol. By the time we reached Corfu we had assembled into an interesting group of travelers. Once we hit Corfu's dock an elderly lady persuaded us to check out her hotel. I used our group's size as a bargaining chip and obtained a better rate for the group. We all ended up in a large pink hostel not far from the port. We hit the showers and re-grouped for dinner. In one of the local bars I met a couple of young Dutch sailors. They couldn't have been more than sixteen years old. I inquired if that beautiful sailing ship docked in the harbor was theirs. I had noticed a beautiful three masted vessel that had to be a Sovereign of the Seas docked alongside the ferry landing. "Hey, can you guys get me on board for a tour?" "No, we'd get in trouble" they responded in chorus. Paying for beers ended up getting me a ticket for a late night tour. I guess the risk could be tolerable once they were drunk. Even though it was dark I noticed it had that solid used look, with old paint and worn rails, used but gorgeous and its uniqueness made it special. There I was standing on the boat whose picture I had engrained in my head from movies I watched as a kid. I could almost imagine Charles Laughton coming through the galley door. What would it be like to wake up in the morning in one of those beautiful Mediterranean coves. I could imagine such dreams.

I took advantage of the dollar breakfast and met up with two young ladies from New Zealand and a gentleman from Italy. We began comparing notes and discovered the four of us saw eye to eye on driving mopeds around the island. We shopped around for reasonably priced mopeds and the four of us headed out to attack every road on the map. This is freedom. I loved traveling that close to the road where I could feel the air, stop anywhere I wanted to and every so often I discovered a view that would have been neglected if traveling by any other means. I stopped in the middle of the road at one point to review the map and let the others catch up. At that moment an elderly woman ran out into the street and pointed to my map, "You are here". "Ten K that way and fifteen K that way" At one point I wasn't quite sure what she said. About the time the other three caught up, her husband had come out into the street with a bottle of wine and four glasses. "You like? I make" and began filling glasses. The two girls couldn't leave without buying something, which would only lead to another reason to rest our bikes. We had met up with a couple of others who were also on mopeds.

We relaxed under a grove of olive trees. It was there where I met a new friend. I rubbed his ears and it was like I had adopted him. I was most surprised at his dedication to keep up with me while on the moped. I discovered a beautiful bay where I stopped and bummed a cigarette from a local. I could see from there the shortest swim between Albania and freedom. I waited up for the group prior to heading back. I noticed that we were one short, so I retraced our steps until I located one of our young ladies about a mile or two back. She was pushing her bike along the side of the road. I first offered to switch bikes but she wouldn't have it. It was her bike and she was the only one who would push it back home so I accompanied her on her long walk. Since there were still a few hours left on my rental agreement I let a few of the younger girls at the hostel take my moped for short spins. I took one long hot shower and then wandered into one of the local bars and met up with the others. We lined up the beers and began sketching out the groups next steps. That was one long day and I consumed a lot of alcohol the previous night so I watched how much I consumed and headed off to bed early and alone. Over an early breakfast I managed to persuade Dawn and Heidi that renting a moped to explore the island was the way to go. I planned on repeating the adventure of the prior day if the company included those two young ladies. But our plan of doubling up on the mopeds was a bad idea. I decided to wait behind, relax and catch up on my journal instead. Stromboli was still on my mind and I wanted to get those thoughts down on paper. Our little drinking group's faces began to change and it wasn't as fun as the night before. Four of us had decided that the next morning we would head toward Athens. We were warned that if we wanted food for the next day we had better buy it now. The next day was Sunday and buying groceries would have been difficult if not impossible. I suppose pitching in money for the next day's meals officially made us a group.

*When the sun comes up, from another day, when the clouds have passed, an gone away
Will you stand by me, or will you say, it's not like yesterday*

*When the night has passed, from another dream, when the days turn strange, against the seams
Will you still be and will you say, it's not like yesterday*

*When it all comes down, an it's all so clear, when the moon returns, yet it disappears
Will you ever see, or will you always say, it's not like yesterday*

On the trip into Athens we were joined by another young lady and young man who had been pursuing her. She wasn't interested in him but tolerated him because she liked the attention. At least that's what she told us. We discussed renting a van and exploring Greece's mainland. I wanted to visit Delos and then each extension of the Maurice Cross but Athens was first on our agenda and we decided to postpone making a decision until later. When we reached the mainland and while waiting on a train into Athens Tony and I went to search for a good bottle of wine and ended up buying two. On the way back toward the train depot we noticed the rest of the group sitting outside of a small café. Pizza was on order and the idea of hot food hit the spot. That pizza excursion assisted in making the two hours we had to wait pass by almost unnoticed. Prior to the arrival of our train we decided to open the bottles of wine. They were passed to the left and again to the right. That began to increase our group's size and in turn the bottles didn't last long. Somebody else and then somebody else began donating bottles to our cause. By the time we got on the train we were pretty unruly and eventually the conductor gave up trying to control us.

It was late and we were all tired. Not one of us felt like trekking around Athens looking for a room. We were willing to sacrifice location or even reasonable rates for an immediate bed. We just wanted to shower and sleep. When we first came through the main door of the station there were two elderly men fighting over a cab. Arms waving in the air and though I don't speak Greek the gestures telegraphed that punches were on their way but never to arrive. We all stood there watching the comedy unfold. We did a pretty good job creating enough confusion in the lobby of the hotel we had selected. That made it easy to sneak a few up into the rooms and then we divided the entire bill among the group, anything to save a penny or two.



I was up early and took advantage of the empty streets, getting a feel of my new surroundings. Everybody else was still tired from the previous day's trek and since the curtains were drawn they didn't have any idea that the sun was up and approaching noon. Tony had his mind set on locating a weight room and getting in some lifting. Tony definitely kept himself in shape. Tony was black, tall and could be physically intimidating. I persuaded him to join me for a meal before he worked out and perhaps along the way we could locate a phone book to help him find a gym. We walked around for awhile and then selected a small restaurant that appeared clean enough to give a try. When we approached the door of the restaurant a homeless man approached the two of us. I assume he asked us if we could spare some change. I tried to explain that we didn't have any change but once we finished our meal I would have some available to give. I believe that I was responsible for helping out anybody that asks for help and try my best to live by that principle. Perhaps he had misunderstood what I tried to explain. While we were sitting waiting for the waiter to take our order, the homeless man entered the restaurant and repeated his request. Almost before I could react the owner darted out from the kitchen and struck that man in the face. While he lay on the floor bleeding the owner turned to us and apologized for the man's rudeness. I understood why he didn't want people begging in his establishment but the violent outburst made us

both uncomfortable so we got up and left. I gave the beggar a large bill on the way out. I guess in hind sight it turned out to be a lucky break for us because we then wandered into another restaurant that was everything we could possible dream of. Since neither one of us spoke Greek the waiter suggested that we follow him into the kitchen and view the meals being prepared. Most of the entrées were just prepared for the early dinner crowd and our timing gave us first pick. Hands down that was one of the best meals I have ever had.

Tony headed out to find a weight room while I wandered about towards the Acropolis. Our group had planned on reuniting there late in the afternoon. That gave me hours to begin taking in some of the other ruins. After surveying the Acropolis I laid along its outer wall enjoying the sun with the view of the amphitheater below and the countryside in the distance. Eventually we all gathered and then began deciding what to do next. The girls still had their minds on shopping and convinced the group to hit the shops before we settled down to a meal. They were probably right. After a few bottles of wine we men usually cross shopping right off the list. I know shopping is never really on the list we just say that to accommodate the women. Dawn enjoyed trying on mink coat after mink coat. She enjoyed acting like the quality she was seeking just wasn't available. "We'll just have to go back to Manhattan or Beverly Hills" she said

with snobbish overtones. It was fun pretending. Since we were all traveling on a budget it took awhile for everybody to agree on a place to eat. In the meantime I enjoyed bulking up on fresh shredded coconut and almonds. It seemed everywhere we went there was another street vendor pushing carts of assorted nuts so I was never too close to hunger. After we had finished dinner we headed out into Athens's streets and came upon what looked to be a celebration. It was a kind of a parade. So while we were in a festive mood we joined in. But after a few minutes the crowd began chanting "Death to Regan". It was obvious that this was an unshaken cocktail of influences, so as Snagglepuss would say, we "Exited stage left".

One irony in my life is that I had very few women friends. Most relationships with women were always aimed toward romance and when that didn't work out or when we experienced an obstacle that couldn't be overcome, we'd move on. Mostly I have had male friends, sharing common experience and growing up like all normal boys. But I'll have to admit, women make pretty good friends. Once that it is understood that not everything is sexual, we get along wonderfully. They make much better traveling companions, easier to agree with, better conversationalists, not as competitive, better sleeping arrangements; they attract a different type of crowd, and if there were benefits attached all the better. Along the river I learned to open myself up and to utilize my experiences and understanding to enlarge conversation into the interesting topics. Topics that help reveal and help me understand. It seemed the greater the risk, the greater the reward. You can't fly a kite unless you go against the wind. We hit up a couple of bars on our way back to a well deserved sleep.

It wasn't exactly an early morning but much like the day before we each headed off in separate directions at different times. I spent the majority of that day touring Athen's museums but still managed to seek out the place where we ended up having lunch the previous afternoon. Once you discovered gold, you keep coming back to the same location until the vein is gone. Tony and I had planned on meeting that evening at a local hotel for cocktails. Yesterday we had met a group of young ladies that were attending school in Europe for the summer and were in Athens on a field trip. The company was good and I understood the meal in their hotel would be free. Free has always been my favorite word in the English language. There are very few sentences that the word 'free' doesn't fit well in a positive way. It seemed that our group was beginning to break up. Sandra had left for Rhoads and Brad continued his moves and followed her. Dawn had already boarded a plane for Crete which sounded like a pretty good idea to me. After discussing options the rest of us began to search the streets for the cheapest fare to Crete. It turned out that if we left Athens at four in the morning the fare would be cut in half. After a short discussion we decided to make a late night of it and planned to sleep the next day on the sands of Crete. We bought tickets and checked out of the hotel. The hotel clerk was kind enough to watch our bags until it was time for us to head to the airport.

We regrouped at the school girl's hotel for dinner. At the dinner table we were joined by a couple of other gentlemen who appeared to be hitting on a couple of girls in the group. I swear one guy looked exactly like Paul McCartney ten years ago. The waiter that had served us drinks for the past two nights was pulled aside by one of two gentlemen that were dining with us and they proceeded to have an odd conversation in Greek. I sat there watching their expressions and things just didn't quite add up. Then the waiter approached our group and asked if Tony and I had rooms in that hotel. I explained we didn't and the waiter then asked us to leave the premise. I thought that was odd since it was a restaurant. We inquired why and what made tonight different from the past two nights we drank there. Once I gestured to the girls that we should all leave the gentlemen changed their position and tried to convince us to stay. It was obvious to me that their priority was maintaining company with the girls. That interaction and the fact that they kept suggesting that the girls go club hopping with them on the outskirts of town raised some concerns. Even when the girls expressed reluctance they kept insisting that we should leave the city, "We know a really good place". That raised a red flag in my mind. I pulled Tony aside and explained that we needed to be cautious about taking those young ladies into unknown areas of the city. Apparently our conversation triggered his aggressive instincts. Immediately when the two gentlemen came back into Tony's view he entered their space. Tony could be intimidating if he got in your face. His aggressive stance and tone scared the living hell out of both men. I noticed they were eyeing the exits just in case. They backed away from the table faster than a cat being chased by a dog. Understandably the girls were really upset since from their perspective we had insulted their guests. The two gentlemen still insisted that we visit a disco, suggested a location, eventually flagged down a cab, gave the driver directions and we were off without our new acquaintances. We arrived at what I would classify as "Disco Hell". I could hardly stand the music. Add in an unprofessional light show and increase the price of drinks by five. I was ready to go in minutes but we were struck there for the night. At least it seemed that the girls were having fun. They let their hair down and enjoyed the dancing. All night I was casing the crowd as if I expected a kidnapping to take place.

With the birth of a new day we began to head back to fetch our bags from the hotel. Beyond all odds we managed to fit all of us and all the baggage into one cab. Two of us had to lie across laps in the back seat. Our taxi driver slid in an eight-track and we were off to the airport. I found it odd that the stewardess confiscated only the US passports and then forced us to sit in specific seats, "the American" section. I guess in case of hijacking that would better protect the locals. I believed my eyes closed for just a second but when they opened we were landing in Crete.

Everyone was herded like cattle from the plane towards the buses. We figured it would be more economical for us to divvy up a taxi fare again, which meant we could avoid the lines and get a head start toward sleep. We bargained with a local driver and headed to Malata. I remained awake while the rest of the group slept. The snoring made both our driver and I smile. He dropped us at a small hotel on the outskirts of Malata. The taxi driver gave us the impression that it might be the only hotel that could accommodate us. We were all too tired to go looking for other options and just wanted to get some sleep. Once I got myself situated I put on my bathing suit, found myself a towel and headed

straight toward the sand. It was still early in the morning so when I reached the cove I was the only one on the beach. I took a swim out about seventy-five yards or so and two seconds after returning to my towel I was asleep. I have no idea how long I was out or even if I was embarrassing myself by snoring or let's hope not. When I awoke from the heat I was surrounded by sun worshippers. I wandered half asleep back to my hotel room crawled into bed and didn't awake until early evening. I woke to discover that I was alone again and assumed everybody else had gone into town to eat, so I got dressed and did the same. The moon was up and the beer was flowing. Each restaurant was about an arm's length from the next and it wasn't uncommon to move between tables and between restaurants. I had been seeking that type of atmosphere since Portugal. I noticed Dawn and Heidi were at each other's nerves. They didn't like the fact that they both ended up in the same hotel. I understood they had been traveling together since they met up in Bavaria at the Oktoberfest and even though they separated from time to time, somehow they always ended up in the same space.

I woke to what I thought was a scream. Eventually I realized that it was the manager of the hotel yelling at somebody. Apparently Dawn had spent the night with a young man who got himself caught on his way to the bathroom. That was the sign I needed to change locations and find a new room closer to the restaurants. I managed to locate a much nicer room directly across the street from what I had labeled the best restaurants and it was a whole lot cheaper. I guess this time I didn't have to compensate a taxi driver. Four of us had met out-front and had agreed to share one of the larger rooms. I claimed myself a bed and headed out to meet up with Tony. I had planned to catch up on some writing and convinced Tony to join me on a trek over the ridge. Tony was working on a screenplay and had settled down to enjoy the sun. I played hooky on my original intentions, the water was so inviting I had to do some diving. While I lay down in the sun to dry off I suddenly felt as if somebody was watching me. I adjusted my eyes and turned to see a herd of goats that had wandered up to a nearby salt pool looking for water. From the corner of my eye I noticed that Tony had fallen asleep on the adjacent hill, so like the child I've always been, I chased them. I manage to control their movements so A plus B equals watch out for the goats. Eventually we ran out the beer and decided that was the sign we needed to head back. We ended up re-grouping with about a dozen or so that we had partied with the night before.

After about thirty minutes of soaking in the sun, one of the usual male mating rituals raised its ugly head in the form of a challenge of bravery. I figured the young man who proposed the challenge had done that before and saw it as a good way to gain favor with the young ladies. There was an overhang about fifty feet above water that was apparently above water deep enough to dive into. So as those things usually go only a few declined. Six of us trekked out to the cliff in view of all the sun worshippers. One thing was certain. It was a hell of a different perspective looking down from that height than looking up at it. Well the guy that suggested that venture pulled off a perfect swan dive with almost no splash. Tens across the board. The second and then the third guys in the order we had climbed up had shuffled themselves back to regain some confidence lost while looking down. So I inherited next in line and I wasn't going to show any hesitation. I pulled off a half cannon ball that I'm sure made one hell of a splash. It turned out that the impact had slit my bathing suit up the backside. The four others took turns declining until all four lost any bravery points they might have earned and crawled back down to their towels. The original decliners then looked smarter than they originally did. All in all that was a good day of sun and relaxation.

Brad and I had made plans with two young ladies involving a bottle of wine and a sunset. We got cleaned up, searched out a good bottle and got to the place where we were to meet. I experienced a bit of a line in obtaining a shower. Two of the girls I was sharing a room with wouldn't come out until they felt their hair was absolutely perfect. I was slightly concerned that I was getting a late start. The sunset came, the two of us downed the bottle of wine and still no sign of romance. As we headed back to the restaurants and were deciding where to have that night's meal, we came across the young ladies heading up to meet us. They apologized for their tardiness. They too wanted their hair to be perfect. The four of us met up with the two girls from my room and some Canadians we had met earlier in the day. On the way to the restaurant I picked up another couple bottles of wine, I figured passing it around between tables would open up even more conversations. We had quite the party. I enjoyed an environment where I never had to consider the expense. Everything here was so reasonable, cheap. Just think, only weeks ago I had been a dead man walking through southern Italy. "For its hard, you will find, to be narrow of mind" is one lyric that keeps my perspective clear.

