

FORWARD

This is an account of my trip around the world in 1973, visiting 24 countries on three continents over 10 months. It's based on notes, letters I kept and personal recollections that remain fresh in my memory. I travelled by hitch-hiking, bus, train and flew over bodies of water or closed countries.

This was a journey out there, but also a journey inside. Travel changes you, but not in ways you expect nor in ways you can immediately know. The effects of the Hippy Trail on me continue to unfold, 44 years later. Writing this book itself is part of that trail. In that sense the Hippy Trail never really ends. It part of the process of life itself.

The trip was made possible by the hospitality and generosity of hundreds of friends, family, relatives, fellow travelers and drivers who picked my hitch-hiking. and relatives. Some of these people I had known before I left, while others I met at the time. Some I've stayed in touch with—but most have names long forgotten. Indeed, I never learned the names of those who gave me rides, even when we shared a common language.

To those who may recognize your names here and those who are long forgotten or gone one to the next world, Thanks you.

Fullerton, CA
December, 2017

What lures someone to the open road? To unknown joys, fears and adventures far from home? Who starts a journey not knowing how or when it will ever end?

That was me in '73. The open road that lured me was the Hippy Trail. We didn't call it the Hippy Trail back then, but when it finally closed for good, the world looked back at it in wonder.

At its narrowest, the Hippy Trail was an overland route connecting Europe and India, as it was during the mid-60s to mid-70s. It was a time just after improved roads had made good, cheap public transportation possible across even the poorest parts of the world, but before the internet and cell phones connected you instantly with the world. You could still disappear for months at a time, with no one back home having an inkling as to where you were. That odd post card from Calcutta or Kabul—if it got through—was typical way of communicating with home.

Politically, it was made possible by relative prosperity and stability in Iran and Afghanistan, which ended in revolution and invasion by the late 70s. When the last shah and last king fell in Iran, the route was closed off, and remains closed today. When we looked back at it later and knew what we'd lost, only then was it called the Hippy Trail.

The Trail was dotted with cafes, tea shops, hostels and cheap hotels, bus stations and train depots that we all had to frequent. Everything we carried in a backpack slung over our shoulders, and a money belt or pouch containing the Two Irreplaceables: cash, and passport. Some travelled East, others West.

Geopolitics limited the route. The Soviet Union was closed to the casual traveller and Maoist China was closed to everyone, so you had to pass through Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. There were certain places where everyone passed, some going east, others west. All shared information about what lay ahead. Those travelling the same direction would team up, travelling together for days or weeks, sharing money, food, stories and each other.

We didn't normally call ourselves hippies, a term even then that seemed campy and overly self-conscious or pejorative, depending on which generation was using it. We were overlanders, backpackers or wanderers. Certainly we were tourists, but in a low key way, trying to experience places

on their own terms.

In the broadest sense, the Hippy Trail was more than just a route across southern Asia. It was anywhere in the world where a person carried all their possessions in a backpack and headed a certain direction with an uncertain outcome. It was relying in advance on the generosity and hospitality of people you hadn't met yet, but knew you surely would. It was an optimistic attitude that opportunity and adventure outweighed danger and—if only one had the right attitude.

More than a physical, route, the Hippy Trail was an idea of what could be done with limited funds and unlimited time, patience and imagination. The Trail is more than just a route, however, frozen in time. It is an idea that the world is a friendly, open and accommodating place. There are many such trails out there to be explored. Whole countries lie open that were forbidden zones back then. My story is not just what was, but what can still be.

Growing up I was regaled by tales of my father's hitch-hiking during the Depression. Cars, trucks and open boxcars were all fair game. He's gotten as far from his native Minnesota to the 1939 New York World's Fair. When he joined the army, he met my mother while stationed in California, hitch-hiking in uniform, when rides were plentiful.

When a freshman at Fullerton H.S. I signed up with an international pen pal agency my Spanish teacher Mr. Myers had made available. For 50 cents apiece, you got your choice of country (I chose New Zealand and Australia, being the furthest our English-speaking countries) and sex (female, of course). Soon I received addresses for Isabel in Kati Kati, NZ and Cheryl in Port Hedland, Australia. We exchanged letters and photos off and on for the next 8 years.

The lure of romance with two cute girls far away was motivating. The goal was to meet them, some day, some way. With phone conversations impractical, I could still imagine their sweet accents through the onion skin pages of the air mail letters back and forth over the Pacific. Isabel was refined and proper, an only child of two doting parents, she'd write of parties, horse shows and boyfriends. Cheryl was a bit rougher, coming from a remote mining port town.

Isabel would visit me first, on the way back from distant relatives in Canada. She came with her best friend Judy, whom I both met coming off a Toronto-to-LA flight. Eight years of anticipation, and there she was—my honey-haired rosy-cheeked Kiwi angel. We were friendly, but soon realized that letters along were no substitute for chemistry. We shared affection, but she set clear limits. Her parents were counting on her returning and marrying her fiancé, Peter, which is what she did.

In the meantime, she stayed at my parents' home in Fullerton while I finished Fall Term finals at Occidental College. I set Judy up with my best friend and the four of us went to Death Valley and Las Vegas. Her last night here she took in Disneyland, then flew home. I was left with a standing invitation to visit her should I ever make the trip. And there was still Cheryl, who would never leave Australia—she was down there, too.

I got through Oxy in the requisite four years, with general career ideas, but no immediate plans or prospects. I had a draft deferment, then a lottery number (154) high enough to avoid Vietnam, which was winding down when I graduated. I had no clear academic or occupational path, but I did know I wanted to travel around the world. Now was the best time. Some people had the money but not the time. Others had the time but not the money. I was among the later.

I worked at a few different jobs for the next six months to save up. A receiving clerk at Buena Park Lumber, a plater in a hardware manufacturing plant—none required a college degree, but the money added up. I worked as hotel bellman where I also drove the airport shuttle and ran room service orders. Tips were good and all in cash. I voted for the first time in a presidential election—George McGovern, because of my opposition to the Vietnam War. I've been a dedicated non-interventionist even since. My experience on the Trail only convinced me more how little we understand these countries that we think we can transform through the blunt—and costly—instrument of military force.

I'd saved about \$6,000 when I bought a one-way L.A.-Sydney excursion flight for \$665 at the American Airlines office at Hollywood and Vine. That was an enormous sum at the time. You could buy the same ticket today round-trip for only \$885, a fraction of the cost in the 1973 dollars I paid. Adjusted for inflation and incomes, air travel was more expensive then, while overland travel was cheaper. That was the whole point of the Hippie Trail, but you still had to cross an ocean to get to it.

My family saw me off at LAX. Neither they nor I knew when or how I'd get back. That was the fun of it. Back then, everyone could see you off at the gate and greet you as you returned. We ate at Flight Bite cafeteria, aptly named for its airline quality food even before boarding. Long before the dark days of the TSA, they saw me off as I walked down the ramp toward at the Continental Airlines gate.

HAWAII

Just like in the post cards, the green-mountain fringed scene lay below, with Pearl Harbor at one end and Diamond Head at the other. Lei-bearing ladies met selected passengers as the disembarked, but no one for me. I took a public bus toward Waikiki, holding my large suitcase on my lap so as not to have to pay an extra fare, as the driver demanded. I'd have to get used to fighting for every nickel from now on.

I'd arranged to stay with Scott, an old high school friend and musician who had a Honolulu gig and was set up in a studio apartment. He worked all night and slept till noon, so I had plenty of alone time to wander for a few days. I checked out the hotels along the beach and swam at Waikiki. Forgoing a pricey formal tour, I tried taking a public bus out to visit the USS Arizona memorial, but ran out of time. One night I visited Roseanne, a friend-of-a-friend, and her husband in the Navy. She gave me a book of very cryptic, stylized Zen poetry that she thought I might better appreciate than her. I kept it the whole trip.

Before leaving, I collected as many names, addresses and phone numbers I could from friends who might know people along my way. It really paid off. Like Roseanne, the thinnest of mutual connection gave rich concentrated human connections that still linger like little icons in my memory.

During Scott's one day off, he borrowed a car and we took a loop trip around Oahu; beautiful, balmy beaches and everything green. "It never gets above 85 or below 75 and rains mostly at night" Scott observed. "It's just perfect all the time!"

People in the tropics simply don't need as much stuff as the rest of us, a theme repeated throughout my trip. Honolulu is dense and commercial, but the laid back countryside starts just a few miles out.

The next day I left for New Zealand aboard a half-full American Airlines 707. The flight was delayed for hours due to some glitch, so by the time we boarded it would be too late to land in Auckland (local landing curfew was 10 pm). It was announced we'd have a one-night layover in Fiji—paid for by American Airline. Great!

They also gave out free cocktails on the flight, so I nursed my little bottle of Drambuie as I looked below at scattered tropical storms, with recurrent lightning insight to swirling cotton ball-like clouds. We were above the turbulence and enjoying quite a night light show. Sometime that night I crossed the Equator and the International Dateline.

FII

Three things I remember from my one-night layover in Fiji. I met a newly married Dave and Ellen DeKantzow at the hotel pool, young Australian couple who offered me their extra bedroom when

I got to Sydney. This was the first of many times I'd get an address and phone number of people I'd see later, when my arrival would be greeted like that of an old friend.

It was the first time I'd ever seen left-hand drive traffic, a disorienting influence from the British. Interesting, too, were the people of Fiji—true Fijians, laid back brown-skinned Melanesians sporting afro-style hair then common back home, and the even darker South Indians (Tamil, mostly) who ran the businesses and clerked the hotel, with jet-black straight hair. They'd been brought by the British long ago as farm laborers and now controlled most of island commerce.

I got in late, and the tropical air hit us like a blast furnace as we walked down the gangway. I hung around the hotel pool most of the next day. The Airport at Nadi is on the opposite side of the island from Suva, the main city capital. I took a long walk in the countryside, the lush green matching the humid equatorial air.

NEW ZEALAND

Isabel's parents Tom and Helen were at the Auckland Airport to meet me, and were very excited to have me stay with them. It was about a 2-hour night drive back to Kati Kati, a dim wonder world of a land so far from home.

I would spend a couple of weeks at their home. When I went to bed that night in Isabel's old room, I thought of how far away I was from my own home, yet how comfy and secure I was in this new world I'd gotten myself into.

"We were afraid we might lose her to you, that you two might fall in love" offered Helen. "She's our only child and we wanted her back home with us"

Helen and Tom got their wish. Isabel was now married to Peter, a music teacher at Kati Kati College (their equivalent of a high school) with their first child on the way. They lived nearby and all got along well, and I was now part of the family during my stay. They taught me how to water ski and say biscuit instead of cookie and tomato sauce instead of ketchup. It was a beautifully verdant land, with the rolling green hills of England and the beaches of California and the mountains of Switzerland.

They were active in their Catholic Church and the Rotary Club, where he arranged for me to speak. They had a boat they hauled to the nearby beach and to a lake a few hours away.

Tauranga was the nearest city of any size, the port for the agriculturally rich Bay of Plenty region and we visited there a few times. Isabel and Peter arranged a double date with the lovely Jillian, a local telephone operator and we went swimming in a beautiful creek up in the hills. Isabel's father ran his own butcher shop in town, so there was plenty of fresh flesh on the table. He took me to a special discount store where I bought a back and sleeping bag that would last me the whole trip, and dispensed with the bulky suitcase.

I hitched up to Auckland for a few days, then down to a lumbering town, staying with Judy and her new husband. They lent their extra car to drive about, my first time driving on the left side of the road. It was disorienting, but I was on a country road with little traffic. Signs were recently converted to kilometers, but everyone still used the old English system in conversation. Isabel's parents were happy to let me stay with them, I'd even been set up with a few cute local girls. We went to a local dance and to the beach a few more times.

They took me to Rotorua, where we visited relatives and the hot springs. It was a cultural center for the Maoris, with galleries, shops and traditional music performed. Having arrived with the great Polynesian migration about 1300 AD, they had since been subdued and marginalized by British rule and waves of *Pakeha* (their word for all whites). Still, their active resistance and rapid adoption of Christianity allowed them some rights and some ancestral lands, and they now made up 15% of the population, 5 times higher than aboriginal Australians who were virtually wiped out.

Their family friend Roy Diegelman, was driving to South Island on business and offered to take me along, as it turned out, paying for several nights along the way. I bid my host family Tom and Helen and Isabel goodbye; I wouldn't likely ever see them again. After many years, I did recently get messages on my Facebook from Isabel. She has 4 children and 6 grandchildren and her mum is still alive at 90. She posted a photo at her daughter's wedding.

I rode with Roy and his 12-year old daughter Sandy down the length of North Island, through the capital of Wellington, where the new beehive-shaped capitol building was under construction. We boarded a car ferry which took half a day all the way down to Christchurch. The rolling open sea made many sick, but I barely held on to my breakfast. Roy checked us in to two rooms at the Coker Hotel, one for me and one for him and Sandy. It was a really classy place in this beautiful city of English gardens and cathedrals.

The next day we drove to Queenstown, where they left at the youth hostel. I was now completely on my own, outside the care of friends and families who'd looked after me. The hostel had a mix of Kiwis, Aussies with a number of Yanks, Canadians, Brits and a few Japanese, all friendly and full of stories and plans.

Queenstown was beautifully laid out in the heart of the Southern Alps. I made my way to Milford Sound, with its iconic Mitre Peak soaring a mile up out of the fjord below. I made it to a youth hostel in Te Anau and plotted my run up the coast to Christchurch where I'd fly out to Australia. The kiwis were hospitable, and I spent a week hitch hiking meeting all ages and circumstances. A very cute blond was particularly fascinated by my accent, and took me home to meet her older parents, while one older man kept a log book for all those he'd picked up to sign. No police hassles here, as I'd later have in Australia and the U.S. Memories of mountains, of the Auckland Harbor and rolling green hills and flocks of sheep, of beautiful beaches and hot springs in the Maori heartland around Rotorua. But, like everywhere, the ultimate adventure was the people.

My hair was still short enough to be sometimes mistaken for a Mormon missionary. After all, they were all blond 20somethings with American accents. All I lacked was the bicycle, the traveling partner and the nametag. Hitching was easy, cheaper than public transportation with the added bonus of often having lunch bought for me.

In the hostels were friendly contemporaries with the local scoop—and many a time we all went out to the pubs together. I'd learned to stop the snoring of a roommate (typically the hostels would sleep 6-10 per room) by one loud clap—that would be just enough to redirect his breathing patterns. From Te Anau, I hopped up the coast, staying in Invercargill, Oamaru and Timaru before reaching Christchurch. From there, the flexibility of my costly excursion fare allowed me a direct flight to Sydney.

I spent St. Patrick's Day drinking green beer with some Canadians group, then boarded a Sydney-bound flight that night. It was my last leg of my prepaid excursion fare; the rest I'd have to improvise, plan on the spot as circumstances dictated. At the Christchurch hostel, I'd met two friendly Aussie girls (*sheilas* as they were called) named Barbara and Carolyn, who were on my same flight. They were going home to after holidaying with the Kiwis. I was going ever farther away from mine.

The three of us were able to sit together on the Qantas flight, drinking, giggling and having a fun time high above the Tasman Sea. "Bibs" was tall, blonde and statuesque, while Carolyn was shorter, freckle-faced girl-next-door. I got their phone numbers should I need company in Sydney (which I would).

AUSTRALIA

I got off the plane arm-in-arm with my two Aussie sheilas who wanted me to feel welcome. I phoned the De Kantzows who came quickly to pick me up and gave me a little night tour on the way

home to Drumoyne, a working-class area near the harbor.

Wow—friendly Aussies. The Ugly American cliché sure never fit me, not anywhere I went. The truer and older cliché is that people treat you the way you treat them was universal. On the road, you were always just a smile and a conversation away from sharing someone's home and hospitality.

Ellen took me around all of Sydney the next day, undulating neighborhood, with the multiple arms of the bay reappearing throughout the city. Manly Beach, the Opera House. That night we went to a party at their friends, maybe 6 couples in their 30s. Knowing I was a Yank, I was told “you can tell this is an Australian party—all the blokes are outside drinking piss, and the sheilas inside fixing tucker.” I won't even try to phoneticize their accent, as such attempts are usually demeaning. Besides no spoken English follows the written word (like “gonna” and “wanna”) and you've heard enough Paul Hogan and Foster's commercials. Aussie vocabulary does merit translation, however. I learned piss means beer, sheilas are women and tucker is food, among many others.

I was surprised at his comment, as it showed a self-awareness in front of a foreigner of the distinctiveness of Australian culture of mateship. “I got me mates at the pub and my bird for the bed” as one expressed it.

I'd quickly learned another word, too: “Pom” or sometimes “Pommie.” Of uncertain origin (like *gringo* to Mexicans) it refers to an English immigrant recent enough to still have his accent, which sounds snooty to the Down Under ear. This seemed odd at first, since the vast majority of Australians are of British stock, but it reflects the stereotypes born of their convict origins. The first white Australians were not voluntary immigrants but exiled convicts, the thieves and vagrants of a Victorian era of limited prison space. It was either Botany Bay or the hangman.

I heard it first used in New Zealand by Isabel's father complaining about labor strife: “The kiwi's an easy-going bloke, but you get these pommie labor radicals coming over and causing trouble,” Tom had complained during a strike of the Tauranga port workers.

The Australian flag bore the union jack and efforts at redesign floundered with no success. The national anthem was still “God Save the Queen” (since changed). Most still carried British passports even the fairly new Australian passport was emblazoned with “British Subject.” Their National Holiday was still ANZAC Day, commemorating the Australian New Zealand Army Corps' role in the disastrous British defeat at Gallipoli in WWI. This was beginning to seem pretty futile 60 years later.

Australian ethnic slang was preceded by “bloody” and “f---ing” and followed by “bastard”. So it came out “bloody-fuckin-pommie-bastards.”

If some resented the British as arrogant older brothers, they saw the Yanks (like me) as fairly benign cousins of the English-speaking world. They remember well that MacArthur promised to defend Australia when he'd fled the Philippines, while “that bloody Churchill and the Pommies would have given us up to the Japs to save Mother England” as was told to me several times. When I was called a “bloody-yank-bastard” it was usually friendly. My accent they adored, especially the girls.

Aussie men have a strong sense of mateship with their friends, dating back to when they came over as convicts in a virtually all-male environment. The pubs at that time were not the cozy living rooms of their English or Irish counter-parts, but huge fully tiled locker room type set-ups that were literally hosed out after closing, with urinals directly under the bar the piss (urine) out the extra piss (beer).

The next night I met my airplane seatmate Barbara “Bibs” Ingraham. She'd marveled on the plane that I was actually reading Time magazine's account of the then-unfolding Watergate mess, and saw in me something exotic and interesting. I visited the family in the tony Bellevue Hill section of Sydney, where her friendly father opened up a road map of the whole country. It covered the table, and it showed how vast was this country and how empty the interior, the “Outback”. That gave me pause.

Bibs drove and paid for our dinner at a nice Italian restaurant. before going out to dinner. There

was no tip, that seen as an affront to Aussie egalitarianism. She was warm and encouraging, without romantic overtones. I would see Barbara again, 5 years later in Vancouver when I was leading tours in the Canadian Rockies. She'd married a Canadian, and the three of us met for dinner. She dropped me off downtown and I spend my last night with Dave and Ellen. I would send an occasional Christmas card to them, but never heard or saw them again.

The next morning, I headed out, westward. I was at the edge of the world and the edge of my plans. I had only the vaguest idea as to how or when I'd return home. I took a city bus to the end of the line and stuck my thumb out. It had worked in New Zealand, and had better work here in a country 20 times the size. It was then I noticed the flies, "bush flies". Why so many and why out in the country and not in the cities? It seemed to more bleak the terrain, the more flies, swarming out of nowhere. They didn't bite, they just were after your moisture, but they were disconcerting, disorienting. In bringing alien animals like cattle, sheep and rabbits, the English had totally disrupted a long-isolated land. The flies followed, too.

My luck was with me hitch-hiking. Traveling salesmen, local farmers and the occasional long-distance drivers ("truckies") needing to stay awake were my mainstays. I returned their hospitality by being a bright conversationalist and a good listener. I heard a lot of stories and opinions. I tried to accommodate any political views I heard, with the gentlest of pushback. My general goal was to make it the Port Augusta, the rail head for the Indian-Pacific train to Perth. From there I'd work my way up the coast to Port Hedland, where another old pen-pal Cheryl Crombie had told me I could find work in the nearby mines. Cheryl and I had lost touch for years, but I was able to reconnect before I'd left.

My last ride into Canberra gave me a personal tour of the capital city lasting several hours, which I gladly accepted. Canberra was an artificial city built from whole cloth as a compromise between Sydney and Melbourne and was physically beautiful but lacked heart and personality was his point. It had been laid out by architects more concerned with geometry than how people actually lived. Point well taken. He stopped at a store and bought some groceries and suggested I spend the night at his place. When he put his hand on my knee, I demurred and he dropped me at the door of the youth hostel. Despite those awkward last moments, he taught me a lesson in urban planning that influenced my attitude toward overly-planned communities that stirred my thoughts of urbanologist Jane Jacobs.

I spent the next day touring the city on my own, using public transportation to visit a number of embassies, each a showcase of this showcase of cities. The Indonesian embassy was of particular interest, a world away culturally but Australia's nearest neighbor geographically. I'd need a visa to travel across that vast archipelago, but Djakarta authorities were hostile to hippies, overlanders, backpackers—whatever they called us. To qualify, you needed a prepaid round trip airline ticket in and out of the country, something impractical if you wanted to travel across it island hopping. They turned me down flat. I would probe again later.

The next day I got a ride to nearby Yass, where three blokes about my age were leaned up against an old car. They offered to take me westward if I helped pay for gas. OK—I needed to travel free, but how much could it be? Turned out I'd front them almost \$100 I could ill-afford for gas, food and tobacco. They were rough-edged Queenslanders, ostensibly looking to find work in Adelaide. We drove for three days, spending 2 night sleeping in the car, across the Riverina wheat country and the edge of the dusty outback.

We parted in Port Lincoln, where they promised to repay me in full, which they never did. They promised to send the money to general delivery at the main Perth post office, one of my interim destinations. Of course, the money never came. But they left me with information that more than made up for my out-of-pocket loss—how to get to Perth across the Nullarbor Plain. There was no paved road across the country, so most truckies traveled by train with their rigs strapped on board.

"Go to the bloody weighbridge at the railyard in Port Augusta and see if one of truckies will take

you along as a helper. Go in the afternoon, since they assemble the train every night.” Sounded dicey, but worth a try. I certainly couldn't afford the \$200+ fare for the Indian-Pacific. Once in Port Augusta, I did find the weighbridge, where the rigs were being loaded onto flat cars. There was a small office with a group of men hanging about, so I entered and casually asked “Anyone needing help with driving?” Immediately a railway official ordered that I leave but before I did another bloke said “wait for me outside.”

“I'll get you on this bloody-fuckin-train, mate, no worries at all. Meet me at the Southern Cross bar in an hour”. Which I did. True to his word, he showed up—Ted Taylor, my savior. He spotted my accent, started calling me a bloody-fuckin-yank-bastard and proceeded to get totally pissed off (drunk). As I dragged him from the bar around sunset, we stumbled back to the railyard where, sure enough, there sat a solitary old wooden passenger car emblazoned “C.R.” for Commonwealth Railways.