One after one, leaves from my tree, love, has it forsaken me

*I've known the rustling of delight, like the wind, who comes and goes with the night
and I've been there, with these arms stretched wide, watching one, then another, fall by my side*

One after one, leaves from my tree, love, has it forsaken me

*So many leaves, I lost, I knew, touch of rain, the weight of dew,
but all I lost, that leaves, that dies, now leaves me room, to see, the sky,
and now, for the first time, in love I know, the stars above and the earth below*

Outside the walls of the party I left secretly to grab myself a smoke. A young lady followed me and suggested we burn images of ourselves in the caves adjacent to the bay, at least let's give it a look. There were many caves carved out into the cliff that were used as alternative to hotel rooms. The view of the bay from there was interesting and she kept trying to wrap me into her darkness. I was pretty drunk and consider myself lucky to have made our way out of the caves safely and to locate my bed. When I got up, hung over, about mid day, I was told the young lady from last night had been looking all over for me and perhaps she headed over to the red beach. I understood the red beach to be a

topless beach which sounded like a good enough place to start the day. All my Corfu comrades were taking steps in separate directions. I didn't even get the chance to say goodbye.

Once I arrived on the red beach there were a lot of guys lying on their bellies. I thought that was quite funny and continued inviting them to swim or to play Frisbee. There was one conversation that had come up about a guy a few years back that had swam around the peninsula. Didn't seem like that big of a deal to me. I disagreed that it was an impossible task and suggested that I could easily do it. That statement escalated the conversation into a bet. I would be given no time frame and the only rule was to end up at the other cove by way of the sea. The group would take their time and proceed over to the other cove, order a few rounds of beers and wait for me to swim up, if I ever did. They would be watching. Sounded like an opportunity to get some exercise, earn a few bucks and obtain bragging rights. It was about a hundred or so yards out from the first bay but I had to swim further out to avoid the waves that were pounding the bluff. As I turned and began to swim out of sight of my Naysayer I had no visual of the other bay. I swam and swam and swam. I could hear my heart beating and it appeared that it was a hell of a lot farther than I originally assumed. Not only did I entertain the thought of cheating by swimming into shore and walking across a few of the bluffs, I actually attempted it. What a bad idea cheating is. I had to fight the surf in, in order not to get thrashed across the rocks. When I finally did locate somewhere where I could make it ashore the rocks were sharp as broken glass. Walking seemed to be the worst of two evils. So it was back into the water and that time I had to fight the waves coming in. It would have been so much easier just to stick to the original task. I suppose I just needed all other options eliminated. I swam and swam and eventually I could see around the last bluff. To my surprise they were surprised that I had gotten there so quickly. Apparently they had yet to finish the first round of beers. From that point forward the beer were free and on occasion someone would tell my little adventure to the ladies paying dividends.

10/31 was the night of nights, Halloween. Most people I met outside the United States who had never visited us gave me the impression that they believed that America was built on disposables. Everything about our country was plastic, one big plastic McDonald's. But we did get one thing right, Halloween. We played drinking games, singing games, drinking and singing games. Everybody dressed up and since we had limited options body parts were usually exposed in one way or another. Lots of hula and belly dancers and as far as I'm concerned that was a good thing. Even without candy one of the more memorable Halloweens. There were about ten of us who closed every bar in town. One of the young ladies in our group got caught trying to remove a case a beer at the rear door of the last bar closing shop. She was too drunk to realize she could never carry it down the steps. It was about three or so in the morning. The bartender who caught her was kind enough to let us buy a last round to take to the beach, and then he locked the door behind us. When those bottles were empty we still hadn't had enough so we proceeded to roam the caves in search of someone who might have some weed. "Bob Marley, Bob Marley" we asked while making a smoking gesture with our fingers. We succeeded in getting the point across but apparently nobody had any to share. We did stumble across a few entangled in an embrace, but besides those types of discoveries we had come up empty handed and eventually wandered off to sleep off the alcohol. Once my eyes adjusted to the darkness of my room I felt lucky my bed was still vacant. The room had tripled in occupancy with couples and friends.

A bunch of us from the night before had agreed to gather for a late breakfast and had earmarked today as a moped day. We all kinda wandered up at the same time around lunch. Brad and his sweetheart, Elspeth and Dave were all I managed to convince that it would be a worthwhile experience. Elspeth had never been on a moped before but wasn't shy about taking on new challenges. During her learning phase either Dave or I would tag along side. Of course we didn't want to lose her in a nearby ditch, but still babying her was like swimming upstream with an anchor dragging. We wanted to push those mopeds to their limits so when we had the opportunity we dumped Elspeth on Brad and his date. Let's hope, "What seems but idle slow strengthens and supports the rest". The first rest stop we had earmarked on our map sold bottles of wine. We grabbed ourselves a table and waited for the other three to catch up. Once we were all rested, or more truthfully when the first bottle was empty, we refilled our tanks and headed back onto the open road. Everybody we passed on the road was extremely friendly, trading gestures and always sharing a smile. We stopped from time to time to talk with the locals or to take pictures. We stood up on the bikes pegs with the throttles full and passed the bottle of wine between us. We then came upon a beautiful little bay lined by shops on one side and boats on the other. We located another bottle of wine and waited for the rest to catch up giving our bikes some time to cool down. I liked to imagine what life would be like if I had settled into one of those small quaint villages. What kind of person would I have become? I toyed with the idea, could I? Again, we had full tanks and a wandered lustfully for our next discovery.

It was then we entered the twilight zone. Dave and I were out in front of the other three. We had earmarked a destination some distance away where we would meet just before dark to watch the sunset. That way we could wander about for awhile. We had taken a left and proceeded about six miles or so when that road came to an end. There was something odd, misplaced, unnoticed by the conscience mind, yet my eye wandered about hoping to pin point the uneasiness. There stood an elderly man. His face was uncommon and weathered but his eyes had a familiarity to them. Yet I was sure I had never seen him before. If I did I would have remembered that face. He held up a trinket in his right hand as a gesture to invite us into his world. It was a necklace of dark red stones. I looked past that necklace and surveyed the other items he had spread across his table. Each item was different and unique in contrast to other peddlers who normally have groups of similar items. I supposed we both shook our heads as if we were saying, what no beer? It was hot outside and all he had were trinkets. That dead end reinforced any doubt that we had taken the wrong turn and we knew we would have to make up the distance back to keep to our appointment with the others. We traded gestures, giving thanks but expressed no interest in his jewelry. As the image of that peddler faded behind us his gestures began to engrain themselves in my mind. What was he doing there? Was he just waiting for us? There

couldn't have been any other lost idiots that day making that wrong turn in the middle of nowhere. We joked and wondered what would have happened if we had bought something from him. Perhaps that was the real fork in the road.

We grabbed something to eat, another bottle of wine and we were entertained by a small local girl inviting us in a game of hide and seek. Beautiful landscapes surrounded us, orange and olive trees reaching out from golden hills, with a back drop of sky and sea. Without focusing it was hard to tell where one ended and the other began. Each time we would make it to the top of another hill, it appeared as if the ships in the distance were sailing through the sky. Eventually Brad and his side kick had caught up with us but there was no Elspeth. They explained that they needed some time alone. So I headed back to ensure she was catching up to us and hadn't gotten herself lost. I found her attempting to push her stalled bike up the road so I traded bikes and pointed her in the right direction, "Don't worry I'll catch up to you". When I reached Dave we raced toward the imaginary finish line and headed toward the showers. I would have won the race on my original bike, no excuses the beer on me tonight.

The first thing I discovered upon returning to my room was that somebody had swiped my money belt. It was well hidden, but once they found it they must have hit the door running because my money belt only contained an assortment of colored pencils. It was the principle that rubbed me the wrong way. I also was told that Brad had followed his young lady friend into Italy and Tony decided to head back into Athens to look up one of the girls he met over dinner. As for me, there were new faces and I was starting to grow conformable here. I had a lot of friends, the food is good and the bar tenders not only liked me but were helpful when needed. We spent the next morning on the red beach where five of us decided to charter a taxi the next day to the other side of the island. We were told that there was a black beach of volcanic sand that was worth the journey.

One of the secrets learned while traveling is the advantage that can be gained by finding that right taxi cab driver. Once I have selected my chaperone for the day I inquire about his business, ask a few questions to ensure he had the right personality, then I'd ask him to explain the best day he's had in the taxi business. "I once made twenty dollars". Then I'd offer him twenty five to more depending on the economy. Taxi drivers know their way around, where to go and what to see. When it comes time to eat invite the driver to join you or your group and pick up his tab. Now he's starting to look out for your interests. You could avoid a lot of wasted time trying to get to and from place if somebody waiting for you. Remember don't leave your possessions with him unchaperoned.

Today's taxi driver was quite the character and a lucky find. He knew the area very well and was more than willing to show the backside of sights. I noticed that our driver would give the sign of the cross every half mile or so, when we past small religious shrines alongside the road. "So go to the river, trace its fountains head, plunge yourself and body in and wash away your faults and its punishments." We had left the majority of our gear in the trunk of the taxi. We set off to roam the Minoans palace and when we returned our taxi was nowhere to be found. Panic swept through the group, especially the girls. They were sure we'd never see him again. It turned out that he thought we'd take a little longer than we did and took this opportunity to pick up some eggs, an item on his honey-to-do-list. We were stupid to put ourselves in that situation because it could have easily tuned out for the worst. It was a good lesson for the group.

We needed to obtain a ferry schedule of ships leaving the island so when we reached Irrackea, besides food we sought out the tourist office. We wandered about the city, grabbed a bite to eat and then headed toward that famed black beach. When we reached that black beach we wandered about seeking a room for the night. Not one of us was willing to concede to their outrageous prices. They wanted like nine times what we were paying for rooms in Malata. So we proceeded down to the restaurants for a meal to discuss our options. The table we sat at was in the domain of feline predators, seriously. Those cats were so aggressive I actually held the pepper shaker in one hand and I used it to demand space. The food they brought was really bad. So bad not one of us had the stomach to digest a single bite, so we fed the local cats. There were so many cat's that we thought the meat might be the last dog from the area. Elspeth's had told us stories of her family always illustrating the wealth she had come from and she mentioned on more than one occasion that she had horses back home. Our two Canadian friends couldn't resist teasing Elspeth and kept on insisting they knew it was horse meat. Well, we were all still hungry and all we could purchase from the local grocery were chestnuts and a couple of bottles of vodka. We decided to sleep the night on the beach and build ourselves a fire but when we searched for wood there was not a single piece to be found. Alongside one hill we did managed to find a few branches that were dry enough to use a kindling and a fallen telephone pole. We gathered up all we could find and modified our fire pit to accommodate a pole. The fire managed to keep us warm but the chestnuts were sometimes difficult to remove without burning one's fingers. The darkness eventually fell around us separating us from the rest of the world. The beach was nothing to brag about but the stars that night were spectacular and demanded our attention.

When we reached a low point in a conversation Dave would introduce riddles to the group, supposable true stories. The goal was to reconstruct the event by only asking questions that could be responded with a yes, no, or does not apply response. His first riddle to the group was: "A man walks into a bar, wanders up toward the bartender and asked for a glass of water. The bartender reaches below the bar and pulls out a gun, pointing at the head of the man who had asked for the water. The thirsty man replied with a "thank you" and then exited the bar" That struck a cord with the group and Dave stuck to his guns and wouldn't give us an inch. We would gather information, change the subject but eventually someone would ask another question and we would all get going again. His second riddle ended up taking a few days for us to solve, it went something like this. "There was a port attached to a small seaside community. One evening a boat was towed in with broken mast and once it was securing tied to the dock a few sailors disembarked. They walked directly to the first restaurant in sight. One man sat down at an available table. When the waiter approached and asked if he would like to see a menu, the man replied, "Do you serve Albatross?" The waiter gestured that they did. "Please bring me a plate of Albatross" asked the sailor. When the meal was brought to him, he cut off a

small piece and began to chew it. He suddenly pulled out a gun he had been concealing in his pocket and shot himself in the head

The sunrise was a picture to behold. Sitting on that beach was like being the only person on the planet. Once we were all up and awake we attempted to hide the remains of the burnt telephone pole and headed up to meet the first bus to Nicolas. We were in need of a shower and food. We took advantage of the stop over on the way to Nicolas which provided enough time to grab some real food. We were all so hungry but still skeptical after the last experience. Once we stepped off the bus in Nicolas a little fat kid's persistence persuaded us to follow him to an available room. After a few blocks I volunteered to watch the gear while the others checked out the room. I was told it was a dump. We traded turns watching our bags while the others went searching for something more inexpensive but also in a more suitable location. We managed to get lucky and found a really nice room with balcony overlooking the street and most of all hot water to spare. After we all showered everybody but me was interested in checking out the harbor's night life. I needed to play housemaid and wash all my clothes. I offered and each threw in a few garments of their own. They came back to retrieve me for dinner but I was at a disadvantage. Only my bathing suit was dry enough to wear. So Dave lent me one of his clean shirts. The shirt had some Canadian this or that written across it. It seemed everywhere I went somebody would wander up thinking I was their countryman which opened up the door to a different type of conversation. We ended the evening in a local disco but that wasn't for me. Michael Jackson and Saturday Night Fever is not my cup of tea so I wandered off to bed.

We thought about mopeds but the wait for available bikes was far too long. We ended up instead waiting for Dave to finish up an I love you conversation with his girlfriend back home. A day of just hanging around the harbor. We wandered across a group of kids playing soccer with a taped up t-shirt and thought it would be nice to pick them up a ball. We found a local shop that had soccer balls for sale and bought one but the kids playing seemed to have vanished. The first young boy who crossed our path became the proud owner of the new soccer ball, be the man. Elspeth had been talking about experiences she had while working on a Kibbutz in Israel. To the group Israel sounded like a good idea but I had my mind set on Santorini. But once we obtained the ferry schedule Santorini didn't seem practical. It was the off season and ferries were no longer a daily event so we agreed Israel would be our next destination and purchased tickets to take the next day's morning ferry.

Those disco nights were not for me but it sure made the girls happy. They had all paired up on the dance floor and it appeared I was the odd man out. I was not interested. I was given a patch of the Canadian flag to sew to the outside of my bag. They persuaded me that it would help us avoid any anti-American attention while in the Middle East. I had snuck out of the Disco and wandered along the water's edge toward our room. I sat along the shore looking up at the stars and reminisced about the many things that had happened, the many faces and the many memories gathered over the past few months. It seemed as if I'd been on the road for years rather than just months. There were so many pieces that made up the puzzle of the memories that now are my past. I am still too close to see its composition. Back in my room I caught up on some writing. For me, reading at night is always a recipe for sleep.

I woke to the sound of wind that seemed to be gaining strength. It sounded like cats crying in the distance but no, it was closer. I went out onto the balcony and noticed two of our lady friends down in the street trying to get somebody's attention. Apparently the door was locked and they had no key. We had an early boat and needed to get moving. Elspeth discovered her girlfriend never made it back from last night and she presumed she may have gotten lucky. Either way she wasn't going to hop on the ferry without her, so we left the two behind.

The Canadian flag sewed to my pack didn't go over too well through customs. The combination of a Canadian flag and an American passport just lead to lots of unnecessary questions. They tried to make me feel as if I were a mouse cornered by the household cat. "Spell your name" spoke the frozen face as he shuffled through index cards. He attempted to give me the impression that he had found something. What is your "Father's name? Mother's maiden name? That was the entertainment that came along with the job. The others waited at the exit. It didn't end there. Next they pulled the three of us into small room and made us wait until some type of decorated officer showed up and sat across the desk from us. He just sat there staring at us. Eventually he opened up his mouth and slowly asked us "You know why you're here, don't you?" In the silence after his question he continued to stare. "You know why you're here, don't you?" he repeated. We had no idea what in the hell he was talking about and stared back across the table and said nothing. "Did anybody give you anything?" He asked. "Like what", I added. "You know", he replied. In a joking manner I questioned "Heroin, Diamonds?" "Lots of diamonds" Dave added. It was obvious they didn't want to be involved in any type of comedy. "Did anybody give you anything to bring on board?" "No" we replied bluntly and then they showed us the door.

We scrambled to find a good location on the deck and claimed one of the flat life jacket containers above the deck. Most all of them had a canopy to protect us from the sun and possibly rain. They were also large enough to accommodate all of us plus a few girls if we were fortunate enough. It wasn't long before the deck was covered with wall-to-wall sleeping bags. Through the grapevine the word was that an elderly man had persuaded a young girl to carry aboard a package for his nephew. It turned out to contain explosives. It would have been nice to have known that type of information in advance of boarding and to have had the choice to say no thanks.

We had an eight hour stopover in Cyprus giving us plenty of time to wander about and grab some food. We walked up and down the streets and along the water front, but saw nothing exciting except for the town's pelican. He was guarding some drying octopus and all he needed was a gesture and he was in your face. He was something to watch. He believed he ruled the city and there wasn't anybody going to tell him otherwise. We stood off to the side for a while watching the other groups from the boat wander up, "What a cute pelican" Surprise! We spent the rest of our

time under the sun out on the city's outer wall and decided to pitch in on a bottle of rum so we divvied up and I tackled the pushing and shoving of the duty free line before boarding the ferry.

Post time was nearing so I angled over for a better position and ended standing next to an absolutely gorgeous Norwegian and another Scandinavian. She and her husband were on holiday. I then noticed a little blond haired girl struggling to purchase a pack of cigarettes. I added her cigarettes to our order of rum so she didn't have to wait any longer. Her name was Jenni and she explained that she was originally from New Zealand. She was also heading to Israel and so she joined us on our container. Jenni sat next to me on the deck and we talked for some time. When a chill came up she was kind enough to share her sleeping bag and kept me warm. It was about half past midnight when it began to rain and it didn't take very long for the deck to gather enough water to create waves. First those not up on the containers ran inside for immediate cover. Eventually the rocking of the boat eliminated the advantage of the canopies and we too ended up inside sacrificing leg room and oxygen to keep dry.

The clouds parted when we reached Haifa's harbor. It was impressive passing right up next to aircraft carriers and battleships. That time they passed me right through customs but not Jenni. They couldn't pin point why somebody would travel from New Zealand to Moscow, to Cyprus, to Israel and detained her for about forty-five minutes while the rest of us waited outside. We read travel paraphernalia for ideas and to pass the time. Once she got released we all wandered the waterfront in search of the train station and discovered that if we wanted to exchange currency we would need to find ourselves a bank. Half of us went in the bank while the other half watched the gear. I wished I didn't leave my camera behind because the picture inside the bank was classic. It was a typical bank line with one exception. The third person in line for a withdrawal had a machine gun over his left shoulder. I was unaccustomed to this type of hardware. We purchased tickets and boarded a train into Tel Aviv. Once in Tel Aviv we had no problem locating Hotel Joseph, the hotel we earmarked in our travel guide. That part of the world wasn't part of my original plan so I then had to study along the way. I headed straight into a shower and then spent a little time reminiscing in the den alongside a beer. Of course I missed my family, I miss my friends, my own bed, my shower head. There was something to be said for not having routines and not knowing what the next day would bring, but always knowing it would be something I didn't expect. I felt open and creative, like I could hear noises in the distance that I never could before. Some nights I dreamt of home. I was always explaining that I wasn't really here but somewhere else far away. I don't even notice anymore that the conversations that surround me weren't in English. You don't need to speak the language to interact with people anyway.

I slept well and woke up late, but was still up and around earlier than anybody else in our group. I grabbed a conformable seat in the den alongside a bummed cigarette and a morning beer and caught up on my journal. The den had a bar and off to one side a kitchen for guests to prepare their own meals. I noticed on their bulletin board a brochure from a sister hotel in Cairo. They were offering a round-trip flight, two night's accommodations and three days of transportation to and from the major attractions for only twenty-five American dollars. Well I wasn't going to pass that up and wrote everybody's name onto the signup sheet. We all decided to take advantage of the hotel's kitchen so before the day was over we needed to gather the ingredients to prepare dinner. Everybody we had crossed paths with was extremely friendly. After we had eaten dinner Jenni and I were walking along the beach front when Jenni unfortunately stepped in some dog shit. A woman walking in the opposite direction on the sidewalk noticed and pulled out a piece of tissue from her purse. She didn't hand it to Jenni or myself but bent down and removed the dog shit from Jenni's shoe herself. I'd never seen anything like that before. The two of us ended up out on the sand relaxing in a pair of lounge chairs alongside one of the ritzier beach front hotels. Looking out into the darkness of the water Jenni remembered that she had promised her grandmother a particular bottle of Port so we took a left and began searching the through the shops that were still open. We had no luck but we did manage to wear ourselves out.

Bad news for our Cairo travel plans. We learned that Libya had lined its border with Egypt with tanks and things didn't look too inviting. Thanks but no tanks. Questions are always surrounding me, inviting me into the darkness. If I fear death is that a sign that I lack faith or if that was an indication that I value life? I believe without hesitation that I embody the motivation of a hero. Dire circumstances tend to bring the best out of me and I would not hesitate to save anybody in need not just loved ones. I have always felt that it was my responsibility to involve myself in situations where people are in need. In those circumstances I don't fear anything, or consciously choose, I just act. Where is the line drawn between those instincts and responsibilities to love ones? Today's topic was war, a much different battlefield, one I would chose to avoid altogether if I had a choice. I can imagine a gun in my hand, acting out those many movie characters engrained in my head. I still don't see my life ending on a battlefield, but who can tell the future? Fanaticism and ignorance need feeding and are forever busy, and avoiding our problems is never going to lead to our solutions. Nobody ever argues over virtues or morals. From my perspective the understanding of the virtue or moral concept expressed within a story is the story's true value. Not the storyteller or the setting. Whether it really happened or not has no bearing if the story speaks the truth, because it is the truth that is important. The story of the boy who cried wolf is a great vehicle to teach children the downside of lying. Nobody ever argued over the facts of that story. How many sheep did the wolf really kill? Where was the young boy's family from? We need to re-educate those cultures that perpetuate fear and create enemies by bearing false witness and start to steer societies toward the truth.

Jenni was writing out post cards in the hotels den and handed me a couple to fill out. She suggested that we each write to the other's parents. I penciled out a short poem and placed a stamp on it. "On the road once can never know the ways, the times, and the winds that blow. At times my sight is not so clear, as your daughter's smile, so sincere. I've

walked alone for days on end but today we walk together. I wrote this postcard to let you know, she's been my sunny weather." I also wrote a few others to family and another to Ann, I had promised I would.

*I remember the birds outside our window and a tear rolling down your face, a hug I thought would never let go,
I journeyed without a trace.*

I found you with God's guidance, then journeyed to the sea, and made our bed upon the sand, the darkness, you and me.

I remember you so beautiful, the lights they shined for me, and now when I lay myself down to sleep,

.... it's you I turn to see.

Then we wandered through the mountains, to take another stand, within the walls of the Alhambra, together hand in hand.

*The fire raged around us, while our passion grew and grew, now these times when I'm alone,
my dreams they turn to you.*

I remember you so beautiful, the lights they shined for me, and now when I lay myself down to sleep,

.... it's you I turn to see.

I felt the pain, to say good-bye, free but so alone, and wondered if you felt the same, so far away from home.

There were many times upon the road, where I stopped an thought of you, I really tried to find a way but I couldn't make it through

I remember you so beautiful, the lights they shined for me, and now when I lay myself down to sleep,

... it's you I turn to see.

*You know it's more than just a memory, within this heart you'll stay, and helps me smile,
when I'm feeling down in the midst of a lonely day*

Elsbeth's plan of working in a local Kibbutz still resonated in our heads and we began taking steps towards that path. The idea of spending Christmas in Jerusalem was an attractive proposition and one we began considering seriously. We managed to locate the local office where there was a small group gathered in its lobby. After waiting for a few hours without any movement, I began to lose focus and suggested we just head into Jerusalem rather than wasting any more time here. Jenni agreed. Dave and Robert wanted to give that venture a few more hours hoping somebody would pick them up. Jenni and I picked up the trail of tourist and wandered about the local sights and shops until we found the bus depot and gathered up some bus schedules. We ended our touring with the setting of the sun back in the hostel's bar waiting for Dave and Robert to return. After about hour or so of relaxing the hotel manager showed up with a message from Dave that stated they were successful in joining a Kibbutz. You could tell he was very excited. It turned out that each of them was socializing with different groups of people when a gentleman entered the lounge and said I want you and you, pointing to both Dave and Robert. They thought the chances of that happening were slim but I on the other hand remembered that the rest waiting were female. The real reason why I thought they stayed. It was a long day so we decided to just hang around the kitchen and cook ourselves meal and head early to bed. We had an early bus and valued our sleep. It looked like I might have started something. Jenni began keeping a journal of her own.

My eyes were glued to the window of the bus. The landscape we passed reminded me a lot of my home. The anticipation of knowing Jerusalem was approaching was beginning to take hold. There were many images that had been presented to me throughout my youth that I now have the opportunity to touch. The bus let us off at the Jaffa Gate. Jenni had a name and address of a family given to her from a mutual friend that could perhaps put us up for the night. I noticed a tourist office just off to my left and thought that might be a good place to start and to find ourselves a map of the city. The agent searched the local phone directory and made a phone call for us. The woman on the other end of the phone agreed to meet with us at their home in few hours. The tourist agent penciled out a crude map and we were on our way. We discussed bearing gifts so we went searching for fruit but I first wanted to locate where they lived and then proceed from there. If you were a young lady blessed with blond hair in need of attention this is the place. It was a different framed picture than what I experienced in Europe and appeared to have changed little from say the last thousand years. It was easy to imagine we had traveled back in time. We sat alongside the road and watched the many faces pass. There was an old man attempting to repair the road with just his hands and a chisel, there were garments draped over a woman's shoulder, vending water came from a tall brass container that was toted around over a man's shoulder, all seemed unchanged and all added to that sense of time travel. Then we crossed a pair of wild eyes like a child caught stealing and not knowing what to expect. He had a machine gun strapped over his shoulder and he couldn't have been older that sixteen. His fear made him dangerous and perhaps unpredictable, so I kept one eye on him to see what he was noticing.

We continued down the city's arteries searching through shops and gathered up a variety of fruit. Bearing fruit made the two of us feel more comfortable showing up at a stranger's door. Our map didn't quite lead exactly to the door but knowing the family's name and asking questions eventually pointed us in the right direction. We were greeted by an

elderly woman who looked much older than she actually was. She gestured for us to sit across from her while her many children gathered around us. Each with smile ear to ear and a curious stare. She thanked us for the fruit and offered us a cup of tea. We attempted to have a conversation but the wall between our two languages was too high for either one of us to climb. We hoped that they had an available space where we could sleep the night but their home appeared to be too small for the two of them and children. About that time her husband arrived and we repeated the same trading of smiles. I think they offered the balcony for us to sleep on but I think both of us were looking for something inside. We said our goodbyes and went searching for a room on our own. We managed to locate a German run hostel that was ideal. It was clean, reasonably priced and had a beautiful view of the city. The hostel was pretty packed and had no individual rooms for us to share but there were available beds in each of the gender separated dorms. Good enough for us. Down in the kitchen we discovered an assortment of pots and pans. Having the accessibility to cook our own meals was an invitation to save some coinage.

Jenni had finally called home. She had been talking about it for few days but was avoiding the task. During the conversation with her mother she broke into tears. Deep down she was home sick and hearing her mother's voice brought all those feelings to the surface. Once she recovered we wandered down into the streets and gathered up the ingredients for that night's meal. After a few cups of coffee we grabbed a few blankets and claimed a bench out on the patio. I have to admit we had gotten lucky to get such a wonderful spot. We could see the Dome of The Rock glowing under the night's moon. Occasionally we would see shadows running across the roof tops unnoticed by everybody but the two of us. Must have been an interesting place to grow up in. We both agreed that it would be an ideal location to view the next day's sunrise and set our alarms. Both in blankets we watched the sleeping city awake. Sleeping in this part of the world does take some getting used to. The Moslems prayed every four hours or something like that. They built towers so that the elders could scream out the prayers over the faithful but with the electronic age each towers are now equipped with loud speakers. I could see that irritating a lot of people. Not those with just different religious views but those who liked their sleep. We each headed back into bed to get a couple more hours of sleep and planned on visiting Bethlehem in the morning.

I wasn't sure if our bus could make the trip but luckily Bethlehem was not that far of a ride. Bethlehem was rather small and unexpectedly vacant. Typically I liked to walk around the outskirts and then worked my way back toward my destination. That gives me a better feeling of where I am. The church was also empty and there was nobody inside its wall but the two of us. It was kind of a shell of a church with an altar at the far end. At first I didn't know that under that altar was the manger where Jesus was supposable born until we followed a priest down into it. It was a small space but toward the back was enough room to loiter. Inside the manger I had an unexpected experience. I can't really explain it but it was like I could read peoples' minds or at least feel their emotions physically. Groups of people would flow in and we would quietly watch them from the rear of the manger. They would sing hymns and break down in tears. Even a group of nuns came through and passed plastic crucifixes over the star. I supposed they now would fetch a better price in the market.

I noticed that the Star placed over where Jesus was supposable born had fourteen points and nobody could explain to me its significance. The plastic crucifixes kind of ruined the moment so we wandered into a small café in attempt to escape the heat. Few walked the streets. All the eyes we saw stared out from the windows as we passed by which was not the most comfortable of feelings. When we reached Jerusalem's we decided to walk around the city and kiss each other under each gate to the old city. Those walls have witnessed sides of humanity my eyes will never see. I was born in a time and place where those shadows only lived in movies or news clips. Across the Mount of Olives the wind was blowing and whistled words through the branches of the trees. I sat there as the sun went down, jotted down ideas and reflected on what I had seen. A tornado of ideas and anger traveled past the arid sand and the bareness of the rock.

*Through these olive groves and citrus trees,
from the hills of Galilee to the apocalyptic vistas of the Dead Sea,
the wind I'm told whisper prophesies.....
But, the fox comes running to the rabbit's scream,
take my shadow and see that it does not follow me into my dreams"*

Questions began filling my head. Do we really love God? Or are we in the process of defining ourselves in his image, in an image we have constructed? Could we ever really know God's will? Will we ever really know what man is? I look at the world spinning in the universe and see an oasis, a garden in the desert of space. Not even too sure I understand space. With the knowledge we possess of its beauty and rareness how could our priority be anything but to nurture that gift. Be its care taker, a steward of the habitat and a part of the whole, because it is us. "We like parted rain drops fall, swelling till we meet and run. We shall be absorbed again and flow back into one". In my mind, there is a wall that runs down the middle of my faith. It draws a line between the concept and value of the individual soul versus the concept that we are to separate from our individuality and to becoming a part of the whole, to join one another. I was raised on the first but think a lot about the second. It is a logical place to stand, for one to believe that we are all connected. Our responsibilities are interwoven. I will continue to search with the belief that I will be forgiven and delivered to the truth. "Where little has been forgiven little love is shown". Forgiveness is God's greatest gift.

*Thou art my Lord save me from those who pursue me
incline these eyes to see ... keep me ... looking toward ... you ... and deliver me*

*Thou art my Lord in thy righteousness please hear me ... incline thy ears to me
keep me ... walking toward ... you ... and deliver me*

*Thou art my Lord in thy names sake will thou lead me ... incline thy ways to me
keep me ... searching toward ... you ... and deliver me*

*Thou art my Lord I shall find refuge when I seek thee ... incline thy hand to me
keep me ... reaching toward ... you ... and deliver me*

*Thou art my Lord send me out thy light, and thy truth ... incline my eyes to see
always ... keep me ... looking toward ... you ... and deliver me.*

Keep me where the light is.

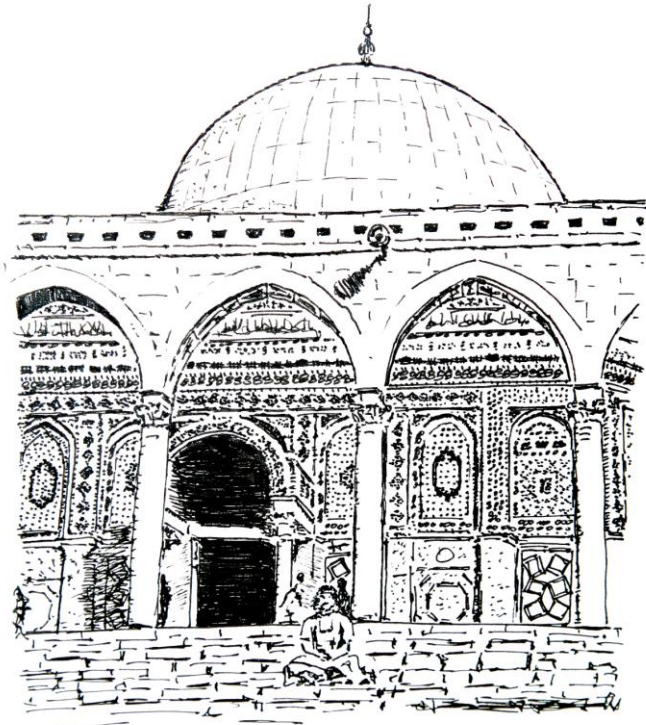
I convinced Jenni to take another day trip, this time to visit Masada. At the bus depot it was like joining a herd of sheep. If there was a terrorist attack it would not be good. Jenni kept reminding me of that. Alongside the Dead Sea and after passing a few scattered Bedouin camps I found myself wondering how far it was to the next tree. Masada was a magnificent plateau in the middle of nowhere. It's hard to understand why anybody would be motivated to conquer its walls unless motivated by pride. We followed a few tours to get some verbiage and history, wandered about the site and took in the view. There was still enough of the day left after returning from Masada to visit the Dome of the Rock. The entire plateau was littered with military personnel toting machine guns. That wasn't a conformable place to loiter.