“That's it, that is---that's our bloody-fuckin-carriage!” Ted exclaimed. After dragging him into it, he promptly found a room and crashed on one of the bunk beds, not to awaken until the next day. There was a hallway, lined with doorless rooms, all with bunkbeds on either side. There were a few other truckies on board, who paid me no mind, but my concern was railroad officials coming on board checking tickets, ID, any kind of authorization to ride, none of which I had. I didn't even have an awake Ted Taylor to vouch for me. It seemed too good to be true—but it was. After a nervous hour, the car started moving, being jerked around in the yard as the train was being assembled. Then came the consistent smooth clackety-clack of the open rails—we were moving!

I fell asleep on one of the bunks in an otherwise empty room, sleeping to the assuring rhythm of a lumbering freight train heading west. I woke up to the Nullarbor Plain, the vast flat treeless expanse stretching in all directions. I met some of the other men, who sat, smoked and fix meals together in the galley at one end of the car. Hour after hour—and the next day, the scenery was identical. There were a few stops along the way when we pulled over on a siding to let the faster “Indian-Pacific” passenger trains pass by. The utter emptiness, the solitude of the countryside was daunting, like most of the country.

We stopped at Tarcoola, the junction of the Alice Springs line. At the tiny siding outpost of Cook I was warned that railroad officials sometimes check passengers to catch freebees like me, so I hid in the bathroom stall during our stop. But they didn't, and even if they had, what could they have? There was only one way in and out—by this train.

Late the next day we arrived at Kalgoorlie, an old gold-mining settlement. Taylor had me hide in his trailer as it was led off the flat car—there I was, hiding among the hay bales and the horses—to avoid detection. He could still have been charged extra for allowing me on the train. But he wasn't.

Riding on that train for free had saved me a lot of money, and had gotten me across this vast country the only way possible. Taylor bid me goodbye, and I spent the night in a youth hostel before resuming my hitchhiking the next day. There was a hostel in nearby Coolgardie, a much smaller and forlorn version of Kalgoorlie with a similar name.

At the hostel I'd met a Tom, an Englishman headed east. I shared with him my good fortune, but wasn't sure if he'd be able to duplicate it. I got his address, as it looked like he'd be back in Kent before I got there. I would see him again.

The next day I hitched the 300+ miles to Perth fairly easily, traveling salesmen, ranchers, students, even a rare married couple. I was still clean-cut enough, with modest sideburns and wavy blond hair that I looked fairly non-threatening. I passed through Southern Cross, Northam and an into Perth, a sprawling city in the hills along the fertile southwest corner of the continent, one of the most isolated in the world. I stayed at the youth hostel there a few days, fell in with some locals who showed me around the beautiful, expansive city. At a house party where I met a sweet young Aussie fascinated by my journey and my accent. We shared a few sweet moments then never saw each other again. I'd

met an English immigrant, too, with whom I had a long conversation about national identity. My wife's Australian, my kids are Australian, and I'll likely live here till I die, but me—no, I'll always be English, always be a Pom."

I went to the beach at Fremantle, a wide sandy expanse with great waves. This southwest corner of the continent enjoys Mediterranean climate, just like L.A. with beaches like our own, too. Not wanting to risk leaving cash on the beach when in the water, I'd hidden it in my backpack stashed in a closet at the hostel, which was locked up during the day. When I returned, it was gone. Big mistake.

I had no money. Hearing of my plight, a few of the hosteller chipped in a few bucks, maybe \$10—that was it. I needed to get north in a hurry, to Cheryl the promise of a job. In the meantime, I'd live on luck and generosity. It came through.

My first day's hitching north from Perth began pleasantly, as I was treated to two lunches by hospitable motorists. The first one was in Moora, where a friendly Ohio transplant told me of his new life down under in his familiar Yank accent. Happy to hear mine, too, he paid for lunch at a restaurant in town, and dropped me where he thought I'd have the best luck.

A local cop yelled at me through his window "We don't take you your kid around here" but my next ride proved him wrong. Jim was a farmer coming back town in his pick-up. He took me home where I had lunch with the whole family Very nice salt-of-the-Earth types who saw me as a sophisticated source of information about the greater world far beyond them. He was particularly worried about a world takeover by the Illuminati, and gave me a book "None Dare Call It Conspiracy" and asked me to write him later about it. There was a disconnect between his wheat farm in this far flung isolated land and the immediate fear he felt about dark international forces.

After lunch, he took me with his cute little wispy-haired blond little daughter down his long driveway to the main highway and bid me thank you and goodbye. Like most I'd met on my trip, I'd never see him—or forget him—again.

I stood at the highway, two lanes stretching north into a land increasingly empty the farther north I got from Perth. After about an hour, a man and his collie in a station wagon pulled up pulling a trailer. I told him I was heading to Port Hedland, to which he replied he was going to "Paraburdoo". I'd never heard of it, then he reassured me he'd be there tomorrow. OK—that would take me a long way, anyway. No worries about another ride today. He was a laconic New Zealander, heading north to work in the mines. The empty, increasingly flat country gave me little to see and he didn't talk much, so I read the dark tales of the Illuminati, Bilderbergers, trilateralists, gnomes of Zurich, masons and others who supposedly controlled the world, all in the book farmer Jim had given me. I could see why he was scared—if he believed it.

The miles and the hours stretched on. He drove long into the night, feigning off my offers to help drive, as his dog slept in the back seat amongst his gear. We slept off the road that night, then pulled into Geraldton for gas (or petrol, as I was finding myself saying). My kiwi host dropped me off at a roadhouse at the junction with the Paraburdoo Road.

There were only two customers inside the small cafe who I approached directly for a lift. After protesting they had no room, they allowed me to lay down the back of their station wagon squeezed between all their stuff. My American accent, as always, helped—Aussies warm to Yanks so far from home, especially making their way through the vast outback. I rode the rest of the day with them, now reading a copy of *The Greening of America*, with a more positive worldview than the conspiracy tale Jim had foisted on me.

They dropped me in Roebourne in the late afternoon, a dusty town at the edge of a continent, at the edge of my world, where the vast dry emptiness of the Outback met the Indian Ocean, which was just out of my view for the past few days. I walked toward the edge of town, noticing an Aborigine encampment just out of town. Not a traditional camp, but a collection of shacks that was their part of

town. Australian slang called them “abo” and “nigger” but historically they were more analogous to our American Indians than black Americans. Pushed off the fertile Eastern edge of Australia, disease, violence and the introduction of quickly breeding foreign species like the rabbit soon devastated their lifestyle.

Unlike the American Indians, however, they were culturally and technologically incapable of any real organized resistance. There would be no aboriginal Horseshoe Bend or Little Big Horn and no legends like Sequoia or Geronimo. He had skills like finding sustenance in a barren land, but geography had condemned him to live cut-off from the rest of the world, the effects of which were later described in Jared Diamond's classic “Guns, Germs and Steel”

Finding the native population unsuitable for enslavement, the early Aussie settlers simply pushed them aside. Spurning a foreign-imported laborer so common in the rest of the British Empire (mostly Chinese and Indians) and contemptuous of the English class system, white Australians developed a egalitarian camaraderie that is a cultural cornerstone.

I was approach by one, walking solitarily down the road toward me. His dark skin, high cheek bones, deep set eyes and wavy sandy hair set him apart from anyone I'd ever seen before arriving here. He greeted me with a friendly “hello, mate”, when I responded with my American accent, he became even friendlier, wondering where I was headed standing by the side of the highway at dusk.

I started to wonder, too. There was no traffic now and after an hour I walked back into town where I inquired at the town's lone motel where it was proper to safely sleep out. The clerk was Mary, a 20ish earth mother type who took a liking to me and my Yank accent. She regaled me with her travels to Bali. She told me how a crazy boyfriend tried to sell her into a harem in Morocco just before she fled the Casablanca casbah to the safety of the British consulate, chased by would-be kidnappers. Most importantly, she could set me up with a ride to Port Hedland tomorrow and generously offered a complimentary room, where her pet kangaroo also was sleeping. The ‘roo had broken its leg and hobbled around in a cast.

She kept talking about a boyfriend to pointedly foreclose any ideas I might have, but her breezy style was refreshing and we shared stories into the night. As I lay on my bed, now alone, hearing the dim hum of the overhead fan, I thanked my luck and the good fortune that had always awaited me. Treat people right, be friendly and in need and so many doors will open. The world is full of such doors; one only has to knock. That was the larger lesson of The Hippie Trail.

The next day, true to her promise, Mary had a car waiting for me—two blokes (my own Yank accent was beginning to slip easily into Australianisms) heading for Port Hedland on business had room in their back seat. It took us the whole morning, crossing swollen rivers that had been dry for years—I'd learned a long drought had just ended with heavy interior rains. There were no bridges, but the rivers were wide and shallow, with specially constructed concrete fords—if would could follow them through the muddy flow. We did.

We reached town about noon. At about 12,000 people, Port Hedland is the major metropolis in that part of the country. It was hot, in the 90s when I arrived that March day, the end of a down under summer. It had an impermanent but prosperous feel, with its massive deep water dock the delivery point for the mineral wealth of the Pilbarra Region, as the arid undulating hills of the Aussie Northwest were known. Here, trainloads of iron ore were loaded onto ships and sent to Japan, where they were made into Datsuns and Toyotas.

Cheryl's father Bruce owned a taxi in Port Hedland, and he took me to their house when I got into this red dusty town. It had a rough frontier feel, with money to be made, where the vast mineral wealth of the outback sated the industrial hunger of Osaka and Tokyo. Pretty pool was the town's best swimming hole, tree-lined and shady. Not that there weren't other beaches, but here you could get a better look at what perils might await beneath. I was told by many of hazards unknown to California

beaches—poisonous stonefish, sea snakes and “sea wasps” (jellyfish). All potentially fatal.

He bought beer at a drive through liquor store, then bought b=me dinner at a fairly sophisticated restaurant. He was very generous and I was very appreciative. I never met Cheryl’s mother.

Bruce arranged for a ride to Goldsworthy mine the next day, a 2-hour journey over gravel roads. Nearly 1,000 people lived here, all employed at the iron mine, a gigantic multi-stepped hole in the ground atop the rich ore of the Pilbarra region. Single men lived in dorms, families lived in little houses up and down a couple of neatly laid out streets, which is where I met Cheryl. She had two small children and an amiable husband who took me to the employment office and signed me up as a general laborer on the explosives crew, then to the housing office where I was assigned a room in a long narrow building—clapboard siding and a corrugated tin roof, but with its own AC unit, a must where days got into the 90s and night rarely below 80.

The land was vast, empty, dusty in varying shades of red. Australia is an old continent, its mountain ranges worn down and eroded. It's highest mountain, named incongruously after Polish patriot Thaddeus Kosciuszko was barely over 7,000. The mine was in the sprawling Hamersley Range, high hills reaching a max of 4,000 feet, without enough rainfall for any trees outside the edge of an occasional billabong spring or intermittent river.

It would be a silent and lonely land, except for the ever-present swarm of friendly bush flies. They were a mystery to me—the more remote, waterless, heat scorched and seemingly devoid of life, the more flies there were. Supposedly they had something to do with the extreme imbalances of nature caused by the white man's introduction of non-native sheep, rabbits and cattle into a long isolated ecosystem. They were a constant annoyance and made outdoor eating difficult, but did not sting or bite—they we just looking to pick u moisture, salt or whatever else they could lick off your skin.

Cheryl herself was cute, friendly, with tanned freckled skin and pregnant with her third child. I’d written her off-and-on for 10 years. Growing up in the LA Basin, remote places in empty lands had a fascination for me, and the Australian outback was as far away you could be in the English-speaking world where communication would still be easy. I'd just read “On the Beach” about how Australians were the last to die in a nuclear war because the fall out cloud took so long to reach them. Now that was far away! And the haunting melody of Waltzing Matilda I'd first sung in my 5th grade music class remains with me still.

The next day, Sunday, Cheryl's husband went out with his mates shooting, and invited me along. We visited a sheep station (ranch) about an hour's drive across the outback, where a gunnery range had been set up, with land targets and clay pigeons. There was plenty of piss (beer) and tucker (beef and canned beans, that I competed for with the inevitable cloud of bush flies). The house was square with block wall and a high-pitched pointed corrugated metal roof that overhung to cover a wrap-around outdoor porch.