*I don't believe in death as an ending, but rather a new beginning, this time where we are now separated,
we begin to reminisce and value the time we had spent together, enriching our reunion*

So there it is, the central domino, one of the common links between religions. Many prophets have come; many prophets have left words of truth. "Wrought in a sad sincerity, himself from God he could not free". There is no wall in the soul where man's effect ceases and God's cause begins, we are one. Is the soul individual in its nature or are we all one in God? Religions should acknowledge that they are not equal to the whole of truth. Those are the voices which we hear in solitude, the wind, like words calling to me. Everything is more beautiful because we are mortal, because it must end. I see Hell more as a concept constructed within man's own fear. Can evil manifest itself in true knowledge? If that knowledge is not embraced after death then that existence is Hell, the segregation from the true nature of God. Perhaps Hell is being an angel and having to listen to all of our thoughts.

Alongside the darkness we walked the city streets. It was a different feel since the majority of the shops were boarded up for the night. It gave the streets a maze like feel. We came upon a community of water pipes where I sat across from an elderly blind man and a few of his companions. We shared a pot of spearmint tea and a conversation. I had a picture taken but it was very dark and without a flash I wasn't sure if it would come out. When Jenni and I would kiss or hold hands through the streets, an older woman would always spring out from her daily routine to let us know that we were engaging in inappropriate behavior and that we should cease immediately.

We were also told that it was a Jewish tradition to place prayers into the cracks between the stones of the western retaining wall of Solomon's temple. That it was like express mail to God. We thought it odd that they segregated those prayers between men and women and only allow women access to a certain area of the wall. We decided that we would relax that night to a self homemade meal. We would also each prepare a prayer for our visit to the western wall tomorrow. It took me longer to put the poem on an inch square piece of paper than it did to compose it. I would place Jenni's prayer on the men's side and she would place mine on the woman's. Our little protest.



Jenni's poem:

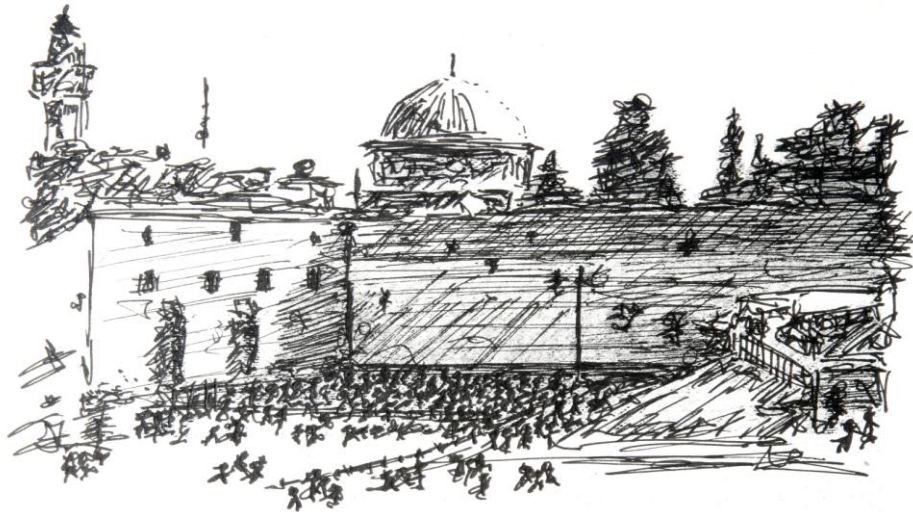
*Dear lord, we write this thank you, for bringing us this far, for helping us to grow, to you, our guiding star
We ask for your forgiveness, for we admit we've sinned, to help our love grow stronger, to shelter us from the wind
to guide us in our travels and help us understand, about the people, food and the wine and the beauty in your land.*

Scott's poem:

*Trails through this world are countless, many have yet to be tried
shadows dance and leap out into the night, leading me on, to where the roads divide
Though my pockets have worn empty and I carry no intent
you can still find me lodged in-between, as if these things were meant, to be, while the wood is green
Like a child embarks among the young, I am wandering through the darkness
in a vain search for water, to cool my tongue but I have only found distress
I try to carry my repentance, in the fruits, my branches bear
but this is not always aligned with my desires but rather where there's fear
... of being cut down at the root and cast into the fire
So each time I lay myself down to sleep, it's for this world I pray and plead
for your forgiveness, for those times we've gone astray
We are all lost without your guidance, like the many seeds, cast upon the rock
may your mighty winds take us, to fertile ground, no longer set apart
Keep us humble, gentle and patient, charitable, forbearing and free
let us spare no effort, to make the first testament, the binds of peace and unity
Keep guard over our hearts and over our thoughts, keep us awake and sober
No drunkenness or indecency, no debauchery or vice, no quarrel or jealousies
... let Christ, himself be our armor.*

Over the years I'd met so many people that believe, believe in their personal God. When I would seek answers, ask questions, express an opposing opinion or different view, or anything that might contradict their belief system, they would jump into a defensive or offensive position, a position of judgment. I know that every one views the world through a different set of eyes and I would love to learn more from them but they make it so hard if not impossible to have a true conversation. Along the river I have learned not to judge but rather seek the truth. I have no desire to separate man from man.

The next morning on our way to the Western Wall we stopped by an antique shop to visit another gentleman whose name had been given to Jenni. We sat down, had a cup of tea and talked for an hour or so. He stated that he had been working on the Dead Sea Scrolls, conveyed many stories and knowledge of the city. When we finally reached the



wall, a large group of Jews were celebrating the graduation of a young boy into their faith. We traded poems and we each secured them into the wall. God bless. We spent the rest of the day tracing Jesus' steps through the city ending outside the wall at the garden tomb. I really haven't found all the answers that could satisfy my curiosity so I continue to question. I've always felt that all sins, even the most inhumane acts, have their deepest roots imbedded in fear. That's a very sad reality. Those foundations erode where there is not love, where neglect is experienced and where one feels alone, truly alone.

Inside Herod's gate we sat and relaxed, satisfied with just watching the flow of faces. Jenni was like a flower to the many bees that circled her as she strolled through Jerusalem's streets. Time and again they would attempt to separate

her from me in order to get her alone. I panicked once, very concerned because she had vanished. But eventually I found her surrounded by wolves in the back room of a vendor's shop drinking tea. That was a long day and I fell right to sleep. This time it was Jenni who woke me up to view the sun rise. We had decided to head north into Turkey, so Haifa was earmarked as our port of exit. I had been looking through shops searching to buy something and had settled on an outrageous shirt for my walk through LAX. Jenni had also picked up a pair of what I would consider clown or parachute pants. They had stripes running their length. At dinner she requested that I write a poem down one of its stripes. I accommodated her request.

*Like the flower, who blooms to grow, all that pass, already know, your color, your scent, it's all a part of you,
and helps their smiles, come shining through*

*Like the flower, you always show, none will pass, who don't wish to know, your beauty, your smile, the picture's true
and helps their smiles, come shining through*

It seems like the entire foundation is constructed to perpetuate conflict, catering to disagreements. They couldn't even agree on what day is the Sabbath. We needed some type of road map just to know which sections of the city were open and which were closed. Now add in all the loud speakers sounding off at all hours of the night. Add in opposing religious beliefs that are contently being parading in front of one another. It was us vs. them all over the place. It's no wonder they can't find themselves peace. We finally located at the top of Haifa hill the hostel we were seeking. There was a small crowd that had gathered at its front door anticipating its opening. A young girl recognized me from somewhere but for the life of me I couldn't place her. I assumed it was a bar in Corfu and did not inquire. After a shower and a brisk walk I settled into the lounge and began sewing together the seams of the shirt I picked up in Jerusalem. I was kind of hanging around waiting for dinner. Dinner came with the cost of the room and seemed like a reasonable option until I tasted it. But that was the least of my worries. I was then part of a captive audience, Kumbaya. I began searching out exits and planned my escape. Once the opportunity arose where I felt we wouldn't be noticed or offend anybody the two of us slipped out.

We discovered that the prior day's information was incorrect. There were no boats leaving today. We got our Sabbath's mixed up again. We had already packed everything up and trekked the long walk down to the docks. At first I had doubt that anybody was talking straight. I always had to ask a few to get some comfort in confirmation. We managed to gather numerous alike answers and concluded that we were stuck there another day, fuck. I would have preferred spending another day in Jerusalem or on a trek to Petra. We cruised through the local shops and picked up groceries to make sandwiches. I wasn't planning on sitting down to another episode of Kumbaya. We settled down in a garden just below the hostel. It was a sunny day and we just lounged around and caught up on our journals and post cards. A whole new group had gathered out in front excited about the free meal. We knew better and decided to hit up some of the local bars instead. The bars in Haifa not only catered to the American military they were filled to the brim with them. Nothing against our military but some of the questions and conversations left a lot to be desired. I hadn't traveled all the way there to talk about the Yankees. Well, we did meet a few new faces but all in all, I considered that day a total waste of time.

I've always hated being late so we headed out a bit early that next morning. There was no way I would miss that boat. We went through the same kind of Customs crap we did while entering. I spent the day out on the deck sewing that shirt together just to pass the time, cause in the end it's just a Halloween costume? Like last time we had five hours to roam Cyprus. We spent some time along the shore but end up burning the time in a small café drinking. We passed through the duty free to satisfy Jenni's fix for Malibu rum and orange juice. We were then joined by a couple from Germany, not together, an Englishman heading back home and an Israeli on leave from his military service. We passed around the rum and some hash added by the Englishman. It was a beautiful evening. The stars were so bright and the sky was so black. We lay out on the deck, gazed up at them and traded stories of traveling and our respective homes.

*Many a night I stare at the stars, it steals away my breath,
taking my thoughts, away as far through the halls of life and death*

*Hours I've spent beneath this sea, knowing so many before,
have known these thoughts that dwell in me and touched upon these shores*

*Have you ever stopped to wonder, where it stops, or where it ends,
have you ever stopped to ponder, where it all begins*

*Many a night I stare at the stars and think about such things,
so many and all so far, yet I reach them in my dreams.*

*So many things my eyes can't see, though inside I know they're there,
more endless, than the open sea, when I glance at space and stare*

*Have you ever stopped to wonder, where it stops, or where it ends,
have you ever stopped to ponder, where it all begins*

Just about the time the hash kicked in the crew of the ship decided to practice safety drills. I could blame my perspective on the hash but that crew looked more like Laurel and Hardy times twenty. Following Jenni's address book we had decided on Rhoads as our next destination. She had an address of an elderly lady who hopefully would

accommodate us for the night, perhaps share her knowledge of the area and suggest places we should visit. When we reached the port we began to wander about. We really didn't know which way to proceed but luckily we crossed paths with a couple who spoke English. They were retired Americans who had been living abroad for the last three years. Instead of joining a country club or pursuing some hobby back home they decided to see the world at a slow pace. They explained that they would live in a different city every three months or



there about and they planned on doing that indefinitely. They enjoyed discovering places and people and would send home airplane tickets, so that family members could join them for special occasions. We walked round the city for some time until we located the address Jenni had been given. I approached the door and knocked on its screen. A pair of eyes looked back at me through the screen and then the door slammed shut as quickly as it was opened. I wasn't satisfied with that response, so I knocked again. The door opened again and something was said but I don't believe it was for us to understand. Then the door slammed just like before. While we were walking away an elderly woman all dressed in black and looking like she hadn't eaten in weeks approached us. She gave us the impression that she knew where the woman we sought lived and we should follow her. She was small, frail and very old but still we found ourselves trying to keep up with her. She led us to a second story door and gestured to us that this was the place. I knocked a couple of time but it appeared nobody was home, so we thanked her and left our bags in a small enclosed porch. We settled in small café just across the street. After about an hour or so, when the beers were finished we wandered back across to find somebody there. This was the Kate we were looking for. She seemed starved for company and wouldn't take no for an answer, so we agreed to sleep on the floor of her living room. After a short conversation, the three of us headed into town to catch some of its atmosphere. Later that night Kate talked and talked. She never stopped. "Are you listening Scott?" I think I fell asleep between sentences.

I planned on taking a bus over to the ruins in Lindos but Jenni wasn't feeling well and wasn't too motivated to go anywhere. "I'll see you tonight" I told her. The thought of missing something changed her mind and she decided to come along anyway. It was a nice sunny day with a cool breeze. A gorgeous little white washed village lodged under a Roman acropolis. The acropolis was strategically placed on the point between two bays. I sat alone among the ruins looking out upon the harbor below imagining incoming ships from centuries ago. Jenni waited below for me to return. As I was going over notes from my journal I came across thoughts I had written down weeks ago while feeling lonely and reminiscing.

*When I'm alone, among the weeds, I still hear you sing your song
and gather up the memories, that helps me sing along, it'll always be
My love It's always free for you and me*

*Our love will lift us, beyond the stars and shall always shine as bright
and if apart, if it seems too dark, our faith will give us light, it'll always be
My love It's always free for you and me*

*My love you know my love, from the beginning shall never end
is without strings, a guarantee, not to cost a thing, it's always free
My love It's always free for you and me.*

After wandering its maze of picturesque narrow streets I met up with Jenni in a small rooftop café. Lindos has retained a wonderful sense of antiquity and a relaxed atmosphere. Quality over quantity every time. When we arrived back at Kate's she was right in the middle of preparing dinner for three. After we ate the three of us wandered into the city to meet up with some of Kate's friends. Jenni and I had decided halfway through the first bottle that we would head into Marmaris, Turkey next. The ferry to Marmaris was scheduled to leave about midday tomorrow. It was a long day and after the addition of a couple bottles of wine there was no keeping me awake once I lay down. Self medicated

Kate joined us on the walk into town that morning. She needed to stop off at the post office while the two of us procured tickets for today's journey. Kate was a very sweet lady and this was a pleasurable visit. We said our goodbyes over lunch and she saw us off at the dock. We met up with the same American gentleman we originally asked directions from when we first arrived. While waving goodbye from the ferry I noticed that he was giving Kate a ride back into the city.

The water was a bit choppy and the breeze brought a chill. Jenni was catching up on some sleep while I just took in the approaching landscape. I went to the front of the boat to get a better view of our destination, to get a little more wind in my hair. A young lady had joined me and we struck up a conversation. She was from the state of Washington and explained that she was currently living with her boyfriend who was a resident of Marmaris. Assuming she knew her way around I inquired if she knew a nice place where we could find a reasonable priced room. She explained that her boyfriend owned a hotel and that she'd call him when we reached port. Those boats apparently were never on time so her boyfriend was waiting at home for her call. He agreed to accommodate us for a dollar per night and would be arriving shortly to pick the three of us up. It appeared that our conversation had distracted our new chaperon because she had forgotten to retrieve the bottles of alcohol her boyfriend was waiting on. There must have been a huge delta between the duty free and local prices, because he was absolutely furious. He flagged down a taxi and the four of us headed across to the other side of the bay.

About half way down that dirt road almost directly across the bay sat "Njotel Selan". It wasn't a hotel but rather a one bedroom house with a kitchen, a toilet and four separated single bedrooms behind the main house. All very small. Those rooms had no electricity and no hot water but candles provided light and blankets warmth. Once we all had gotten settled in the four of us boarded a small motor boat and headed into town. Their friends had just opened up a restaurant along the waterfront and they were eager join the celebration. We were seated at an outside table in front overlooking the bay. We drank, talked and watched the foot traffic. After the meal we wandered through a couple of the local bars until it was time to call it a night. In one of the bars there were five girls at one table that I had met earlier in Israel and I noticed Jenni giving eyes to one of the guys from across the room. Since we went there on their boat it kind of put a damper on the possibilities of freedom. It was beautiful out there on the water under the midnight moon. After a cup of tea it was off to bed via candle light.

I was up early, grabbed a table and a few chairs and set them up on the sand. I sat and gazed out on the empty bay writing until the others woke. A pot of coffee soon followed and then breakfast. The girls were taking about exploring the city's bizarre, a female shopping ritual. I on the other hand I was invited to go with the men. Bear hunting was on the agenda.



We all loaded onto a friend's boat and headed along the coast to a location that supposedly had a recent bear sighting. I'm not one who's into killing animals but I told myself that it was for food and wasn't actually handed a gun. We didn't locate any bears anyway. Everyone just got real winded. They decided to change plans and hunt octopus instead. We divvied up what was caught between the locals. Refrigeration was limited so the extra octopus was taken door to door and offered to the neighborhood. Each took what they needed and nothing more. I needed a shower so when we returned to the homestead I began boiling pots of water. It was quiet and very relaxing and we didn't mind the company, so when it was time to do some grocery shopping Jenni and I paid for an additional four days of lodging and added enough money to stock the place with food. Jenni began a new project of painting post cards and picked up some additional art supplies. Our host and his young lady friend seemed to have very little in common. I sensed that she was afraid of him at times. Late at night I could hear them yelling at one another. Their screaming was only interrupted by the sound of things breaking. I wasn't sure if he hit her and began listening for my clue to involve myself. I believe you define yourself by the actions you take and could be just as guilty by doing nothing and not standing up to be counted. If confronted I would intervene and if I learned of it while were staying with them, I would confront both of them and then decide on what actions I would take. Luckily it never came to that.

That day we just hung around, enjoyed the sun and listened to music. Just before dinner some neighbors wandered up offering fish they had caught that day. It was nice to see a community actually sharing with one another. During dinner somehow we had gotten onto the subject of "hot" food. I grew up in Los Angeles and lived with a lot of cultures that had migrated up from the equator and brought their cuisine with them. Indian, Mexican and Taiwanese, were what I considered "hot" food. A smile came across his face, "You don't know hot" he stated. He got up from his

chair and went into the back yard. He returned with medium sized potted plant covered with little purple flowers. He pulled off a bud and gestured for me to try it. I can admit when I'm wrong. That stuff was as hot as hell and was probably some kind of poison. Our host laughed and laughed as if that was the funniest thing he had ever seen. His girl friend then grabbed a second bud off that plant and forced it into his mouth. He then spent easily twenty minutes over the sink rinsing out his eyes and mouth while his girl friend laughed.

We got word that a storm was approaching. At about nine or ten o'clock a group of men approached the front door. They were recruiting all the men in the city to assist in pulling all the boats from the harbor and securing them on land. Some of those boats were large three masts sail boats and it took a great deal of effort to move them with ropes and elbow grease. It was a poetic scene of a community that came right from the pages of building pyramids. Yea I know on a much, much smaller scale. I was disappointed in myself for leaving my camera behind but on the other hand it was likely too dark for a successful picture. We could see the clouds gathering in the distance approaching the open mouth of the bay. When we had finished bringing the last boat ashore we followed the crowd into town and hid from the wind in a local bar. The bottles of Raki passed freely and the mood started taking on the colors of a ritual. Then a water pipe much like the one I smoked in Jerusalem was placed in the middle of the room. It was a large pipe with five hoses and a bowl about five inches in diameter. They would mix hash in with tobacco and place hot coals on top of the mixture. I took my turn in their ceremony.

*Smoldering incense, perfumes the darkness, murmured chanting, ripples across the silence
where offerings, of the faithful spread the roots, which actually hold the stones in place*

Shadows dance, to the rhythms of the candles, living today's memories, of yesterday's prayer

Merit, for the lives yet to come

I was told and understood it to be true, that hash was illegal in Turkey and the punishment was harsh. If anybody was caught with hash in their possession the Federales or whatever they were called there would take away the possessor with no questions asked. But that night the city was isolated. The City Council had met earlier and agreed. They placed local law enforcement at every conceivable entrance to ensure nobody outside the city's authority could enter without warning. They sent the "Old man", which I interpreted as somebody everyone trusted to fetch the chest. I understood that he would hide a chest out in the bay somewhere and that he was the only one that knew where. In bed under the blankets we listened to the wind rage and watched the shadows cast by the terrorized trees dance against the barren walls. We didn't get much sleep. Trees were pulled out of the ground and thrown every which way. The sea advanced and came in about half way into the front house. Their bed would take days out in the sun to dry.

As the storm cleared we helped put things back into place and decided to hang around another day. About midday we took a walk into town and bought two bus tickets north toward Ephesus. Our bus was scheduled to leave early the next morning. All in all this was good company and I had enjoyed the time off the road. I didn't know what to expect heading into Turkey's interior. I was never taught in school much about Turkey. Turkey wasn't part of my original plan so I didn't spend any time studying or identifying the places I wanted to visit. My only recollection was the movie "Midnight Express". We gathered up some food and beverages for our trip and said our goodbyes. The bus was new, an air conditioned luxury Mercedes.

Our driver was out on the road as if he needed to make up time. I wasn't accustomed to being on bus with the accelerator literally pushed to the floor. We were flying along a road that had very little if any guard rails. I focused my eyes onto passing objects in case I needed to brace myself before impact. At that speed and in that terrain the odds were against us, bracing wouldn't do any good anyway. I'm disappointed when I fly by at those speeds and pass places I wished I could have discovered at a walking pace. I was always wishing to have the ability and time to stop and walk about. There was a bridge that spanned across one of the ravines. I swear my mind believed that it had been there before. I knew the experience of stand on that bridge.

Sometimes, no quite often, when concentrating, I would notice something out of the corner of my eye as if somebody were there, watching me. At the moment when I changed my focus it would always be something inanimate. I questioned whether I was alone and worried that perhaps that was the first sign of mental illness. Mental illness or the inability to function physically is my greatest fear. My grandmother on my father's side had multiple strokes and it pained me that I only remembered her as bedridden. I had a hard time correlating my memories with the pictures I saw of her when she was young with those images of her bedridden. It also made me think about whom I was and what I valued in my life. If memories and experiences are valuable to me and if I used them to define who I am, then who would I be if I could no longer remember? It's a scary thought.

We got off the bus in Selesck and everybody followed us around like we were dropping gold behind us or something. They had all been waiting to petal something, a room, food, whatever, and we were the only ones that got off the bus. We ended up following one of those gentlemen to see the accommodations he was offering, then another and another. The rooms available were very bad but it appeared we didn't have much of a choice.

Once we got our things locked up we headed into town to meet up with another gentleman we had met right off the bus. He kept insisting that his sister loved to cook for Americans and since there didn't seem to be any restaurants in the area we agreed to have dinner with his family. Based on what we had already observed I felt better knowing that whoever cooks the meal is also eating it. Young children greeted us at the door and we sat directly across from their

grandfather. He had just received his first cassette player and was excited to share his music with us. Jenni had been carrying around a few tapes of her own and shared them with the grandfather. He didn't like the Stones but really enjoyed Eric Clapton. Due to the language barrier our conversation was limited. We pretty much just traded smiles and nodded our heads a lot. They brought out the meal on a large circular tin plate about the size of a trash can lid. At first I felt bad because they really didn't have much to offer. Then I felt grateful that they offered what they did have. After the meal we sat in their living room attempting to have another conversation. The mother questioned "We not criminals, why no Americans come here?" Trying to explain the effect that the Midnight Express had on our culture wasn't understood. They understood tourism was an easy way to supplement their income and just didn't understand why they never saw Americans.

We gave our thanks and headed back toward our room. When I was a kid I felt I had control, patience and a strong will but somehow I had let that wall erode into impulses. Marijuana, then cocaine. I never smoked cigarettes while attending high school but after months of using cigarettes to enter various social arenas somewhere within my unconscious mind, I was always looking for the next opportunity. I know it affects my body in a negative way yet we remain friends. The streets were dark and what little light there was drew long shadows against the walls that lined the streets. It was an uncomfortable feeling that everybody we passed on those dark streets wore robes long enough that hide their hands. I noticed a man who appeared to be a leader of a small gathering alongside a wall that separated paths, smoking a cigarette. As I approached I gave the universal signal with my forefinger and thumb gesturing that I was interested in a smoke. He agreed and asked me something in Turkish. Responding in English gave notice that I wasn't from there. We traded gestures in an attempt to communicate but only found ourselves a commonality in the smoke.

*Many times desires, have conquered me, changing the objects of my will,
but this continues to enlighten me, just and how I feel*

God shows me love, a debt to pay, while unthrift fools, throws theirs away

I'm learning to heal, this given pain, a captive's captive I remain

*The height of it all, I know will be, to cry for those who wait to see
those allowing their love to still and search no more, only beggars at a beggars door*

The light at the end of the hall leading to my room indicated trouble. The light bulb experienced difficulty getting its light past a blanket of flies. No lie. Breathing was almost impossible without inhaling one of two. I got a towel from the bathroom at the end of the hall, wet it, rolled it up and wedged it under the closed door of our room. Then I did the same with wet toilet paper on the window. Once the room was secured so that no flies could get in I killed every fly in the room. Through blurred eyes the once white walls looked like spotted wallpaper. The girl I met in Portugal who questioned the fly's intent resonated in my mind. I brushed the dead flies that then littered the floor into each of the four corners and then we slept.

When I woke I could not shake that dirty feeling. I had felt cleaner waking up on the floor of train stations. It was early. The sun hadn't come up yet and Jenni was planning on sleeping in, so I headed off to the ruins of Ephesus. That trek started out as a long dark walk. Luckily I eventually hitched a ride. When I reached the front gate the sun began casting long shadows but it was still very cold. There didn't seem to be anybody about and I managed to find an opening in one of the fences. It looked like the kind of trail young kids must have made so I crossed through and proceeded down what turned out to be a long ancient road. I followed the tracks made by chariots long ago to an amphitheater and sat up at the top, but being out in the open eventually made me feel uncomfortable. Thoughts of what might happen if I got caught danced through my head. I reminded myself that Jenni had probably been up for hours and would be about ready to get moving. I roamed the countryside and managed to thumb down a ride back. Jenni had been hanging around and was ready to leave. Before we checked out of our room we headed back towards Ephesus. We roamed among the outer stones but when we had no luck thumbing a ride Jenni lost interest. She wasn't interested in seeing any ruins, didn't like the fact that they weren't within walking distance and wasn't interested in chartering a taxi. There was no convincing her. I don't think she had gotten much sleep either and just had her mind set on leaving. We passed a military outpost on the walk back to the bus depot. Out in front were healthy orange trees full of fruit. Jenni gestured to the two officers sporting machine guns if it was okay to pick a few of the oranges and got the thumbs up.

While Jenni went back to the room to pack, I headed up to the ruins that overlooked the city. When I reached the gate there was an old man with his hand out for an admission. There didn't seem to be anything I couldn't see from outside the gate so I walked along the outer wall and ended in the local dump. There was no wall on its northern side and nothing much to see inside. The old man that originally requested admission just smiled when he noticed me as if he was acknowledging that he had tried to pull one over on me. On my way back I passed a small family living in what looked to be a one room home built of weathered mud brick. Plastic protected them from the elements and they didn't have much in the way of convenience. All seemed dirty and cold but the minute the children saw me their faces lit up like Christmas trees and they gathered round me as if I were some kind of prophet or was giving away candy. I affectionately rubbed each of them on their heads but inside my unconscious mind was telling me to wash my hands. I couldn't help it.

*There's always a place, I find in the day, where I turn my eyes, to keep it away
another just wishin', for a little less pain Just like the others, I'll never complain*

*I pass by so many, who know not my smile, who look once, then away, with all their own style
I don't want to understand and what's to explain I'll never be, the one to complain*

*I see they're down, why do they let me know, if they're not interested to take my hand
why don't they all just go, I can always use a smile but no use for the pain, Even though I'll never complain*

*Your eyes are your windows, your words fall beside, how could you believe, you had a chance to hide
what is it you're protecting, or what can you gain Just like the others, I'll never complain*

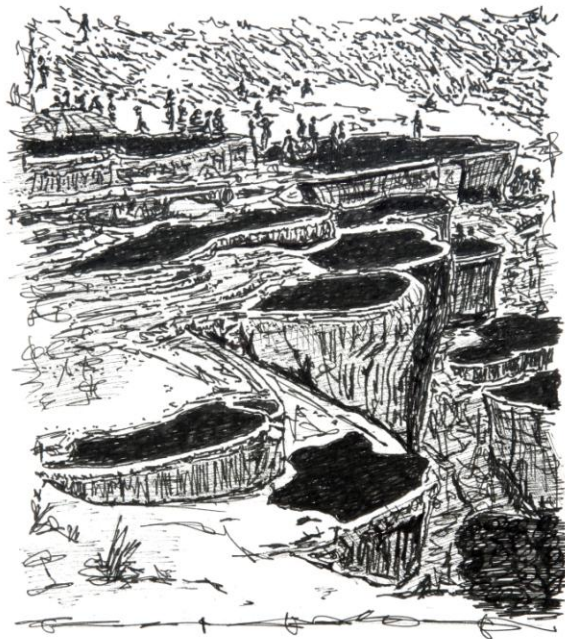
*There's always a place, I find in the day, where I turn my eyes, to keep it away
another just wishin', for a little less pain I'll never be, the one to complain*

Jenni and I had a brief argument on which way we should head. Jenni wanted to travel straight through until we reached Athens. I on the other hand didn't see the rush. I felt that I had scarified not spending an entire day in Ephesus wasn't going to repeat that mistake. I had decided to travel into Turkey's interior as I had read about some places over the last few days that seemed very interesting. Places I never knew existed. "If you would like to come with me I really would enjoy your company but it's up to you". She didn't want to be alone so she reluctantly decided to follow and we took another luxurious Mercedes into Denizli. I watched as the countryside danced past my window and listened to Cat Stevens on Jenni's walkman. We had about three hours to burn in Denizli while we waited for our transfer to Pamukkale and so we wandered in and out of numerous cafes looking for one whose cleanliness equaled Jenni's standard. It must have been the belly-dancing hour because every one of those establishments had a group of guys surrounding each television. I'm sure they all had seen belly-dancing thousands of times before but they were still captivated. When the belly-dancing was over they began serving food.

A small mini-bus arrived and toted us off to Pamukkale. I only knew what I had read in the bible and in travel brochures about Pamukkale. I understood that it was one of the seven churches Apostle Paul wrote letters to and was coined the "Cotton Castle" of the ancient world. There was an extremely old hot spring that was believed to have healing power and over time became a center of a pagan cult. Large limestone steatite created a beautiful arrangement of pools. There was a gentleman sitting next to us on bus that apparently taught English locally and was very interested in spending time with us. He stated that he was an authority on the area and would enjoy giving us a tour. He handed us directions to a friend's rug shop and we set a time to reunite after settling in our hostel. The rugs on display were absolutely beautiful. There was a silk prayer rug that had caught my eye. I was very interested in purchasing it but unfortunately I didn't have any extra money. I was almost running on empty. I knew someday when I looked back I'd wish I had brought it, par for the course. The English teacher was full of stories, history and folklore and was very interesting to listen to.

Colonnaded streets lead to where olive trees had rooted on the steps of the amphitheater. He and Jenni continued talking while standing on the amphitheater's stage. I walked up its step and sat down on the last row. It wasn't a small amphitheater. It probably could have accommodated a few thousand and the acoustics were wonderful. I was surprised that I could clearly hear their conversation as if I was just feet away. I imaged the dramas performed there where an actor would call out to the crowd that gathered around, "I've been foolish casting my dreams and lighting a thousand candles that listen to the prayers and sins of men". We were lucky to have stumbled across such an educated tour guide. In his company we got a free pass to the gymnasium, necropolis and a free cup of hot tea in the local rug shop. It was getting dark so we headed back to our room, hung around the dining area and played a few games of backgammon.

Jenni had remembered that she had saw orange trees on our bus ride in and wanted to go for a walk to see if we could locate some but we didn't have any luck. When we returned about six of us had a conversation over a game of cards. I think it was my suggestion to sneak into the pools that night. Like a bunch of school kids not even considering the consequences, but hell we had a few drinks. We each grabbed a towel and hid baiting suit under our jackets since it was very cold outside. We all climbed the hill successfully with a little help from the moon. I was thinking to myself these three women are probably the only blond haired women in the entire country and here there were three. When we finally reached the pools nobody wanted to risk jumping in. We'll I was the only fool.



I jumped in and it was cold as ice. It must have been a pool fed from the main spring and hadn't been refilled since tourist season ended. As if we all had stolen hub caps or something along those lines we high tailed it back and headed straight into bed.