It was hot, dusty and all seemed to have a good time. There we abo hired hands, and the white man's shared stories of them—good workers, but prone to the occasional “walkabout” when they would leave, unannounced, and wander about the bush, and reconnection with their nomadic life only a generation or two removed.

Back at the mine for my first day of work the next day, I joined a 3-man explosives crew and got my on-the-job training. We worked in a huge open pit mine, ever expanding by blasting out the sides. Deep holes little wider than those on a golf course were bored into the sides on a grid pattern. I would tie a rock at the end of the plastic fuse line with three charges about two feet apart, then drop it down to the bottom of each hole. We'd then fill the hole with a slurry mix of hot water and nitrogen pellets. During lunch or after work, when the pit was clear of people, the charges were detonated and the boulders would tumble down with a roar where there's soon be scooped up and loaded into these gargantuan trucks, whose tires were twice my height. The ore would be crushed, then loaded onto long

freight trains to Port Hedland and shipped to Japan.

There were operations like this all over northwest Australia, at places like Shay Gap and Tom Price, opening as new deposits were confirmed, then phasing out as the ore veins were exhausted. Goldsworthy has now been closed for decades, but it will still appear on Google Earth when you can see a lake formed in to pit and the residential road pattern of the little houses than have long since been demolished or picked up and moved to another site.

There was no local labor pool, so anyone showing up for a job got one. There were mostly Aussies, but a few Indonesians and eastern Europeans, especially Croatians and Romanians who preferred chess (like me) to darts at the local company pub. I was paid the equivalent of about \$125 weekly, plus room and board. It was very hard, hot, dusty work. The first week was a hellish ordeal, but I started getting my rhythm by week two.

My co-worker was Jerry, a hard-drinking single Queenslander far from home, who's after work diversions were darts and beer. We worked with our supervisor Bruce, who had a family down in Bunbury (near Perth), an easy-going bloke, who occasionally reminded me to be sure the fuse line was dropped all the way down to hole for maximum effect.

Half the time we spent in the mine, the other half back at these deep bunkers where the explosive pellets were kept in huge back that we had to mix, standing atop a tanker truck and dumping it in the boiling cauldron. That was the part I dreaded the most, fearing I'd either fall off the truck or into the toxic stew below.

We worked from 7-5 with an hour for lunch at a huge communal dining hall. Mornings in dim light, Bruce would get Jerry and I in his pick-up truck. We'd enjoy our regular *smoko* or Australian coffee breaks, where we'd sit, chat and smoke. Every week or so a "Road Train" would arrive, a huge 3-trailer truck designed for travel across the outback's dirt roads, with the deep treaded tires and kangaroo / cattle protective guard in front. It brought the bags of nitrogen for the explosive slurry we were constantly mixing.

There was a weekly movie night, where workers and their families sat outdoors and watched on a big screen set up—a drive-in without the cars. Under the Southern Cross I watched Charlton Heston in "Omega Man" reveling in the familiar LA street scenes in a post-apocalyptic world. I remembered, too, when I'd met the star at his Mulholland Drive home when I'd snagged an invite sent to the Occidental newspaper staff. Producers were reaching out to all LA-area student newspapers, so I arrived with my new freshman girlfriend Ella from El Segundo, who I was trying to impress, and did.

The second feature was "The Producers", which I found hysterical with its New York Jewish humor and its "Springtime for Hitler" spoofing, laughs lost on the rest of those watching. Zero Mostel and Paul Hogan came from different worlds.

There was an informal chess club of a few Romanians I fell in with. They were allowed to leave that communist country since they'd send remittances back in hard cash and had a family that could be held in case he didn't eventually return. One was Jan Popescu, and he gave me the address of a brother in Bucharest that I later tried to look up, in vain. He lived down a long hallway of a dorm that where he doubled up with a fellow countryman

Jerry would give me a hard time. "Why are playin' chess with a bunch of bloody wogs? You should be playin' darts ("daahs") with me and me mates at the pub!" I was happy to oblige, but I found I was more competitive at chess.

Jerry's room was adjacent to mine, and Boss Bruce would pick us up in his a pick-up every morning about 7:00. One night Jerry had come back late, drunk, and was banging on my door yelling.

"Bloody Swan Lager, mate! Best bloody piss in Australia!" He held up a can of it and pointed to a empty oil drum that now was a community trash can, "I'm gonna fill up this whole bloody things with Swan Lager cans before I get out of here!"

The next morning, the boss and I had to drag him out of his bed and into the truck for work. “He’s no good after he gets pissed off (pissed off—Aussie for drunk) but I’ll get a day’s work out of him yet!”

Compensation included three meals a day at the cavernous dining hall. There was a lot of beef, sausages, meat pies and bred but also fresh fruits and vegetables. All had to be trucked from long distances. Here, you could see there were a variety of workers—maybe 2/3 obviously Aussie, but also recent Southern European immigrants as well as Indonesians and Malays.

Failing at distinguishing, Aussies called all Asians “Japs” from World War II days. There was still goodwill left over from when MacArthur vowed to defend Australia from possible a Japanese invasion in 1942. Things had changed, however. Now, all the iron ore we were mining was shipped to Japan to make cars that we would buy. As all countries learn, trade is much cheaper—and more lasting—than conquest.

We were all unionized, and one Friday there was a strike, so I got a 3-day weekend. It was a perfunctory affair, I was told—some grievance was made up just to extend the weekend, and by Monday we were all back at work. I had a lot of time to think, while still keeping my concentration on a dangerous job, my hard-hat securely on my head. When I'd saved enough money I'd get back on the road toward Darwin, my way out the country. Exactly how or to where I wasn't sure.

That day came Easter Sunday of 1973, singing “Jesus Christ is Risen Today”, and iconic hymn that was a kind of ritualistic annual reality check for me since I was much younger. This was my reality; standing at the junction of the Great Northern Highway and the Goldsworthy cut-off. All the traffic was either turning right toward the mine or going back to Port Hedland. I stood in the hot sun, no trees, no breeze, just a floppy hat and a smile. It took 2 hours for a car to actually approached my direction, a faded aqua green VW bug.

It stopped and a shaggy-haired bearded guy about my age got out apologetically saying “I'd like to help you, mate, but as you can see she's loaded to the bloody gills! But I'll give you some water”

Then he reconsidered, “I can't leave you out in the bloody desert... get in!”

I would ride with Robbie and Sue for the next day and a half.

He asked his girlfriend to move to the back seat, put me in the front seat and jammed my backpack net to her. Now we were really loaded, but I was moving down the endless horizon of red earth, spindly spinifex plants, on a gravel highway that was the sole connection to the next town—Broome, nearly 400 miles away. With luck, we'd be there tomorrow afternoon. We talked about where we'd been, and where we were going, sharing stories of the road and of the outback. His sweet brunette girlfriend Sherry now sitting with my backpack on her lap seemed quiet, serene.

Traffic was so sparse that whenever an oncoming car approached, we'd both stop for a visit, trading tips about what lie ahead. An occasional kangaroo would leap across the road or briefly tag along beside us. The only civilization we passed was the Sandfire Road House, where a lazy dog lay in the doorway to a little store and snack bar and the counter where you paid for your gas. All traffic stopped here, but there was very little of it. With darkness approaching, we camped by the side of the road. No traffic passed by all that night. Very quiet—the flies are inactive at night—just a vast canopy of the Milky Way and not a single light on the horizon. They slept in the same sleeping bag, and I discretely lay down out of view.

Both the sun and the flies came the next morning, so it was time to push on. A few miles out of site to our left was 80-mile Beach, a vast empty stretch of sand just out of our view. Gradually, the land was now appearing a little more lush, as we headed north rainfall was more affected by periodic monsoons off the Indian Ocean. As we approached long-awaited Broome, the highway was now paved, and we picked up the pace driving triumphantly into this old pearling center of 10,000 that made it a relative metropolis in this corner of the country. We had a picnic at beautiful Cable Beach, and swam in the tropical Java Sea waters, until someone spotted a sea snake and we all got back to shore. Rob and

Sherry had reached their destination—I pushed on.

That afternoon, I got a ride all the way into Derby, where I slept by the side of the road, the balmy night as free of mosquitoes as the scorching days were full of flies. The land was becoming more interesting, lusher and more varied, with occasional cattle—the true buffalo with the horns swept back in an arc. The next day I made it to Fitzroy Crossing, the famed “pub with no town.” There was a town of a few hundred, about half white, half aborigine, but the huge pub dominated all, and was a must-stop for passers-by and the only watering hole for locals.

There I learned that recent rains (it was the monsoon season) has washed out a bridge ahead, causing unknowable delays and a break in overland traffic. Travel would have to wait until the river was fordable. Luckily, a rumor had it a bush pilot was leaving soon who could give me a lift, so I someone at the bar gave me drove out to the air strip where I was able to jump aboard. As we flew low across the endless expanses undulating countryside, I could see the telltale signs of the reflections on pools of water that had formed after recent record rains, with several normally dry riverbeds now swollen. There were no signs of human life below.

It took about an hour to reach his destination: Hall's Creek. There I surveyed the tiny settlement with its one general store, campground and church mission oriented to aboriginal well-being. There were a few more hours of daylight, where I spent sitting at the only petrol station. All through traffic had to stop there as it was the only fuel for over a hundred miles in each direction.

It was there I met Greg Horspool, who had been waiting at the same station all that day.

Greg was from Bermuda, the only person I'd ever met from that storied Atlantic isle before or since. He'd been traveling around the world generally heading east and had been across Europe and southern Asia. I would counter his footsteps the opposite way. He was headed to Perth; I was headed to Darwin. and we approached every vehicle that stopped for gas, maybe at the rate of one per hour. No luck that day, not for lack of hospitality, but because everyone was so loaded up with gear and people there was no room.

A couple ran the station and didn't mind us hanging out, an Aussie bloke and his exotic Indonesian wife. There were no buses then, so hitching was our only way out. As darkness loomed and the station closed and even the sparse traffic ended till morning, we headed out to an open area out of town, where a collection of towering termite hills loomed. As high as your head and as hard as concrete, these other worldly structures created by a hidden commonality of a million insects cut a dramatic shape across the flat horizon. As the sun and the flies now gone, the stars came out, and we lay our unzipped sleeping bags across the stony ground.

We traded stories about where we'd been and where we hoped to go. I told Greg how to get a job in Goldsworthy and how I rode the Indian-Pacific free. He talked mostly of India, of its people, its villages, teeming cities, its heat, its squalor and its allure. He talked of the network of hostels, guest houses, government tourist bungalows, free beaches where he'd stayed for almost nothing. Greg's India stories cast I kind of spell, and helped convince me travel around the world South Asia and Europe.

Before that, I'd had a vague idea of teaching English in Japan, where I'd heard jobs were plentiful. But getting there would be costly, with flights around the western Pacific rim. Once there, I return home back across the Pacific or try to take the trans-Siberian railway. Intourist, the Soviet tourist agency, was very bureaucratic and unaccommodating to solo tourists. So I resolved the overland route, I resolved to travel the Hippie Trail, as it later became known once war and revolution had shut it down.

As dark settled over this vast an empty corner of a continent, the flies went to sleep and the stars came out. In one direction some ambient lighting of the little town. Then maybe 300 lived there, half white, half aboriginal. In the other directions there was nothing on the horizon. Then we heard the soft singing of a tune familiar to me, and we approached an outdoor group of aborigines singing *Old*

Rugged Cross outside a church, with one pale bare light bulb and a piano player. It was uplifting, yet also mournful and haunting, a sight and sound I remember as if it were yesterday. I joined in “on a hill far away stood an old rigged cross, the emblem of suffering and shame”. That hill was very far away. From Hall's Creek, everything is far away.

The next day broke clear sunny and hot. I got a ride first, a northbound bloke in a pick-up truck filled with gear, but with an available front seat. He welcomed the company. I got a post card from Greg about a year later affirming that he'd made it out and back home to Bermuda. Decades later I googled him and easily found his name attached to a landscape architectural firm he runs in Bermuda. We traded emails, and remembrances of that time long ago and far away.

My ride drove all day through settlements like Turkey Creek and Kununura. We slept out under the stars and the next day he left me in Katherine, where I got a ride the last leg into Darwin. The land became greener, lush as we neared the coast. During my last lift into town I passed through a traffic light—the first I'd seen in 2,000 miles. The ride was a Czech immigrant, who got out five years before just after the Soviet invasion suppressed the Prague Spring and re-established a hard-line regime. He'd been in the Czech Army when Soviet tanks rolled in, and was told to stay in the barracks, that resistance was pointless. Similar orders had been given 30 years before when Hitler moved in. The poor Czechs were victims of cramped geography, but here he had all the geography he wanted.

I checked into the youth hostel, where people were coming and going—arriving from Indonesia or Timor, and figuring out how to leave. Darwin's the northern tip of the continent, where Australia meets the tepid Timor Sea. I joined a group of Pommies for pub-hopping, quickly having my fill. It's information that I really needed.

How do I get out of this country? Indonesia wouldn't give me a visa without a round-trip ticket, but what was the point of that? Return to Darwin? There were direct flights to Dili in Portuguese Timor, and there was a Portuguese consulate in Darwin that would give me a visa, but would I be able to get into Indonesia from there? Accounts varied. Finally, in frustration, I forked over the cash for a flight to Singapore, and board the BOAC 747 the next night. It was a round-the-world route on which I was on for just a 2-hour segment.

My seatmates were fortuitous; Cynthia and Manfred. She was a copper-hued bundle of energy, born and raised in India; he a blond German. They were married and returning to their home outside Frankfurt, and were full of advice and political commentary. A truly international couple with three beautiful teenage daughters (Indo-German) who I'd later meet in person. Of course, they invited me to stay at their home when I got to Germany. They would be there in 12 hours—I'd be there in 5 months.

SINGAPORE

I got off in Singapore, the former British colonial outpost quickly transforming itself into an economic powerhouse of a City-state. I'd heard stories of their disdain for hippies, and large posters in the airport receiving area confirmed that. There were illustrated posters in several languages showing hair length acceptable in Singapore, and that longhairs would be served last and possibly be compelled to take a trim on the spot. My own blond locks were pretty shaggy with sideburns down to my earlobes, but not long enough to be hassled, and I got through.

Knowing little about Singapore or where I should stay, I chose the cheapest hotel listed on a posted “approved for tourist” list; the “7 Storey Hotel” at \$7/night and asked the cab driver to take me there. Flush with the money I'd earned at the mine, I could afford that for one night. I was non-descript, basic and with a private bathroom—more than I needed. It was late night, when I walked around the neighborhood.

My lasting first image was a man sitting on an empty sidewalk, late that humid night, behind his

array of merchandise neatly laid on a cloth before him: He offered comps, nail clippers, small packs of kleenex and a few packs of cigarettes. He was typical of what I'd see throughout Asia, but a first for me, especially late night with few on the street. He had such a tiny piece of the action, but it was all his.

This island nation is Confucian in its paternalistically authoritarian rule of Lee Kwan Yew, with this veneer of British language, culture and colonial architecture. All official signs were in four languages; English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil. Tamil? I was fascinated by the beauty and total otherness of its alphabet which I'd never seen before. The Chinese controlled the place, the Malay were at the bottom and the Tamil—a dark-skinned people from South India--had a niche somewhere in between,

These Indians were better at English and their merchants and café operators friendlier than the Chinese. They'd come right out on the sidewalk as I passed and practically drag me in. Most shops and eating places had no front wall—just the roll-up door that left the places practically open air. The aromas I noticed most. I'd never experienced such smell of the city, the sweet, pungent, aromatic and acrid as I pass by a variety of food and industrial places.

The next day I found a much cheaper hotel—about \$150 a night—the Hai Hin, run by Chinese for Chinese, but they took me with a smile. My room was actually a converted balcony closed in with plywood and with a tiny mattress. Down the hall was the bathroom—the first time I'd ever seen squat johns. I didn't even know they existed, but here they were. No toilet seat, just a hole in the floor with two slightly raised pads for each seat as you squatted and did your thing. I'd get used to them.

One night I went to Bugis Street, whose reputation had preceded it on the overland grapevine. At night, it started out as a typically Asian clothing, food and electronic bazaar. I cruised around, observing, smelling and having a little fun with a local hustler, who would ask me furtively “Hey Mister, you to change money? You want drugs? You want girls? You want boys?” I egged him on with ever more outlandish requests, until he gave up.

At about 10, the locals began drifting home and long tables were set up in the street as tourists and resident Westerners sat down to drink. Now the female impersonators (as they were called then—pre-op trans females today) came out, glamorous and dolled up and ready to hustle. Some guys were into that sorta thing. Others were fooled—until it was too late.

I was with a group of gregarious Australian sailors and a more formal English businessman, all living up to their national stereotypes. We were soon joined by a gaggle of flirtatious glamorous people of ambivalent sexual identity.

“I'm Tracy. I'm Malay” one introduced. One Aussie friend was drunk—and smitten, determined to take her to a nearby cheap hotel room she had in mind. His friend warned, “That's no Sheila—that's a bloke. You'll have her clothes off and they'll be some hairy crank staring up at you!” Undeterred, they went off. Like my English drinking partner, I was a curious observer but kept more aloof—and sober.

I stayed in Singapore a few days, until Dad wired me some money from home from the sale of my '57 Ford pick-up truck. I picked it up at the American Express office, a few hundred more dollars swelled my stash, which had to last me a long time. I'd talked to my parents at a special phone at a post office—the last they'd hear from me until I got to Europe.

I still toyed with options heading for Japan, but direct tickets were costly and I didn't want to fly over all those interesting places below, as I'd done with Indonesia. Singapore Airlines billboards were everywhere, the exotic stewardesses beckoning; *Singapore Girl. She has a way with people*, but both she and her airline were out of my league. Then there was the India route. I looked into a regular passenger ship service to Madras; only \$40 third class, but was told that 3rd Class was reserved for Indians—no whites allowed. Western hippies definitely not welcomed among the teeming Tamils re

returning home.

So I would head north up toward Thailand and see how things developed, what information I could glean and what twists fate would take.

MALAYSIA

I took a bus headed for Malacca, crossing the causeway that connects to the Asian mainland, the same one Japanese soldiers crossed on bicycles barely 30 years before when they captured Singapore. My first two impressions were seeing elephants and a beggar who came on the bus with a shriveled arm. I'm really in Asia now.

Malaysia was green, balmy and fragrant. I gulped some delicious noodle/vegetable/chicken soup dish from a roadside vendor during a brief bus stop. My goal was to reach Malacca where my hostel guide showed accommodations. There I got a motorized trishaw just out of town. I was told it was closed, but had reopened temporarily for a large French-Canadian student group staying there. My good luck. I was surrounded by sweet looking (and sounding) Quebeoise and wasn't charged.

The accommodations were fine—an open kitchen, a few bunk rooms and a totally laid-back atmosphere with no on-site supervision. My first night on the Asian mainland. I joined some of the French Canadians for a walk down the road, to be greeted by curious kids. Some homes were modern and self-contained with doors and glass windows. Others were open, elevated in stilts with open windows and doorways. We met an 50ish British man who had stayed on with his younger Malay wife after independence came 10 years before. They had mixed teenage kids—the face of the future.

We went into town, with the pungent aromas and flavors of the street food stalls enveloping us, and sat down to a delicious noodle vegetable soup concoction. We passed a semi-exposed mosque, with the men prostrate in prayer/ The Malays are Muslim, the Chinese and the Indians not. The Malays are a slight majority, controlling the police and the army, the Chinese have the money and most of the shops, with the Indians owning what's left over. It provides an uneasy balance, which seems to work. The 75-year British rule of Malaya was really just an agreement with the local sultans to protect them, collect customs and provide for defense, which they utterly failed to do when the Japanese came in 1942. After independence, the local rulers remained in power, trading off the presidency among themselves. Malaya plus Sarawak (North Borneo) became Malaysia

The next day I tried hitch-hiking and got a lift from a Chinese salesman driving a new Japanese car. He spoke very good English and fully explaining the uneasy relationship between the Chinese and the Malays. "The Malays have the army and the police, while the Chinese have the money. The Indian are more like the Chinese, but not as rich." He was a Malaysian but not a Malay. He bought me lunch, showed me the sights of "K.L." (Kuala Lumpur, the capital) then all the way to Ipoh, where he dropped me off at a cheap but clean hotel, near the bus station, as per my request.

I got a bus the next day up to Butterworth, a very British name in an area generally known as Penang, where I took a ferry out to Penang Island, a bustling tourist center. Some Canadian backpackers I met told me of cheap beachfront accommodations there along the west side, so I got a local bus along a beautiful beach, with modern hotels gradually fading into countryside. The last stop was Batu Ferengi, and I got a cubicle for \$1 a night, about the size of a bathroom stall with plywood walls in a ramshackle building.

It was a great location. There were the usual mix of Yanks, Canucks, Aussies, Kiwis, Brits and European backpackers, hanging out—exchanging stories, food, drink and love. There were scattered street stalls and open air restaurants, open on all sides, but always with a thatched or corrugated metal roof---this was the rainy tropics.

Right behind us was the beach and the calm ocean waters of the Malacca Strait, separating Malaysia from Indonesia. Ah—Indonesia, so close but so far. I learned of a ferry from Penang to Medan on Sumatra. A roundtrip ferry tickets might satisfy the strict visa requirement of a prepaid ticket out of the country, and it could be had upon arrival. I met an American girl regaling me with stories of Lake Toba and the time she'd spent on an island in the middle of it. However, I decided to continue heading north to Bangkok, as plenty of adventures would lie ahead without taking side trips.

I took the ferry back to the mainland in order to catch the early morning train. I found the cheapest hotel I could at \$3 for my last night in Malaysia, but even then a boy instead on taking my back up to my room where he asked me if I wanted a woman, too, for an hour or a night. I demurred. Paying for sex seemed both unromantic and expensive. There were opportunities, if not always with the locals, then with my contemporary travelers.

I wandered through the Butterworth and into a book shop where I bought a small pocket atlas to trace my tip. Right then, I was hit by something I'd eaten earlier and was directed to a bathroom inside the home attached to the shop. It was a squat john where I quickly unloaded, then asked for toilet paper from my host, I'll never forget his somewhat quizzical, somewhat embarrassed tone in his thick Indian accent: "toilet paper—we don't use". I should have been the embarrassed one, for there was a coffee can and a faucet right there for me to clean myself by hand, then wash up. Clean, simple, sanitary. I would learn this new system, and by the time I'd see my first sit-down johns again (months later in the Greek Islands) I'd be squatting up on the toilet seat.

I got to the station as the sun arose, buying my ticket and locating my car. I was riding third class unreserved, but there were adequate seats and I located a few Aussie girls to ride with, heading to Bangkok just like me. Safety in numbers. We went to the dining car where I saw my first written Thai—a blockish alphabet like Roman, but with exotic and completely opaque letters. English was a very, very distant second language in Thailand.

THAILAND

The train moved forward and soon crossed the border into Thailand. The Aussie girls and I were getting along fine, sharing food, stories and laughs. The windows were all wide open, as the balmy damp air kept the car fresh and we took in the passing countryside of lush fields, forests, and small towns teeming with motor scooters, and each with a looming spire of a Buddhist temples. Thailand had escaped European colonial domination, playing Britain off against France. Everything seemed more genuine and authentic.

At each town hawkers greeted us with all kinds of wares and food from soft drinks to the dried fish on a stick, spread out almost like it had been crucified. We had some mangoes, bananas and went to the diner for my first spicy Thai noodle soup. At one stop, a Chinese traveler has his watch pulled right off his arm as it lay resting on the open window, which created quite a ruckus. At major towns there were steam engines on sidings, painted bright colors with wood piled up in the tenders. It was like being back in time, something reminding me of the iron horses chugging across the old west.