Walked up one of the local hills and watched the sun rise over the valley. Then I took a trek back to the pools to get a few pictures without people climbing all over in them. They were so beautiful and unique. Shallow petal shaped pools with large expanses that had the texture and the look of snow. I expected the crunch of snow but was met with the resistance of rock. I sat alongside them for rest of the morning, just day dreamed and enjoyed the view.

*Pools rise up in steps, one above the other, a frozen waterfall of quiet meditation
they cascade down over slopes, like my memories, impeded only by clumps of oleanders
looking out over the deep silence of the tombs lay scattered over the countryside
along side, where Apollo once sat, I pondered where they all went*

The mini-bus ride back into town took forever. We picked up and waited for everybody. We stopped at one road where we could see an elderly lady walking towards us. She was about a mile up the road and there we sat and waited. "Why don't you just drive up the road and save her the walk? She'll probably die trying to get here." I almost said out loud. Since we didn't get sick the last time we decided to eat at the same place as before. We chartered a long bus ride through Ankara into the Nevsehir valley. I had a pillow, took off my shoes and enjoyed the front seat in another beautiful new Mercedes. It was cold outside and the heater at our feet fit the ticket. Buses didn't get more comfortable than this. We both fell asleep and it wasn't until the bus driver was shaking us did we realized we had reached our destination.

The two of us stepped half asleep, barefoot, with shoes and pillows in hand, out onto the cold street. There wasn't snow anywhere but the ground couldn't have been colder. Neusehii was dead. It must have been three or so in the morning and there wasn't even enough light to see where we were standing. I had to tie my shoes by memory. Then the silent darkness was broken from the sound of dogs barking in the distance. The square where we were standing gave us no indication of which direction we should head in order to find ourselves a room. It was obvious that those dogs were getting closer and closer and based on the sounds they were making there was quite a few of them. As we turned up one of the streets leading from the square we stood face to face with a pack of aggressive dogs. There were about eight to ten of them. When they stopped and started to tighten up a bit I could sense Jenni was beginning to feel uneasy. I got the impression they wanted us to get out of their way. At that exact moment when we both stopped and waited for the other to make the first move a whistle like that of a band leader echoed through the streets. The dogs on hearing that noise got very agitated and began to act more like a group of scared individuals than a pack. There was an officer behind the whistle and the second he came into the view the dog dispersed like scared rabbits. My first impression was that we had entered Mayberry. That officer was just off center. I suppose anybody who is handed a whistle and told to walk the street at that hour had to be. He attempted to let us know that he and only he had the keys to the city. He gestured that he understood our situation and we should follow him. We ended up walking about a quarter mile into a smaller square. He walked us to what appeared to be a private home and rang the bell. There was no answer and this made him agitated and impatient. He blew that whistle of his at the top of his lungs and began banging on the door. Eventually someone woke up and invited us into their home. It was warm and cozy in contrast to the cold outside. I warmed my hands in hot water before I crawled into bed. It was Thanksgiving back home and I had promised I'd call my mother, let her know where I was and perhaps talk to other relatives who would be sharing Thanksgiving. The difficulty was that I needed to be up in a few hours to catch them at mid-day. The first impression I got of the city told me that it wasn't going to be an easy task to locate an international phone line. It might also require a long, long wait. I set the alarm and went to sleep.

When the alarm went off it was just too cold to get out of bed and I convinced myself there would be a better time to call home. In that part of the world if we were told there was warm or even hot water we had to act quickly because it went fast. So Jenni out wrestled me for the first shower. The water was at best lukewarm and Jenni was afraid that it too was depleting so she showered through complaints. When it was my turn I had difficulty keeping the temperature below boiling.

We had planned on seeing Urgup and the Goreme Valley and headed out into the streets in search for the tourist office. It was still very cold but it was like a reversed microwave, my bones were colder than my skin. We located what we believed was the tourist office but there were no brochures or posters to confirm that we had found the right place. Everybody inside was huddled around a small stove trying to keep warm. They explained there were no buses or organized tours this late in the year and suggested we find ourselves a taxi driver. The word taxi driver was not a good sign and we began to view our circumstances as expensive. Jenni began expressing her reluctance to do anything that would cost more than what we originally budgeted, which was zero. My philosophy was that I was there and most likely would never be there again so I was willing to sacrifice and take it on the chin. I felt as if my initial fears were confirmed when the taxi driver walked in through the door wearing a silk suit and alligator shoes. He was right off the cover of GQ. He was dressed as if he was and wanted everybody to know he was doing much better than just okay. Jenni just shook her head and gave me a stare. He spoke good English and appeared to have excellent knowledge of the region. At least everybody gave us the impression that he was the man.

We drove through the Derivkuyv region stopping off for brief periods to see some of the local sights, the places he thought we would like to take pictures. When we reached Raymakli he parked in front of what looked to be a hotdog stand. Our driver shook hands with the man behind the booth and then gestured toward the opening of a cave. "Take your time, I'll be here when you come out", he said as he was handed a cup of tea. Talk about unexpected pleasures. This was a hide and seek wonderland. I wished there had been some place like this back home when I was Tom Sawyer's age. It was an underground city, eight stories deep, with passages running in every which direction. Jenni made it clear that she was uncomfortable and didn't want to be separated. I explained that she'd be okay as long as there wasn't an earthquake. As we were heading down I explained that she just had to follow the electrical outlets to the surface. When the two of us reached the lowest point the child inside me crept out. "I'll race you to the top. I'm just kidding." There was a cool breath of air rising to the surface so I knew there was good ventilation but I couldn't imagine that many people would live



underground like this. I would be more apt to believe that it had been constructed for defensive purposes rather than everyday living until presented with evidence to the contrary. That reminded me of a dream I had as a child, a very young child. There was a tunnel into the earth that was warm, almost inviting. I would look in but was afraid to enter. That dream would repeat. Sometimes in the middle of another dream the tunnel or cave would present itself. Sometimes I'd look in but was always afraid to enter. When I was older that dream took a different twist where deep in the tunnel there would be a door to the right that was always closed. I felt as if I had been inside there before because there was a familiar feeling of knowing. But greater than that knowledge was an the feeling of an evil presence that was so evil I felt that if I disturbed what was behind that door it would kill and eat me, or worse.

We then headed into Cardak. Our driver explained he needed to drop off a package in Ushisar and that Ushisar would be an ideal place to eat. That also gave us a chance to wander about the city. Chiseled into the earth's unusual shapes it was like roaming Disneyland in ruins. I climbed up to the top of one of those ant hills and sat down to write while overlooking a unique view of the valley below.

*Forbidden are such mountains, in the shadow of the light, to hold faith that it's the fountains that lay forth its delight.
And there paused above the mirror, in the reflection, I saw a glance and the breath of a faint murmur, like me she seeks romance.*

Deep within the garden, we cared but not for time, where I was more than a friend and she was nobody's but mine

*We drew lines within the darkness, not the utter of a word, nothing but a shared caress, our hearts were all we heard.
I got lost within her pleasure, she was blindness to my sight and I gave it all to nature, without the slightest fight.*

*Like eagles flies descending, my wings cut through the air, holding on with such a grip, to every strain of hair. My
sprit then lay weakened, the height from which it dropped, though emotions were still all peakin, time has chosen to stop.*

Such eyes were laid to darkness and within my mind I flew, was only me who needed the rest, I had stopped to see the view. It was a view above the valley, I so wanted you to know, a place where I have felt so free, like a child long ago.

*As I ran throughout the garden, you didn't want to play, my heart was out to you again but again I heard you say.
There behind your window, only glancing out to see, why aren't you interested to know, love is something free*

It's this day I hear the singing, the whispers of its song that grows inside this longing and helps me sing along.

*From far beyond these mountains, awake beneath the light, I know it's not these fountains, that shares with us delight.
And there paused behind the mirror, a reflection and I glance but I'm no longer the explorer, out searching for romance.*

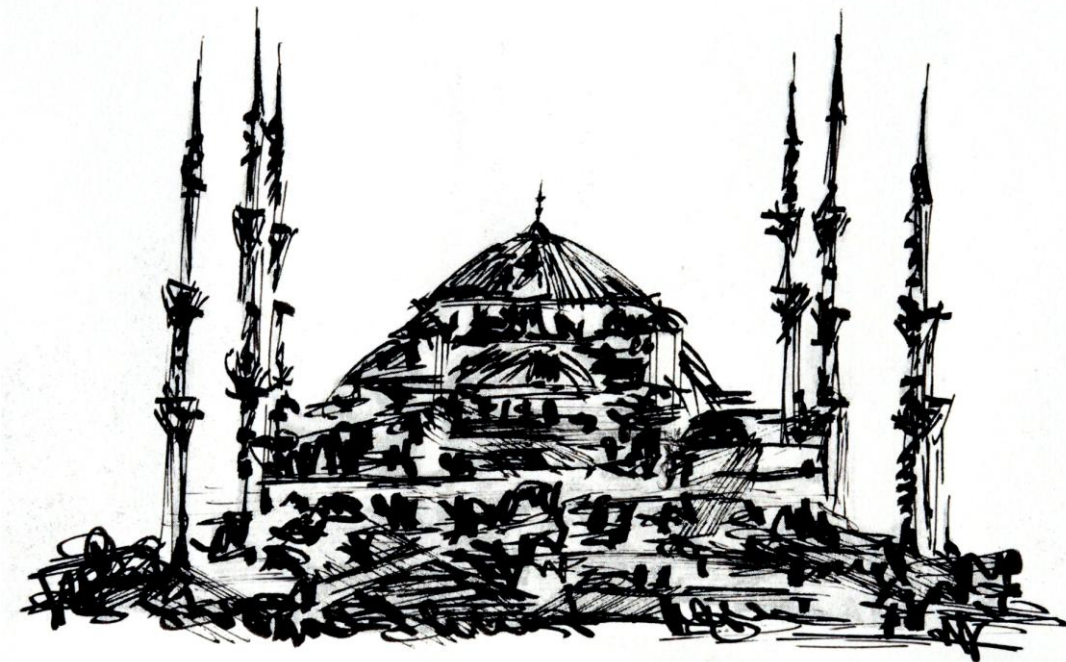
My love's now growing in this garden, no restraint in time, where everything's more than a friend and nothin's claimed as mine. To be one within such pleasure, where they've opened up my sight, for me it's here with nature, is where I've found the light.

We drove around and eventually pulled up in front of a large cliff face where there was a small opening about half the size of a standard door. I would describe it as a chimney about the width of a man's shoulders with small foot holes carved into one side. Looking up I could see the light of the opening and estimated it was over a hundred feet up. Our taxi driver dressed as he was gestured that we follow him and began climbing up. Jenni was second, me and then a young Swede who had been following us around. Once we were all in the tunnel I could barely see the light of the flashlight ahead. Every so often I would look down measuring the distance we had traveled. We came to a small opening. There was a crack on its outer wall that allowed enough light in so the flash light was no longer necessary. It was a small church with religious paintings decorating its walls. I believe Jesus had said not to parade one's religion in front of men, so places like this where prayer was in solitude are special to me. We had a dialogue without words in silence and exited on the other side of the mountain. The Swede that followed us had left his bag behind and there was no way he would attempt climbing back down the chimney alone. He had a long walk around the mountain to fetch his belongings.

The next and last stop for the day was the Goreme Valley and wandering amidst the "Fairy Chimneys". Along the way there we passed a group of five guys one of which Jenni had eyes for back in Marmaris. Our driver was not going to pick those guys up so all she could do was wave as we drove past. Staring at them from the rear window. We walked among stone mushrooms which was yet another absolutely unbelievable formation. It's hard to believe that either wind or water had created those structures. It looked more like a very large giant had come along and placed each stone on top each chimney. They are the exposed bones of the earth and windows into our past. That was a remarkable venture and my concerns earlier were unfounded. Considering everything, what we paid the taxi driver was quite reasonable.

We picked up our bags and headed for the bus station but hadn't yet decided what our next steps would be. The choices were to either spend the next day in Ankara or travel straight through and end up in Istanbul the next morning. When the sun went down it got cold and I mean really cold. I got myself comfortable next to a heater on the bus, went to sleep and wasn't awoken until the sound of snow began hitting the bus's windshield. When we arrived into Ankara neither one of us felt much like searching through the city for a room. As a matter of fact we really didn't want to get off the bus, but this was the end of the line. Luckily the transfer between buses was short and we didn't have to spend too much time with the elements.

We arrive early into Istanbul but were without coinage and to compound our dilemma that day was the Sabbath. All the exchanges in the station were closed. We walked across town and ended up being directed to a major hotel in the area, but they would only exchange money if we weren't guests of the hotel. "Get a room and we'll exchange money for you" the receptionist repeated to us twice. The only other option we had was to charter a taxi to the airport, but the taxi wanted to double charge for having two occupants. So Jenni went to the airport while I stayed behind and watched the bags in front of the hotel lobby. Then the exchange at the airport placed some type of Sabbath tax on top of the rate, so we started off on the wrong foot. We wandered back across town into the Sultanahmet district and found a place in view of the Blue Mosque. Once we got things settled we grabbed some tea in a local rug shop and then headed out to see the sights. We started the day barefoot and entered the Blue Mosque. What struck me as odd was that they allowed individuals to establish their own boundaries. Worshipers would lay down prayer rugs on the floor of the mosque and then go about their day and return to the same spot to continue prayer. It was obvious that they had grouped themselves in small social orders where the less privileged were moved to the perimeter. I don't know but too me it all seemed so staged, like a parade of one's religion.



*Voices cry out, like passion in the wind, searching ears, having not pierced the veil,
cries and the tears fall, endlessly on*

*They only appear, toward the end of the gallery, where the cruelest lies, are often told in silence,
and the tears fall, endlessly on*

*And we shall never know, what autumn leaves are stripped away, only the soul, thrown wide open to the sun
cries and, the tears fall, endlessly on*

We relaxed among the gardens that separated the mosque from the Ava Sofya where we met a peddler who was selling flutes. He could really play this instrument. I picked up some nuts and shredded coconut and we headed off to see the church of divine wisdom, Aya Sofya, glowing from the light of thirty million gold tiles. "What stories they could tell". I was told that where I was standing was once believed to be the center of the universe.

*They paint images in humans form, for their idols show disdain
for they will entice you, all the beautiful and sweet things, corruptible and vain
may you display firm faith, undoubting hope and unfeigned and never failing love
not in the flesh but rather in your heart, the true message from above*

We continued munching on nuts up to the entrance to the Topkapi Palace, the heart of the Ottoman Empire. I naturally avoided the circumcision room. I was very impressed with the jewels on display. The sultan's armor had diamonds and emeralds the size of baseballs. I have a lot of respect for somebody who can step on battle field with jewelry of that value and not get raped. We crammed a lot into one day and I was dead on my feet so we didn't wander far from our hotel to find food. We joined a few others that we had met in the hotel, drank some alcohol and talked a bit but eventually I crawled off to bed early. Jenni stayed out late and slept in. I on the other hand hit the streets at first light. Any time it was too cold, I knew all I had to do was pretend to be interested in buying a rug and that would lead to a warm room and a hot cup of tea. Later I met up with Jenni and we wandered alongside the Hippodrome and spent the day roaming the Kapali Carsi or grand bazaar. Colonnaded galleries and calligraphy-covered high walls, from one peddler to another. When you're on the road, shopping is more a look but not buy exercise but every so often I would see something and debate if I should send it home. There was a beautiful large water pipe that had caught my eye and was reasonably priced but in order to get it home there was the secondary cost of shipping. No thanks. We ended up that evening around the golden horn, checking out the clubs and dined more upscale than the previous nights. On the way back we picked up a pair of train tickets for a late night train into Athens. On the way to pick up our bags we stopped for a drink in the previous night's hang out before we departed. What a small world. The same five gentlemen that we last saw from the rear window of our taxi came wandering in. We passed around a few drinks and traded stories until it was time for us to head for the train station. Our lucky travel angels had been watching over us. They had been granting us good weather everywhere we went. It only snowed when we were on a bus between locations. When we approached the train station it began to rain. "If it's going to rain, put me on a train."

We boarded the train and ended up in a compartment across from a young married couple. Without asking I assumed they were newlyweds. She was heading out and he was stationed there with the American military. While they were saying their goodbyes a Turkish military officer entered our compartment and began to make a pass at his wife. Her husband had no idea how to react and just told the officer that she was his wife, hoping that he would respect their relationship. The officer ignored his comments and proceeded to come on to her. I stood up and removed his hand from her blouse. He stood there staring at me and while he was deciding on what action to take his walky-talky went off. It was another officer requesting something. Then over the loud speaker they announced that the train was departing, all aboard. Those two occurrences derailed any reaction and the officer quickly hopped off the train. The young woman's husband kissed her and did the same. Both guys were standing on the platform next to one another as the train pulled out. I could see the relief in his eyes knowing that his wife wouldn't be traveling alone.