We were heading due north, up the Isthmus of Kra, a narrow land bridge connecting Thailand and Malaysia. As night nightfall approached, a bare light bulb remained on, and would all night. It helped with security, but discouraged romance. I was getting cozy with one of the three Aussie sheilas, with our arms wandering about each other all night, neither fully awake nor asleep. We could get in the mood with our eyes closed, but open them and there was that bright bare bulb again. It was an awkward night, but we made the best of it.

I bought a leather pouch to keep my passport and cash, with loops to attached my belt through it.

It was too visible, but would take a real effort to cut the straps near my waist and enough time for me to defend it. It was certainly better than the pouches many overlanders wore around their neck, with a string, like a necklace. Too visible, too vulnerable.

As the morning light gradually replaced that of the bare bulb, we could see the same lush countryside gradually becoming outskirts of Bangkok. Scattered farming villages became larger, the countryside melting away into the suburbs. We passed rail yards with more brightly painted and glistening steam engines.

Thailand. Siam. Land of the free, never having been subdued or occupied by a foreign power, with a continuity symbolized by its royal family, whose pictures were seen everywhere. Legendary for its cuisine and beautiful women, and the fleshpots of its cities and beach resorts. The legend of many GIs on R & R.

The station was chaotic, as all tend to be with the big long-distance train arrives, and this was as long as any trip in Thailand could be. Thais were greeted by relatives, foreigners by taxis, both motorized and trishaws powered by muscle. They all seemed to be getting kickbacks for a certain hotel—Hotel Reno. The cabbies were all shouting “Hotel Leeno” as best they could approximate what the American name of a place originally built to house soldiers resting from Vietnam.

The three Australian girls and I piled into one care, and having no other place in mind to go, obliged and off we went to Reno. We joined the traffic of buses, cabs, bikes and trishaws, of fruit-hawkers and elegantly clad beauties and leathery old men hauling freight on their backs. The hotel itself was fine at \$7 a night per room, though pricier than I’d have liked. I checked in, alone and took a long nap, with the sights, sounds and smells of this exotic city waiting just out my window.

I didn’t see the Aussies again, but met a couple of British girls in the small lobby. One was Pat Bannister, a honey blond with just a hint of cleavage always showing. Pretty Pat. I would later see her in her native Manchester, where she was returning the long way after a year working as a nurse in Australia. We walked down a busy street, ate from a street stall, then agreed to see a movie—The Poseidon Adventure. Why not? The cinema was right there and promised relief from the mid-afternoon humidity.

The Thai national anthem was played before the feature, along with an image of the bespectacled king and his wife. I stood dutifully to a man who descended from one played by Yule Brynner, Rama—-who jockeyed among imperial powers to keep his kingdom independent.

The movie was shown in English with Thai and Chinese subtitles, of a cruise ship turned upside down and a star-studded band miraculously saved after a few die off. “There’s got to be a morning after”. A touch of Hollywood far from home. We ate afterward, then walked, shopped and talked of so many things. Pat and I seemed to have a connection, but her brunette friend limited my possibilities, though keeping me away from the notorious Bangkok fleshpots that I could ill-afford. Any erotic adventures would be by mutual consent—and free.

I crashed my one night at the Reno, resolving to find something cheaper the next day. We spent the day visiting the sumptuous royal palace grounds, filled with soaring temples, shrines, tourists, hawkers and saffron-clad monks. The Thai money was easy in translation—20 baht to the dollar. Each baht worth a nickel, and they kinda had the same size and shape of a nickel. We were followed around by a particular young post card vendor who kept repeating “Two Baht” endlessly, finally wearing Pat down.

My Japan hopes were dimming. There were no overland shortcuts nor cheap flights. I’d likely have to return home across the Pacific, as the Trans-Siberian option was bureaucratic, costly and cloistered in a 2-week train compartment, or so I’d been told. The big question was what lay for me in Japan—jobs, adventure, relationships. That I would never know.

Pat had her trip home all laid out. She’d get there, seeing everything overland with a pre-paid

itinerary with Penn Tours. They ran regular long distance busses across the Hippie Trail, the Sahara, South America and other locations. She envied me, a little bit, my not knowing how or when, just that I would do it. Had she not already paid, maybe the two of us would have gone forward together, with all the promise and peril of having a steady and attractive western companion. Such was not to be.

Taxis in Bangkok had no meters so you had to bargain in advance before getting in. You tried to get him down to half of the original asking price, depending on how busy they were. The cabbies all seemed to know how to count in English, and many tried to take you to the girlie bars and massage dens with happy endings. I took one to a local clinic advertising cheap inoculations—I got a gamma globulin shot, good for hepatitis. Hep. It was the biggest health fear on the old hippie trail. Once your urine started turning brown, that was it—you had to get back home, fast.

The next night I spent at the Hotel Malaysia, which I'd heard was the leading hippie/overlander crash site. Rooms were \$6 a night, but the front desk would set you up with room mates that would cut the cost by half. It had been an R & R spot for resting US servicemen during the Vietnam War, it's five stories beat up by partying GIs seeking the local girls and booze. Now it catered to overlanders, backpackers, Yanks, Canucks, Aussies, Kiwis, Brits, Germans, French, Italians, Japanese and a few Latin Americans. They were all here, about 2-1 males, with the girls mostly paired up, or at least not obviously travelling solo. It's swimming pool teemed with life and possibilities, so far were most people from home.

The hotel's main attraction was the huge bulletin board in the lobby, covered with advertisements and personal messages. Some were directed at specific people: "Annie Smith from Adelaide: We met in Goa; if you are here now, I'm in Room 315—Bill" others more general "If you want to join a group heading to Chiang Mai tomorrow, see Tom in Room 512", or "Anyone trying get into Burma? Room 219". Most were in English, a few were in German or Japanese.

One interested me: "Have range rover being shipped to Calcutta. Need help driving back to England. Colin, Room 320". Wow—there was my trip, my travel partner right in front of me. Colin and I talked in the lobby café over sweet Thai iced coffee. He'd made a bundle working the Brunei oil fields, where he bought a Range Rover. He's having it shipped to Calcutta, where he plans to drive overland back to London. He'd like a couple of travel partners to share driving. He'll even pay for all the gas. Sure, sounds good.

"I'll be in Calcutta in about a week and will leave my contact information at the American Express office". Ah, American Express offices. They served as a de-facto post office throughout the world. You could not only have money wired, but personal mail or messages. They'd hold it for a few months, and the word was you didn't even need to be a member. Fine, everything was settled. I had a few days before I needed to be in India for my trip halfway around the world. Sorry, Japan.

I was interested in heading out into the countryside, either into Laos or Cambodia. We were carpet-bombing the Khmer Rouge at the time, who controlled the Cambodian interior, so Phnom Penh could only be accessed by air—too costly. Laos was a ferry ride across the Mekong, so I headed north by bus to Nonkhai, right on the river.

I talked a lot with a Thai guy next to me, and his drop-dead gorgeous sister on the other side of him. That's as close as I'd get. We travelled though rice country, verdant with bananas and cocoanuts. We passed by some huge U.S. air bases, too, with little shantytowns of bars and brothels right outside the main gates. A cease-fire early that year had allowed us to take our ground troops out—a "decent interval of two years before Saigon would later fall to the final communist offensive in 1975. Our B-52s were still carpet bombing the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia to keep the Lon Nol regime afloat. He would fall as well, later move to my hometown of Fullerton and I now see his grave at Loma Vista Cemetery when I walk the dog.

Last stop of many was Nonkhai, a non-descript river town. I grabbed a waiting water taxi shared with a few others and we crossed the wide Mekong over to Vientiane and Laos.

LAOS

Laos. Another country. Fairly easy and perfunctory dockside customs. It was the most isolated and backward of the four countries emerging from French Indochina, but soon plunged into civil war between communist Pathet Lao and the US-approved regime. The French influence was clear from the layout of the city—geometrically laid-out wide, tree-lined boulevards and parkways with a preponderance of Citroens, Renaults and US-made military vehicles. In the bakeries were fresh loaves of crusty warm French bread along with the savory noodle soups.

I wandered a bit, then came upon the Vieng Vilay Hotel, the kind of low-end basic habitation I could spot as both habitable and affordable. I checked into the second story for \$2-a-night with a roommate. It had an overhead fan to keep the mosquitoes away. I stretched out my sleeping bag on the thin blanket in the narrow board that passed for a bed and looked up at the spinning fan, grooving on the endless cycles of its blades and soft reassuring humming sound. I pondered that no one in this whole country knew or cared who I was, and that no one in my own had any idea where I was.

Down below there was a cacophony of revelers on the narrow street, holding signs and banging on drums and hearing toward the river. I learned it was Buddha's birthday celebration and would join them along with a few other backpackers I'd met.

First, however, we resolved to have lunch at the French Officers Mess, a nostalgic holdover of a restaurant located in an old army compound. We crammed into a motorized trishaw (attached to a motorcycle; the cheaper ones to a bicycle) and quickly found the place and the hearty gaullic repast at a reasonable price. Stew, fresh bread and uniformed staff, for maybe \$1.50 apiece.

We traded stories about where we'd been and would like to go, myself, two Aussies and a Brit, whose names have long been forgotten. We then headed down to the river bank to the festival, past the street stalls, colonial balconied buildings and more contemporary cinderblock. Laos; poor, not squalid.

We joined the throng of revelers, with long tables of food for sale, loud music and the occasional rocket shot out across the river toward Thailand (harmless fireworks, not an act of war). There were soldiers with varying military uniforms, and my British friend could tell the government officers from the Communist Pathet Lao, all apparently enjoying a ceasefire.

As the sun set, I wandered the streets solo amidst the steamy tropical night. I came across a dimly lit noodle and tea shop where I heard the familiar American accents of a group of teenagers. I joined them and found them to be students at the American school, all kids of diplomats and aid personnel, all very American, yet few had spent any time back home. One boy's dad worked for Air America, a CIA-operated air service. He advised me as to how to get a job as a "rice-kicker" help to airlift supplies to anti-communist hill tribes.

There was a large diplomatic community here, since Laos was officially neutral, all parties could mingle freely. There was a break in the war, with the Paris Peace agreement bringing a respite before the communists launched their final offensive two years later.

In Laos, driving was on the right side of the road, but I'd just spent 3 months in left-hand drive places (from Fiji to Thailand) that I was careful to look both ways before crossing any street, a practice that's stayed with me to this day.

I'd heard of the beauties of the interior. Overland travel was limited by communist guerrillas who controlled the routes, so I took a flight to Luang Prabang on a WWII era prop-driven DC-3 with Lao Airlines. A talkative gray-haired Frenchman joined me as I waited at the small airport bar. He drank his

beer, spoke to me in French, to which I could only reply with “oui, Monsiuer” and “c’est la vie.” Then we both boarded the plane and he turned out to be the pilot. Inside I sat with the passengers on the left, while the right-hand seats had all been removed to make way for freight, especially motorcycles strapped down to the floor.

We flew for an about an hour over beautiful green tropical mountains “all controlled by Pathet Lao” an Aussie sitting next to me said. LP, as its commonly known was laid back, none of the bustle of Vientiane. This was the Royal Capital, home of King Souvanna Phouma, who was officially neutral, though with heavy CIA-backing. His brother, Prince Souphanouvong was the titular head of the communists, a Royal Red. A complex family affair. For now, there was an uneasy truce, following the Paris Peace Accord earlier that year.

I walked down the main street, lined with shops, eating places, nothing remotely flashy like Bangkok or even Vientiane. I stopped in a small restaurant where I spotted some backpackers and joined them over some rice dishes. The topic was hep. “It can only come from contamination with shit” one American was saying. “Once your urine turns brown, you’re in serious trouble. All you can do is fly back home and get treatment—if you have the money. Some have died because they couldn’t get home fast enough.” We shared where, when or if we’d gotten gamma globulin shots. I had reasonable confidence in the one I’d gotten in Thailand.

I found a place to stay with an aid worker, a soft-spoken Japanese-American guy from the Bay Area. I was on the floor, under an overhead fan, to keep away the mosquitoes. It was either that or a mosquito coil, acrid and slow-burning. I preferred the fan.

The next day I wandered around the town, above the muddy meandering Mekong. I got as close to the royal palace as I could, then walked along a dirt road through the humble hovels along the river. In my countries, this would be considered a shanty town, but it was peaceful, the air balmy and the curious children who followed me were smiling and happily curious. I came upon a smiling beautiful woman frying rice or fish cake. She had clear copper skin and a wide smile with perfect teeth. I had to probe—“Mademoiselle?” I asked. “Madame” she replied, smiling, pointing to a man in a hammock behind her through the doorless opening to her corrugated tin home.

She smiled and continued cooking. She let me take a picture with a cumbersome old Yashica camera I’d borrowed from my sister Nancy, along with a light meter. I wanted to get this one right, and I did. Surrounding me were about a dozen kids who’d started following me out of boredom and curiosity. I got their pic, too—and later used it on a Christmas card.

As I walked, I noted the creative recycling of wartime waste—especially spent shell casings used for planters or makeshift stairways. Jeeps were everywhere, converted to various civilian uses.

After a few days in balmy Luang Prabang, I took my return flight on Lao Airlines back to Vientiane, crossed the Mekong and got the night train back to Bangkok. The light was on all night, again, and I had no Aussie Sheila to snuggle with this time. I made it back to the Hotel Malaysia to laze around the pool, share stories and get off to the airport.

You had to fly to Calcutta, as land crossings through Burma were closed, at least to Americans. There were stories about those who’d gotten through—and those left frustrated. Occasionally, UBA (United Burmese Airways) had a Bangkok-Rangoon-Calcutta flight, allowing a stopover in Rangoon and exploration of that reclusive land of Mandalay. There were few I’d met who’d actually been there. Lacking any means of getting through Burma, I had to fly over the country to get ton India—and Calcutta.

It was an uneventful, cloudy flight until we were just over the Ganges delta and I could make out the jute ponds below, (fiber grown for burlap bags). I sat next to a very dark, rotund Bengali in a suit next to me, who looked down and kept saying “too hot, Calcutta—too hot”. If it were hot for him, I could imagine how it would feel to my pale body.

INDIA

No one is ever ready for his first view of Calcutta. Even by Indian standards, overwhelming are the crowds, the heat, the filth, the flies, the squalor and the beggars with real ailments like leprosy. They abound and come at you. The whole country comes at you in a way that's internally disturbing. India's spiritual sheen (Gandhi, Ravi Shankar music, ashrams, yogis and gurus) attract Westerners, who then find they must become emotionally hardened one they arrive, just to survive. Becoming insensitive to the squalor, the suffering that assaults your senses and tugs at your hearts and wallet is too much for many.

People lived, slept, prepared food on the sidewalks, in the parks (the great Maidan, built of Victorian splendor, now a free-for-all of commerce and homelessness) and getting a glimpse of any foreign face—even long-haired backpack-toting hippies—sprang forth to bed. "Baksheesh, baksheesh" was the cry that followed throughout the subcontinent; an old Persian word for "gift".

I was on the edge of a vast land, deep in people in a culture so impenetrable. Yet there were familiarities, especially English in the signs and as a second language to people on a far higher scale than in Thailand.

I went to the American Express office to get the message from Colin. Where is he? Where do we meet? When do we start? Sure enough, the message was there, but not what I expected: "Chris—Sorry but I decided to fly home. The overland trip is not practical. —Colin"

OK. Change of plans for him—and me. His promise is what brought me here and now it's vanished, but I understood. He took one look at Calcutta and realized driving across such a country was too much. He missed England and was probably there before I even got his message—a trip that would take me another four months.

The most intense part of my hippie trail began there, as I walked out of the American Express office and back into the teeming, sweltering squalorous cacophony that were the streets of Calcutta. I knew I was heading west, across Asia, toward Europe and back to the U.S., but wasn't sure how and with whom. That's the hippie trail at any time or place, then or now, one of unlimited possibilities and people, where attitude transcends place, and time.

First I had to change money. The official rate was 7 rupees to the dollar, but I'd heard you could get up to 8 on the black market, especially with large, crisp, new bills—easy to smuggle out of the country for Indians who might need them for business or travel. I had four \$50 bills that had to last me a long time—plus a thousand more in Australian denominated traveller's checks. A typical street hustler approached me with the telltale "hello my friend!" His dress and demeanor told me he was more than a beggar and offered services I might need.

"What do you want? Girls? I have nice Indian girls you can meet! Or do you prefer boys? Do you want drugs? Or change money?" That was it. The latter.

"I want eight rupees to the dollar!"

"Oh, no, my friend, I cannot get you that—maybe 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ rupees."

When I told him I wanted to change \$100 in 2 new \$50 bills, he became more agreeable, and led me into the backroom of a shop. My bills were examined for tears or other defects. They looked at them under a microscope. Then, nodding, they counted out 800 rupees, which I insisted be in small Rs. 5 and Rs. 10 notes, knowing "no change" would be the constant mantra I'd hear for anything larger.

I placed them in my small leather pouch attached to my belt. This would last me for a long, long time. Later that day I met another out-of-place long hair blond North American—Andre from Edmonton, who was travelling with another Canadian and an Aussie, all sharing a room at the Salvation Army Hotel, as cheap as you could get. (The really cheap places wouldn't allow westerners in and wouldn't be safe anyway).

They were heading toward Nepal, so I joined them and together we navigated the Indian Railway reservation system, visiting several offices, armed with our counterfeit “International Student ID” cards getting us the lowest possible rate. In one massive office were clerks, men and women, sitting at huge wooden tables stacked high with bundles of papers. No one seemed to know or much care about what was in them, as they chatted and drank tea. There we waited for our hard-sleeper tickets for the all night train to Gaya. Andre seemed to know what he was doing. Between offices, I bought some bananas from a street vendor—soft, sweet, to this day the best I’ve ever tasted. Armed with our tickets, we had dinner in the old Chinatown, a relic of Imperial days.

We walked on the now-dark sidewalks, with flickering makeshift fires and occasional operating streetlight lighting our way. Sidewalks lined with reclining bodies, some sleeping, others squatting. There were always a handful of people following us, begging, hands and small tin pots extended, shouting “baksheesh” or children in English phrase “no mama, no papa”. They give up after a few blocks but others would take their place. All we could do was ignore them.

We crossed the giant hulking Howrah Bridge across the Houghly River, heading for the station on the other side. I’d seen it once before in National Geographic. The bridge is a marvel to British engineering, built over one of the widest Ganges was a massive tribute to British engineering and a busy bottleneck through which all passed between Calcutta and its sprawling west suburb of Howrah. Its massive steel-girdered superstructure shimmered in the steamy night.

It was easy to see the railroad station just on the other side. Howrah Station, India’s largest and oldest. Built by the British as a kind of secular temple to the transformative power of the railroad. Its fanciful arches and brick turrets beckoned us and once inside we were greeted with the chaos of a teeming humanity of those coming and going, and others who simply camped out on its floors. Followed by a retinue of beggars—a spastic with tragically uncontrollable muscle contortions remains particularly vivid—we made our way to the platform indicated on our ticket to the carriage number of the train waiting. There taped to its outside wooden wall was a list of passengers and their assigned berths—and my name was penciled in! The vast Indian railroad bureaucracy DID work. Out of the chaos of Calcutta. We were a party of three overlanders—two Canadians and me in a dark car of Indian businessmen and tourists.

With hard sleeper, we each had fold down-platform to stretch out on, for just a couple of rupees. You could travel 3rd class unreserved for free—and later I did. Those cars were so crowded that tickets were rarely taken, the government writing it off as a kind of public service. But there would be no place to lie down or even stretch your legs and your things could be ripped off as soon as you fell asleep. For an all-night trip the small price of the hard sleeper was a luxury well worth it. I used my sleeping bag as my mattress, my backpack as my pillow and my essentials—money and passport—I now kept inside my pants next to the family jewels—a kind of a biological alarm should anyone try to mess with them. No one did.

As the train lumbered forth, the hulking shadowy mass of the Howrah Station faded into the darkness and the ambient light of scattered cooking fires throughout the railyards dimly lit our path forward—into what? Behind me the teeming surreal chaos of Calcutta was tempered by the regular clickety-clack of the train and the security of having my own little space where I could stretch out. We were stacked 12 to a car, but we had the luxury of stretching out. While a few chatted in Bengali, I exchanged satisfied pleasantries with my new-found Anglophone friends.

The English-speaking world was the largest subgroup within the Hippie Trail travelers. While there were plenty of Germans, French, Scandinavians, Italians and a smattering of Japanese, it was the Yanks, Aussies, Canucks, Kiwis and Pommies that predominated. Language continuity created by the British Empire, the same one that created the railroad I was on, heading into the night.

When the train stopped at a few cities along the way, I heard soon-to-be familiar refrain of the tea

vendors approaching us through the open windows; “CHAI, CHAI GORUM CHAI!” Teas for sale, the sweet milky hot tea dispensed directly out of huge containers on their backs. “Chai, Chai, Chai!” Any time day or night, whenever our trains would stop, the cries of “chai!” greeted me at every stop. It was reassuring that our arrival was so recognized!

I slept on-and-off. The car was dark—no perpetual light bulb as in Thailand. With my backpack as my pillow and my irreplaceables (money, passport) in my crotch I felt secure. I awoke into a beautiful morning, walking to the platform between cars to survey the view of a silver-lined cloud blocking the rising sun. All around was the parched farmland waiting for the monsoons. Scattered villages too small to warrant a train stop filled with mud houses, and people everywhere, in groups, walking rising bikes on dirt paths. Even the Indian countryside was densely populated. There were small temples over which hung red pennants—the banners of Shiva.

Our destination was Gaya, where Andre’s plan was to get to Bodhgaya, where Buddha had been enlightened under the Bodhi tree and went on to enlighten the world. We got there by mid-morning, as the heat was starting to intensify.

Gaya was an intense, crowded, dusty city with smells, sounds and people that came at you constantly. I got the impression that half the people were asleep at any given time, since there just wasn’t enough room for them all to be awake at once. All night there were people up, small fires, street hawkers. All day there were folks sleeping, on the sidewalks, through open doors, in the open spaces where people lived in makeshift homes of discarded wood, cloth and corrugated metal.

That morning, we had some chai at the depot café and reconnoitered. A very friendly clerk joined us, being helpful about where we were going. Indians were friendly everywhere, and their ability to speak English very different land seem more familiar than much more modern countries. Many signs were in English, as well, not that anyone spoke it as their main language, but it was a lingua franca uniting the country of many languages.

A southern Tamil speaker and a northern Hindi speaker must communicate in English. Attempts to impose Hindi as the national language met with bitter resistance, for those non-Hindi speakers it was English that was their window to the world. Only 5% of the country had any command of English, but in India that was still 30 million people. And it was those people, in the trains, at the stations, in the shops that we could freely speak with. The women would not speak to us at all, the children were either afraid or were begging and many would just stand and stare. We were the freaks in their country.

The clerk handed us a mimeographed sheet extolling the tourist destinations in Bihar, India’s poorest state. What tourists would ever visit here? I thought, then realized I was a tourist. Definitely a tourist. As much as we travelled on local buses, trains and had long hair or wore sarongs ourselves, we definitely stood out as tourists. And here I was in Bihar about to visit the most important tree in history.