*When you go, away from me and dream of things, you long to be
I'll be there, to hold you tight, to keep you safe, throughout the night*

*So when you go, to sleep, my dear, leave behind, your world and fears
and dream of things, you long to be, when you go, away from me*

When we reached the Greek boarder two overweight Greek women accompanied by a small elderly gentleman squeezed into our compartment. Since they paid local taxes they acted as if that train was their own personal property. They were smoking like chimneys alongside the non-smoking sign and discarded trash wherever they saw fit. On a couple occasions I saw the larger of the two women spit on the floor. When the conductor entered requesting tickets, to put it in as few words as possible, a hell of an argument broke out. They refused to stop smoking, wouldn't pay for the train ride and were yelling as loud as they could without losing a lung. This was all happening conveniently at around two in the morning. Customs followed up behind and confiscated passports, ours included. If that train wasn't absolutely packed and our passports weren't confiscated we would have picked up and moved to another compartment. In hind sight we should have just moved out into the corridor. Those were the poster mothers for the word "Assholes,

large assholes” in the Greek dictionary. The train sat there for some time and when it finally pulled out I hadn’t been given any reassurance that our passports were still on the train, raising some concern. The colors of the landscape changed as the sun came up. I didn’t get any sleep and spent most of the time gazing through the window. The frail gentleman and the two fat ladies had fallen asleep. Talk about the temptation of payback.

We considered ourselves lucky that we didn’t have to wait until eleven before we could get into a room, an advantage of the off season. Everything with the exception of what I was wearing went directly into the tub for cleaning. Our room looked like a Laundromat that had experienced a tornado. We had wet clothes hanging from every available object in the room. Our main reason for stopping in Athens was to pick up Jenni’s mail. Jenni had a P.O. Box set up by her parents that was full of good news and a early birthday cards. Her grandparents had sent a pair of US hundred dollar bills and from that moment she began contemplating how she would spend it. I wanted to spend Christmas in Jerusalem but my money was running thin. I had no rail pass and still needed to pay for my way to the airport and a plane ticket home, so I began a dialog with Jenni about possibly borrowing some money until we reached Amsterdam.

I was told I still had family in Belgrade. My grandmother had given me addresses of relatives so at one point I considered visiting, but the negative idea of just showing up on somebody’s doorstep crept in. I ran it by Jenni. She didn’t have any plans of her own and kind of reluctantly agreed to follow, as long as we were heading north. We spent the rest of the day seeing some of the sights and roaming the streets. The one thing I didn’t want to do was to visit another museum. I knew of some excellent places to eat and while we were heading to that part of the city I ran into Mr. McCartney again. He recognized me right off the bat. We shook hands and I apologized again for Tony’s aggression. “He scared the hell out of me” “That was one big guy and I thought he would hurt me” he stated while recalling his fear. Mr. McCartney owned the restaurant he was standing in front of and invited Jenni and myself to join him for a meal. If I just hadn’t involved Tony things would have turned out a lot different. “My fault, perhaps you would have gotten lucky”. He smiled as if to say of course. We had a nice long conversation alongside the boulevard before we jetted across town to assemble our dry clothes. We snuck out the back way and boarded a train bound for Yugoslavia.

We had met three young men on the train that were also traveling from Turkey into Yugoslavia. During our conversation one of the gentlemen asked if we would help them smuggle leather jackets across the border. Apparently since they were citizens of Yugoslavia they would be required to pay a substantial tax for brining in apparel to the country. I told the Customs Officer that I had bought them as Christmas gifts for my family and I didn’t trust sending them through the Turkish post, that I preferred Belgrade. That lie got me a smile and a nod. There was something about Belgrade I didn’t like from the moment I stepped off the train. When I finally located an available toilet my initial feelings were reinforced. The food was terrible and should have been avoided. The view of the smog that hovered over the Danube convinced us that we should move on. Before we left I wanted to walk by the Russian Embassy since I was told that it used to be my ancestor’s home. We stopped off at the train station and procured tickets for an express train into Sarajevo. It was scheduled to arrive early that evening which gave us more than enough time to locate a place to sleep. We passed a cobbler’s shop up an adjacent road where there was a pair of sandals displayed in its window. Jenni on the spot fell in love with them but when she knocked on the door nobody came. We walked about Kalemegdan Park and cruised through a few of the local sights burning time until our train was to depart. Just prior to our train leaving we stopped by the cobbler’s shop one last time. Jenni knocked a few more times and eventually an elderly gentleman came to the door. Jenni explained that she had a train to catch, would not be returning to Belgrade and was interested in buying the sandals in the window. He gave her some weird look, said something like, “Go away” and closed the door in Jenni’s face. For hours she wined and wore her sad face all evening. We got on “The Olympic Express”, first class all the way. I just wished they would have stopped playing that elevator music. After about an hour or so an announcement came over the loud speaker “Due to extreme snow, the pass over mountains is now closed”. I understood we were then going to go around the mountain and I could tell by the look on the faces of the other passengers that it would take some time. We asked the conductor in passing when we would arrive. “Somewhere around two or three in the morning we’ll be pulling into Sarajevo”.

It was very late, or to be more accurate, real early in the morning. Outside the station it was dark and cold, really cold. Neither one of us were equipped for that type of weather. The streets were covered in ice and our worn tennis shoes didn’t provide much if any traction. When we exited the station we had no idea which way to head to find ourselves a room. There were two others that also exited our train so we began following them in the hopes they would lead us down the right path. We came to a large boulevard lined with large office shaped buildings but there were no signs or lights that provided us any indication that we were heading in the right direction. Then we noticed a light in the front lobby of one of those buildings where there was a man sitting in front of a rack of keys. We approached the glass door, knocked and gestured that we were tired and interested in a room. He looked kind of puzzled but came to the door and let us in. We followed him back into his office where the three of us gathered around a small heater he had been using to keep warm. He gestured asking if we wanted a cup of tea and poured us each a cup. The tea hit the spot and helped warm us up. We sat across from one another and tried to communicate through our obvious language barrier. We continued pointing at the keys behind him and gestured that we wanted to sleep but we were getting nowhere. It seemed like forever but eventually he reached behind him, grabbed a key and gestured that we follow him. The joke was on us. Once we entered the building it was obvious it was not a hotel but a school. We were both laughing while we followed him up to the second floor. Our host grabbed a small heater out of a utility closet, unlocked a door and led us into a teacher’s office. The teacher’s desk was scattered with report cards. My mischievous nature challenged me to change some grades but of course I didn’t. We got down on the floor next to the heater and fell fast asleep.

*I once had a friend and oh did we soar, so many new things, never seen them before
flyin' so high, within the night air, moment to moment, without even a care*

*There's a joy, in the height, when looking on down, I notice them moving, just wandering around
to hover above, to circle again, wondering why and wondering when*

*I felt so free, like a bird through the air, moment to moment, I had not a care
The night, was our own, to adventure the wind, reality my canvas, the paints to pretend
not a fear in the world, to go where I dare, wandering here and wandering there*

My dreams were suddenly interrupted by our night custodian. I got the impression we had to move because the teachers and student were on their way in. We gathered up all our things quickly and exited into the cold streets. I'm sure I still looked as dead as I did the night before but this time I could see. We managed to find a local hotel. Our priorities were to get out of the cold and find something hot to drink. We entered and got ourselves comfortable in the lounge and tried to make it look as if we had spent the night there. This allowed us to take advantage of the hot coffee and fresh muffins. From our view that was the only option until the city woke. When the market place opened we picked up some bread, cheese and impulsively Jenni bought a bottle of cherry brandy. We started out with a one sip, then another and eventually ended up downing the entire bottle in a small park before noon, or maybe it was somebody's garden. Our train to Dubrovnik didn't leave until early evening so we had the entire day to absorb what we could of Sarajevo. The brandy helped warm and loosen up our joints which made all the walking more tolerable. We went in and out of shops, up one street, down another and saw a few of the local sights. Eventually we came full circle and ended up lying on individual benches and soaking up the sun in the same garden from where we had started our trek. The clock was ticking very slowly and there was still a distance to go until departure time. We broke out the note pads and continued sketching down thoughts about the previous days' ventures. Sometimes when I consumed alcohol early like that I get bored and starting thinking about things under a negative light.

*You say I'm dreamin and it's really nothin new, you know, I must be dreamin, baby, to think I had a clue
where ever I go and, whatever I do, I can never seem to find a way and it's got me feelin blue*

*This has got to be, some kind of dream, why can't I open up my eyes
cause every time I see you, I'm back and I don't know why*

*Were drivin down that same old road, down to nothin new, you know,
I must be dreamin, baby, to think I had a clue*

*I thought, I thought I knew the way but every time I'm coming close, somehow you slip away
You know it's true, I can never seem to find a way and it's got me feelin blue*



Our train ended in Karajevo where we were left to wait for a bus. There was nowhere to hide from the cold so we all had to move around a lot and it seemed like the bus was ever going to show. We had scattered moments of sleep, moving here, moving there, trying to forget how cold it was. That was one bad night. The bus eventually showed up late and wasn't scheduled to enter Dubrovnik until around breakfast. I just dazed out looking past my reflection at blackness that was the sea passing by in a blur. When our bus pulled in it was as if we were bread crumbs tossed in front of a group of pigeons. The elderly women of the village wrestled over our attentions hoping that we would agree to follow them to their home. We ended following one of those women up an endless flight of stairs. I then understood why they were waiting around the bus depot. It would have been almost impossible to find these places on our own. It had a hot bath, wasn't far away, we had already made the climb so we agreed. At least the view of the bay from up there was a sight to see. Jenni didn't like the steps, couldn't have cared less about the view and really wasn't pleased with the room either. She wanted to look elsewhere. Let me rephrase that. She wanted me to look elsewhere. I agreed but it was only going to be eighty steps in one direction, then another eighty in another. I wasn't interested in spending much time on anything that derailed me from today's goal. I was tired and had planned on loitering under the sun inside the walls of the old city. So once we got cleaned up and our things settled we walked into the old city of Dubrovnik. After introducing

ourselves to the city we ended up along its small harbor, gazed onto the sea, watched the sailboats wrestle with the wind, listened to the dancing of the breeze and eventually my eyes closed. It was nice to feel the sun radiating from my skin. Those old walls drove my imagination and provided me with the seeds to grow a few dreams by.

I love to hide away awhile, from the eyes of daily cares, where in the setting day, my smile, from within a humble prayer

Found within my solitude, the disappearance of a tear in my pleas to find forgiveness, where none but God can hear I know I've walked in weakness, I have fell and failed again and it seems, no matter how I try, There's times, I've given in

Please hold me, in your love, for I need, strength to keep away from the darkness and the shadows, that somehow finds me, through the day So, I bow this head, face to the dust, and veil these eyes in shame I stand alone, in my self disgust, for where I've walked in vain

God, I pray, down upon these knees, it is here I shall stay you know, I tried to walk this road, alone and still I can't find my way

Please hold me, in your love

Jenni was interested in heading back to our room. I accompanied her out of the old city but once we arrived at our room I kept walking until I reached the end of the point and decided to keep trekking down along the water's edge. The next morning Jenni was all upset with me. Supposedly I had touched her the previous night or something of that nature. Even though we were affectionate, kissed and shared the same bed I had never taken things to a physical level. She never placed a foot onto the bridge that indicated any sexual interest in me and over time she became more of a sister. I enjoyed her company and considered her a good friend. If she was interested I would have accepted that change in our relationship. Her attitude was a little confusing, so I gave her some space. I tolerated her new attitude, hoping it was hormonal and would go away.

We charted a bus north up the coast into Split where I was able to see the beautiful coast line. One of the advantages of traveling in baby steps is that we could stop at those beautiful places and not neglect the details that make each special. When we reached Split we headed through the walls of the old city seeking a room for the night. We either were appalled at the high prices for a room or they didn't have any available. Since our budget was deflating I posed an option to Jenni. Let's see the city, have a really nice meal and head out on a late train. Or just fork out for a room and eat from the local market. Jenni selected option A. So we headed back toward the station and procured two train tickets heading north. We wandered about the city taking in its history and checked out a few of the better restaurants, selecting one that matched the money we had left. We didn't feel that we were going to be missing much by only staying a day. I suppose if the sun had been out, the beaches probably would have convinced us otherwise. We were hungry so we sat down to a nice bottle of wine and an excellent meal earlier than we had planned. We ended up claiming a bench on the water front but when the sun went down the chill that arose from the water was hard to tolerate. We attempted to keep warm with no success so we wandered over to the train station hoping that we could hide from the cold. There was no enclosed waiting area so we laid blankets down against a wall off the platform. At the moment I fell asleep a conductor came by and kicked me, "No sleeping here".

We wandering about and eventually ended up on the same bench we had abandoned earlier. I don't know what we were thinking because it wasn't getting any warmer. We were too cold to sit in one place and had no local currency. Then Jenni mentioned that she still had the hundred dollar bills in her wallet from Athens. "Perhaps we could get a local bar to exchange one" she suggested. I was game to do anything to locate some warmth. We entered through the old walls and just to our right was what seemed to be a lively enough place. Jenni enter the bar wearing a smile and approached the bar tender. "We're thirsty and I have no money....." They didn't let her get out another word out and so she never completed her question. Before I could get a word in edgewise there were two drinks in front of us. "Yugoslavians, big hearts", the bartender said twice. "No, no we only need to exchange a hundred", I explained. Our conversation placed us into the center of attention and expanded to include more and then more patrons. "Big hearts" was emphasized by two more free drinks placed in front of us.

Then suddenly our attention was dethroned by the town drunk. What occurred next could was pulled right out from an American Western. The drunk wandered in smelling like he had been sleeping on the streets for some time and the last drink he had spilled on himself. He was willing to do anything for another drink. They all told him if he wanted a drink he would have to pay for it. That only began to turn his wheels toward begging, play his sympathy card. Then one of the guys sitting at the bar to my right turned on his stool spit on a Dinara note and placed it on his forehead. He didn't attempt to remove it as if that ritual had been done many times before. Then they requested him to dance. "Dance if you want a drink". The way he was treated was embarrassing, especially when they made him sing. They all laughed and when he was done with that drink they literally booted him out onto the street.

Jesus said, "They hate me for exposing their weakness" "Whoever exalts themselves will be humbles and who ever humbles themselves will be exalted". I didn't turn away any free drinks and nobody asked me to sing. Even though inside I felt bad by the way they treated him I didn't risk being cast into the same lot. I know I was weak but I told myself that next time I'd try harder.

*Come down, please lift me higher, eternal hills, I've never seen
though I strive to reach, never ending heights, still one, who's lacking wings*

*Sunlight, I see is brighter, eternal hills, I cannot see
heights I cannot find, supreme desire, still one, who cannot be*

*My God, please lift me higher, above all, I know to be
and clear the clouds and fit me wings, eternal hills, I long to see*

After filling myself with alcohol; I tried everything they put in front of me. I had visions of sleeping like a baby and waking up in Austria, but when the train pulled into the station it was filled to its brim. Luckily we managed to find a place to sit but any sleeping would have to be accomplished in an upright position. Sometimes getting a place to sit depends on which train you decided to board, a few steps behind and you might be standing. I probably dozed off a couple of times but nothing that resembled sleep. The closer we got to Ljubijava the stronger the snow flurries. When we reached Ljubijava we were in the midst of a full blown storm. It was cold, and neither one of us planned on venturing too far and stuck relatively close to the station. Still we had no local currency and were very hungry. The drinks from the night before weren't helping either. Soon we would be in Villach and then we would eat. Boy would we eat.

When we finally reached Villach and obtained some currency, sugar was on the menu. I found a dream of bakeries and was operating on the 'try everything once' premise, but we cut that short for some real food. We spent the rest of the day checking out shop windows. Jenni expressed a passion for shop windows. I suggested that she get herself a nice camera and perhaps someday she would publish a book. It was my opinion that books like those would become very popular, familiarity that could have a lot of diversity. It was obvious our surroundings had changed. We were among well dressed middle class and it appeared that they had all showered that morning. I suggested that we continue heading north to the small village of Lienz. I enjoyed the time I spent there and it was the perfect distance to make a stop. As far as Jenni was concerned, it didn't matter, "As long as we were heading north".

Snow continued falling like angel wings falling from the sky and blanketed the tracks as far as the eye could see. When we reached Lienz it looked like we were pulling into the Santa's Village, Saint Nick's backyard. Lienz was covered in snow that appeared colored by the reflections of the numerous Christmas lights that lined every square. The picture was post card worthy. The tourist office wasn't just closed for the season, it had been converted into a print shop. There was a young man there over dressed for a print shop, he looked as if he stepped right from the pages of a modeling magazine. I noticed he had an eye on Jenni so I played it to our advantage. "Perhaps my mother could put you up for the night". He called home and his mother agreed. She would just need thirty minutes to clean things up and make the house ready to accept guests. The three of us walked the town, talked about local history and located a cold beer. We ended our walk across the river at a large door to a big white house. The room was exceptionally nice and caught Jenni's expectations completely by surprise. From the moment we entered the room she was all smiles as if she had discovered a present with her name on it under the Christmas tree. "I don't have a room like that at home", Jenni explained. Our hosts suggested that if we weren't too tired from traveling they knew of a nice restaurant and would enjoy our company for dinner. We showered, put on some cleaner clothes and the three of us and his younger brother headed across the river. My wallet was really thin so I just stuck to ordering soup and blamed it on all the pastries. The conversation never really included me. Both brothers were hitting on Jenni. When one of the brothers grabbed her hand I hit stage left and set out for a cigarette. I wandered in the cold but the mood of Christmas was warming. I stood for some time on the bridge and watched the water grab pieces of ice and race them down stream. When I returned to the restaurant it was like I never left. The conversation must have come full circle. They made me feel as if I got caught daydreaming in a classroom. "I'm sorry could you repeat the question?" It brought back



memories of day dreaming in school. I've always dreamt my way through the school day and missed out on learning lots of things. Never really applied myself. It was late and we all wandered back to hit the sack.

That was one of the most comfortable beds I had ever slept in. It was like sleeping on a cloud. Morning to me was like Christmas day. I couldn't wait to get dressed and head out into the snow. I made a snow angel and threw a few snow balls at imaginary friends then wandered alongside the river's edge until I came upon a small coffee shop. These little places hidden where only the locals know are priceless and worth seeking out. I stopped by the station and bought a pair of tickets into Innsbruck. Without a rail pass these little transactions added up quickly. When I got back to the room the comforter that covered the bed was so large and fluffy I couldn't tell if Jenni was under it. Underneath the comforter she was still asleep. Breakfast was served in our room and was as exceptional as the bed.

The older brother asked me the previous night about my relationship to Jenni so when he suggested walking us to the station I knew that was his last chance to make a move. Just prior to the train pulling in I thought I'd give them some time together so I made up a story that I was out of film and wandered into town for a goodbye beer. We boarded the train just prior to the engine arriving. Looking in both directions you couldn't see the tracks through the snow which hadn't stopped for several few hours. It was a winter wonder ride into Innsbruck. Even though I had been along that path before everything looked different covered in white. Surprisingly when we reached Innsbruck it was raining very hard even though it seemed cold enough to snow. We darted from building to building in an attempt to locate a room but all our inquiries resulted in no vacancies. Things just weren't falling together the way we would have liked and we began to get discouraged. The rain had a lot to do with it. We made a few more inquiries and eventually decided to play the "eat well and sleep on the train" card, so we shelled out and pigged out. We hit up the Chinese restaurant that Jim and I had gone to on occasion. Not only had its menu changed but it seemed their prices had doubled. We did eat all we could and hung around as long as possible hoping the weather would let up and give us a window to get back to the station. Our plan was to sleep our way into Amsterdam but when we got a hold of the price tag we needed to consider other options. After checking out the schedules and the ticket prices I came to a conclusion that we could reduce our fare by half if we traveled through Munich, so that became our ticket. Our wait on a cold station floor eliminated any opportunity to grab real sleep so I caught up on my journal.

It was wonderful to be back on a train. Trains were a wonderful way to travel and venture to say I considered them to be on an equal footing with automobiles. Each had equal advantages and disadvantages. Trains were fast and direct, easy to sleep on and were always an easy place to locate a smile. Automobiles on the other hand provided freedom, allowed one to travel at a slower pace, to stop and take pictures but provided no sleeping, hardly any leg room and could be difficult to read or write.

When we reached Munich it was still raining outside so we never left the station. We chased down an exchange for enough money to buy two tickets and eat. My budget made it here but no farther. I needed to borrow money from Jenni. When we reached Amsterdam I planned on making a withdrawal with my American Express Card, take out enough money to pay back Jenni, buy a plane ticket home and hang around for a few days to finish up my journal. I had about two blank pages left and only its cover would be untouched. It took really good vision to read it. The size of the letters started out about a font of six but after about thirty pages the letters began getting smaller and smaller. Showing this journal to someone for the first time usually got a chuckle. I still had a few poems I had been working on unsuccessfully and the last part of "Our nature is at conflict", so relaxing in Amsterdam would bring this to a conclusion. I had a frankfurter and beer, then another and again. It felt good to be full.

I knew we had reached the Netherlands when the standard blue or green trains turned multi-colored. Two guys had hit us up in the train station soliciting us to take a room on their boat. I preferred being in the heart of the city where access was easier and I could be closer to the coffee shop I decide to write in, but Jenni kind of liked the idea of being on a boat. I was leaving in a few days and felt that getting her acquainted with another group of people was also a priority. The boat had a large lounge which was nice and some of the people staying there were very interesting. But our room was like sleeping in a can with barely enough space for one let alone two. No doubt winter had arrived. Although it never rained the moisture just hung there like a mist and almost froze my ears off. I searched for things I knew and places where I had hung around before but those familiar faces had disappeared and the smiles had vanished. There was a depression that accompanied the coming of winter. It was not the same Amsterdam I knew. I suppose that was good because I had things to wrap up before heading home and the normal distractions I found there would just get in my way.

*Where went the loveliness I know you by, do I know the place
lost in all perfection no longer shy, a dance without that grace
Pretty little dance around we use to spin, a subtle touch our eyes were one, we wandered like the wind*

*Where went the voice I use to hear sing, now I hear it speak
lost in all perfection no longer brings, these dancing feet are weak
Pretty little dancer within my dreams I see, the way you looked the way we danced, the way it use to be*

*Where went the warmth that I once knew, now there's a little distance
lost in all perfection no longer true, the steps are less persistent
Pretty little dancer you've grown so far away and stopped those nights of dreaming and let it pass away*

I located a travel agent to see what a flight home would set me back and then I searched out an American Express Office. I had enough money set aside at home to cover the hundred and fifty I owed Jenni, accommodations for the week and the flight home. But when I reached the front of the line at the American Express Office, the lady behind the counter told me that she couldn't give me any money off my card, that I could only withdraw money from a savings account. I paused for less than a half a second, said okay and proceeded to create a savings account number out of thin air. It was easy. Way too easy. So easy I planned on cutting up that card up as soon as I got off the plane in LA. Once I had money in my pocket I headed up its arteries to a familiar coffee shop and we both procured hash for the week. I held Jenni's hand while she packaged some and sent it home for the holidays. I on the other hand planned on doing nothing for the next few days but smoke, drink and write. Weed either focuses me or distracts me. Typically it distracts when I'm surrounded by options so I found myself a couple of nice coffee shops where I could hide in the corner and not be bothered. I bounced between there and the lounge on the boat and focused on finishing my journal before boarding the plane home. I tossed out notes and poems that were never finished. I found myself sitting at a crossroad between freedom and routine. When I get home I had to find a job and financially get my feet back on solid ground. I would be entering another world. One I am no longer accustomed to. I spent the last few days going over and over those thoughts which had been on the back burner numerous times since Spain. I suppose it will never be truly done. I started, stopped and continued so many times that I think I just proved to myself I that I know less than I think.

I HAVE BEEN TAUGHT THATwe now come to know the nature of change through Cognition

"Cognition", is defined as the mental process or faculty by which that knowledge is acquired. Defining knowledge as the sum or range of what has been perceived, discovered, or inferred and is provided through a combination of three external functions: Perception, Visualization and Reasoning. "Perception", where one becomes aware of the external environment through the senses, "Visualization" or "Intuition", is instinctively knowing without the use of rational processes, and "Reasoning", that is the way in which we associate ideas into patterns and through its organization becomes the motive for an action, decision, or conviction. "Creativity" can best be described as the way in which we compound, transform, augment, or diminish these materials provided by our senses. The "Imagination" provides an unlimited power of mixing, compounding, separating and dividing these ideas, but these ideas cannot exceed the original stock of ideas furnished by our senses.

QUESTION: Is the aim of cognition to make the mind conform itself to the independent world of object? If that is true, how will it be possible to confirm that our mind has succeeded in conforming itself correctly to that object? What if it's the object that conforms itself to the mind? Does all experience take places within a three dimensional space? What if the mind consists of forms which it imposes upon an object as a condition to experience? Wouldn't then the mind be imposing its own subjective forms on nature. "We turned away to see, until we came to be, one with the shadow." Then wouldn't all cognition be limited to appearance, for that realm of things cannot be known as they are in themselves?

We separate objects into their elements to determine their nature and by applying an understanding or judgment, "lemons are sour" The sense perception no longer requires experience to verify or disprove through observation Mathematics is an internal visualization in a non-sensual form, $A=A$, the whole is equal to its parts, $A+B>A$, the whole is greater than its parts. These types of representations required the concept of either quantity or cause in order to make them understood and applicable to the senses. The intuition of an object, its visualization actually precedes the object itself. The concept of motion cannot be accomplished without employing the representation of time, geometry upon the intuition of space, arithmetic on the successive addition of units in time. If we were to omit from the empirical intuition everything empirical or belonging to the senses, time and space still remain.

Experience requires the laws of time and space, which are at the basis of its possibility. Our understanding does not derive its laws from but prescribes them to nature. We do not derive them from experience but derive experience from them. Without these laws at the basis of our understanding, observation could never substitute as experience. "We are separated from nature"

*4. The wisdom of God is in his original design, the nature of change
Without choices there would be no virtue, without virtue there would be no evil
There can be no possibility of purpose in human life if man has no purposes to choose from
The living world is and always had been in the process of creation*

*When man was created and placed into this world of change God asked the angels to serve man
Lucifer refused to bow down to anybody but God
His pride and his definition of love segregated himself from God
It is the nature of man, not his enemy or foe that lures him into that darkness
"For in the day that you eat from it you will surely" be separated from God*

*I can try to remove myself from the physical world and its wants, selfishness. I can seek to allow my intent to demonstrate an ardent affection, devotion, honesty, a trust. I can try to reach for mercy, charity, kindness and compassion, but at every step, every form of sin, before there is intent there is a visualization that is entertained
"We came to see the show"*

*The characters within the play are these many observations which constitutes my memory
The more I see of violence, the more ammunition there is to persuade to experience or tolerate violence*

*The more I am subject to pornography, the more it becomes ingrained into my own fantasies
 The lower my self esteem, driven down by exclusion, alienation, regret, or simple by not meeting one's own
 expectations, the easier I am to persuade and entertain thoughts of pride, envy, anger, gluttony and lust
 If I attempt to bring these visualizations into my reality
 I would be trading my freedom for the illusions of the world, temporarily filling that void
 So the war is waged only in the visualization or intuition of the object
 What value is there in a sword of faith, if the battle only resides within me?*

*Salvation hinges on the will of God not on the will of man, but it is the will of man who accepts redemption and gives
 it value. Our choices are not meaningless, they define each of us*

*Love is respect not submission and its faith in that respect is given
 If I embrace the feeling that I am alone, I embrace fear
 Having faith that I am not alone provide me comfort and hope
 which of these two soils bears fruit?*

*He who sees the infinite in all things, sees God, sees love
 and that can only be truly understood through separation, tragedy and forgiveness
 That precious gift of forgiveness is the lesson obtain through life's journey
 our own special path to understanding the nature of God and the lesson of man
 "Where little is forgiven little love is shown"*

*Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost?
 Therefore, respect is worshiping God through his creation, man
 I am my brother keeper.*

I met a lot people wandering between the boat and the coffee shops. I felt much better knowing that when I left, Jenni had already begun associating with a new group of travelers. She began talking about cleaning houses or baby sitting in Germany. My pockets were just about empty and the sand had almost run out. On my last night under the lights Jenni made a pass and offered herself to me. I think it was an attempt just to satisfy her curiosity but it wouldn't have been right. We had grown into more of a brother and sister relationship and that was the way I thought it should remain. I gave her a kiss while she slept and slipped out almost unnoticed. It was still cloudy, cold and early. I sat waiting off the main boulevard for my bus to the airport.

I had a safe landing. When the gentleman from U.S. Customs opened up my passport and noticed I'd been gone for some time he smiled and said, "There's probably a party or somebody waiting for you" and passed me right through.

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Road Map:

Greece	Corfu, Patras, Korinthos, Athens [Acropolis, Parthenon, Temple of Athena Nike, Propylage, Erechitheum, Temple of Olympian Zeus, National Archeological Museums], Crete - Irakliom - Matala - Rethimon - Knossos [King Minos's Palace] - Iraklion - Malia - Aj Kiko Laos - Iraklion
Cyprus	
Israel	Haifa, Tela viv, Jerusalem "Yerushalayim" [Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Dome of the Rock, Western Wall, Garden Tomb, David's Tower, Mount of Olives, Har-Ha-Zetin, the Cmade] Bethlehem [Church of the Nativity], Masada - Jericho - Dead Sea - Jordan, Haifa
Cyprus	
Greece	Rhoads [Mandraki Harbor] - Rodos - Lindos [Acropolis]
Turkey	Marmaris, Kasadasi, Selesck [Ephesus], Selcok, Aydin, Denizci, Pamukkale, Konya, Nevsehii, Urgop - Goreme - Uchisar - Ortahisar - Derivkuyu - Kapmakli - Yesichisar - Kayseri Ankara, Istanbul [Aya Sophia, Sultanahmet Camit, Blue Mosque, Suley Maniye, Theodosian Land Wall, Galata Tower, Place of Dttomin, Sultan Topapi Saray]
Greece	Alexandroupois - Thessaionki - Larissa, Athens, Delphi, Thesvaioniki
Yugoslavia	Belgrade [Kalemegdan Park, Crkua Ruzica, Danude River, Serbian Orthodoc Chapel,], Sarajevo [Kazanjijska (coppersmith's shop), Turkish Quarters, Gazi Husrey Beg Mosque], Karajevo, Dubrovnik [Francisican Monastern and Cloister, Sponza Palace, Steps of the Sveti Viaho], Split, Ljubijava
Austria	Villach, Spittal, Lienz, Innsbruck
Germany	Munich
Netherlands	Amsterdam
England	London
USA	LAX, California

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Personal Effects:

Internal Bag "A"	Soap, Deodorant, Tooth Brash & Paste, Shavers, Shampoo
Internal Bag "B"	First Aid Kit, Razor Blades "single edge", Fishing/Sowing Kit Drugs and Aspirins
Book Bag	[2] Long Pants "Levis", Belt Short Pants, Bathing Suit, Thermo Underwear (bottom, top, & socks)

Bottom Attachment	Ski Sweater & Hat, [3] Shirts, Jacket, Tennis Shoes
Internal Bag "C" – Hand Bag	Bed Sheet, Small Pillow, [2] Towels, Umbrella
	Sun Glasses, Camera & Film, Driving Knife / Pocket Knife , Lighter
	Finger Nail File, Headband
	Money Belt: Travelers Checks, Youth Hostel Card, Student ID,
	Passport, Address Book (lost), & Pens
Extras	Blanket (temporary), Guitar (destroyed), Harmonica (purchased)

Cost	
Round-trip Flight	512
Train Passes	1,020
Cash	<u>3,850</u>
Total:	\$5,382

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I don't know if I found my true self or if I ever could. I did allow my curiosity to take me beyond the confines of my own backyard, leaving myself behind and discovering our world. I have discovered that our world is willing to open its arms if you are accepting of it. Accepting and never standing in judgment. I learned to accept the generosity of others and to continue that chain of giving. I have learned that I am unique and through those experiences have joined others in life. I have learned patience, to tolerate, to forgive and to view the world as if it is heaven. Many times small doors open to large rooms and smiles can be found in the darkest of storms. Optimism, curiosity and sincerity are the keys that unlock these doors. And once opened it is like the sun piercing through storm clouds and lightening up everything in view. Our world is willing to open its arms, if you are accepting of it. I am a witness to many ideas, many tears, many fears, smiles and kisses. I have learned that no matter how bleak things seem a positive outlook will always lead to shelter and a warm fire. I have lived by a budget, have scarified and indulged. Life is a journey that must be walked and reluctance will only prevent you from living. There's very little beauty in the grey.

Together we searched, above it all, as clouds, we wandered free but when us two, came to be one, we parted company. It's a lonely road that comes to an end. I'm sorry my love but I must head home.

This is my two coins for the boatman. <http://www.two-coin-travel-journal.com>
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