Prince Siddhartha sat under this Bodhi tree 2,500 years ago, or at least a forbearer of this same tree, or at least at the same location. Such exactitudes are not the point. The point is that he learned the cause of all suffering is desire. Desire. For warmth, comfort, food, water, wealth and sex. Without desire, life cannot go on, but with them life is eternal frustration because there is never enough of what you want. One’s desire, expectations rise or fall depending on circumstances. Hope for the best, but be grateful for the least has been my philosophic talisman. Siddhartha became Buddha when he learned that that to control one’s desires was the path to happiness.

So here we were, finally on a half hour bus ride out to Bodhgaya. There we found the tree and the shrine, but also heat and squalor. We enjoyed sliced watermelon for a few paisa, then an emaciated old woman picked up the rinds we’d tossed aside and ate them.

We got back into Gaya that afternoon, looking for a train to Patna that wouldn’t come till morning. We slept on the platform, with crowds gathered around us just staring, with people coming and going to have a look at us like animals in a zoo. The zoo analogy went both ways, I guess. We tried

sleeping, with one keeping watch, awake for safety's sake. We were generally heading north, toward Nepal, across the wide Ganges plain.

We rode 3rd class unreserved into Patna the next day, soon realizing that tickets were never taken in the human cattle cars, with wood benches and bars across the windows to keep people from falling out. The huge system required fares for anyone with a reserved seat or sleeper, but for those at the bottom, it was run as a public service.

It was hot and fluids were needed. I guzzled Gold Spot orange soda or the fresh cane juice when I could get it. Hot chai was everywhere, the milky sweet mix favored by Indians and their former colonial rulers. "Chai, chai" still greeted us at every stop. It was served in ingenious cups made of thin clay, about as thin as an eggshell. After drinking the tea, you simply threw away the cup or smashed underfoot. Since it was made of earth, it was perfectly recycled.

Patna was vast, teeming and very hot. It was here we needed to cross the wide Ganges by boat to get to the railhead on the other side. I'd expected to get the runs, but my bowels were doing the opposite—shutting down. I was still getting used to the squat johns that were now ubiquitous. Taking a dump for me was always a morning ritual with a newspaper or good book, not a rush job crouching over a stinking hole.

At Patna, we boarded a river boat travelling up and across the Ganges. It would have been at home on the Mississippi, a side wheeler with several decks. The four of us gathered together, reading, talking and looking out at the watery highway heading from the Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal. I noticed a group of girls talking, one catching a furtive glance at us. The Hindu sari is such a glamorous piece of everyday clothing, especially with young women with good figures. The wrap-around cloth, the halter top and exposed midriff. I was so traditional, yet so alluring, in stark contrast to the swaths that Muslim women wore.

I walked past them, trying to strike up a conversation, but was completely ignored. They weren't rude or huffy, but meeting a strange foreign man was simply not done on the fly, without an introduction. We didn't get so much as a "namasthe" from them.

We docked on the northern bank right where a train was waiting to take us onward. The coordination was good. A huge group of porters scurried about looking for business, all with red turbans marking their profession. By the time we got to the train, it was completely full, so we climbed on top as many of the locals were doing.

As the train pulled slowly out, we got out bearings and realized why so many had climbed on top. There was fresh air, a nice view. No one to ask for our tickets. The top of the car was flat enough for balance and we could keep an eye on our stuff. There was even a little shoe shine boy up there, repeating the one English word he knew: "polish, polish?" I demurred. Maybe he saw the humor in it, as I admired his persistence.

Sunsets finish quickly in the tropics and I awoke from a little shuteye seeing huge mango trees pass by filled with fireflies. Aglow like Christmas trees. Ahead I could see the glowing cinders coming out of the steam locomotive—chug-chug-chug—they came quickly at me. It was a world aglow. Surreal, like so many memories.

We got down at Muzzafurpur to change trains. I met an Indian businessman while waiting in the station, and walked with around town in search of fresh leeches. "They are the best in India, and this is the best time of the season".

They were being sold by the branch, teeming with what appeared to be a strawberry-like fruit. I'd never seen anything like it. You peeled off the rough outer skin and inside with the translucent white fruit, sweet, succulent and nothing like I'd ever had, Muzzafurpur was loud, chaotic, dirty, teeming—typical India. Back at the station, I shared my bounty with my fellow travelers back at the station. This was Cynthia's hometown, though she was no back in Germany with Manfred.

We attracted the usual crowd of onlookers on the station platform, boys and young men who'd walk up to us and stare for a few minutes, forming a thin circle. Some begging, most just curious. There was Andre, the big blond Albertan, who was figuring out the routes. There were a couple of Kiwis we'd met in Gaya, who had joined our group of five, just about the right size. We'd get to Raxhaul together, then on to Kathmandu.

Just then I noticed a wiry man, legless, wearing only a sheet-white turban and diaper-like lion cloth, below which protruded two short stumps where legs would normally extend. He was walking with his hands, each holding a large wooden block, using his butt for leverage and balance. He had an erect bearing and grim, dignified look that still remember clearly. I was sure we would approach us and beg, asking for "baksheesh" so I avoided eye contact and mentally prepared to ignore his approach. He did not even notice us, however, but just walked on by, skillfully on his hands and tush. If it was leprosy, it had not affected the rest of his body. Birth defect? Train accident? I'd never know, but he'd adopted to his misfortune with a determined dignity as he trundled with a "clop-clop" into the night.

We caught a train on the Raxaul spur, where the line ended at the Nepalese frontier. Andre got into a bitter argument with a trishaw driver who cursed him once he got off and all the way across customs, which were perfunctory.

NEPAL

Across the border was the Nepalese town of Birgunj. The bus station was right at the border where we bought our tickets to Kathmandu for Rs. 10 (\$1.25) for a 5-hour trip. It didn't look like that on the map—only about 80 miles, but the route wound up and down the Himalaya foothills, rising about 5,000 feet, with many stops.

I was feeling pretty good, with an aisle seat and plenty of leg room, until they filled the aisle with wooden stools and sold them and then when those were full more people just stood. The cramped interior contrasted with the expansive views outside, as the Ganges Valley gave way to steep mountain roads and a succession of valleys—up and down till we arrived in Kathmandu by late afternoon.

The city is higher and cooler, a welcome relief. There was a section of cheap hotels, tea bars and hashish shops (legal here) catering to backpackers. Many spent winters in Goa and summers in Kathmandu, so this was becoming the high season for hippies, and I fit right in, Mostly white—Yanks, Canucks, Aussies, Kiwis, various Europeans. The French tended to stick to themselves more.

One day I came upon a black guy parking his Harley, and I figured correctly he must be American. We chatted over chai—he was travelling alone by motorcycle from Europe and now was near the end of the line. Where to, next, he wasn't sure. Definitely not back home to Detroit any time soon. We discussed mostly the attitudes of the women in the countries we'd visited. Some feared us, others were curious. Many were both.

I stayed at the Shrestra Lodge, run by a friendly Tibetan family (they'd left when the Dalai Lama had 15 years before). I had a roommate to split the cost, an Iranian named Parvis. "Persian Parvis" his English-speaking friends called him, and he seemed to have been here awhile. I lost touch with the small group with whom I'd travelled, and started hanging out with a Rob Martin and his friend Tom, a couple of Canadians who helped me come to terms with India. Their existential and Zen-like approach to India helped me see the country in a new perspective and enjoy the rest of it more.

"You have to look at and accept India on its own terms, not on your's" Rob explained. "Look past the crowds, the chaos the squalor and see the humanity."

The Shrestra was along Jochem Tole Street, commonly known as Freak Street. Familiar names of haunts like Eden Hash Centre, Eat-at-Joe's and Hungry Eye catered to overlanders seeking food, chai or a legal high on freely available hashish. Rumor had it the US government was negotiating a deal

with the Nepalese to ban hash in exchange for a new sewer system. The Drug War is always looking for allies against the free market

Durbar Square held a delight of temples, monuments, shrines and statues, many with free and open access.

My clogged bowels suddenly unloaded after a couple of weeks of very scant defecation. That was a short relief, however, as within a week I had the runs and very bad gas. “Dehli Belly” they called it, a Subcontinent equivalent of Montezuma’s Revenge.

I spent a week up in Kathmandu, cooler, a little cleaner than a mile below on the Ganges. Eventually, I’d have to go back down. Nepal was not on the way to anywhere; you only went there to get out of India for awhile, unless you were doing serious trekking in the Himalayas, for which I was not prepared.

One day I took a mini-van to the Chinese border, which took a small group of tourists through the high country north of the city. I met a young American couple who’d spent \$2,500 apiece for Pan Am’s New York-to-New York round-the-world excursion fare. They could get off and stay indefinitely in any number of cities, as long as they kept heading east. I felt travelling overland, was far superior, but I didn’t want to make them feel bad. City-hopping may have had its advantages, but you miss the flavor of all the places in between. The overland route gave credit to countries and peoples as more than just stopovers, but it did take a real leap of faith.

At the actual border we got out. While the frontier generally followed the towering crest of the Himalayas at this point it was marked by a small creek. A sturdy stone “Nepalese-Chinese Friendship Bridge” had been built for propaganda purposes by the Chinese a few years before, but they were not allowed to use it. We couldn’t, either. China was completely closed and had been since Mao and the Communists came to power 24 years before. On the other side of the creek was a military installation, with Chinese guards looking at us curiously through binoculars. I looked back, as close I thought I’d ever get to that that and forbidding land.

I spent a few more days in Kathmandu, mentally preparing for my descent back down into the heat of India. There was much to see just walking around, between the locals and the smattering of foreigners. I did send a few post cards out, but learned later no one ever got them. I was later told to be sure to see them hand-cancelled before mailing or the clerks would steam off the stamps and resell them.

Annoyingly, I had to go to the Indian embassy for another visa, since the one I’d secured in Singapore was for single entry. That took a few days and some rupees I could ill-afford. Between the room and food, I was spending about \$3 a day. At that rate, my rupees would last another couple of weeks before I had to change that \$50 bill I kept tightly hidden on my person at all times.

I hung out with Rob and Tom a lot, drinking chai in the tiny hotel lounge with other overlanders and exploring the streets. Meeting girls was a priority, too, but the locals were unapproachable and the westerners were almost always paired up with a boyfriend. The gender imbalance Hippy Trail gave women an advantage in picking and changing mates. Such a trek was hard on relationships, and I ran unto a number of estranged couples fighting over how to adjust in a strange land. Such women were available—to change boyfriends, or just for a temporary diversion.

There was a large interchange among the English-speakers, the Brits, Aussies, Canucks and Yanks and Kiwis. Germans and Scandinavians, too. The language barrier was higher for the French, who tended to be a more clannish and stayed in certain hostels and cafes. Most had travelled eastward from Europe and for them Kathmandu was the end of the Hippy Trail. For those of us heading west, it was just beginning, though my own personal Hippy Trail had taken me a long way to get here.

Nepal is even more Hindu than India, with only 5% Muslims and some Buddhists highlands near Tibet. I was enthralled by the vivid, colorful and glossy Hindu religious posters, mass-produced and

hanging in most homes and shops. They portrayed Shiva, Vishnu, the elephant-headed Ganesha, monkeys and all kinds of being of undetermined origin. They were scenes out of everyday life and sacred scripture, and were as familiar to Hindus as they were exotic to me. The art was graphic, colorful, commercial, but the eyes portrayed a serenity rivaling the Mona Lisa.

Rob, Tom and I visited a small shop selling Hindu religious items, including the prized posters. We poured through hundreds of different motifs, from village scenes to celestial battles with flaming chariots. We admired and compared ideas as to what they all meant. They were mass produced, of infinite variety and all of the standard size of an 8 ½ x 11 sheet of paper. I bought 20 for the equivalent of about a dollar. They were easy to carry. I rolled them up around a can of old Australian bug spray then rolled my sleeping bag around the stash and carried it the rest of the way home.

Another thing I picked up was a 50s vintage black leather biker jacket, ala James Dean or Marlon Brando. I paid \$10 to a guy from Ohio who needed the cash more than the warmth. It fit perfectly, and came in handy later. I had a pair of shorts, jeans a couple of T-shirts, a batik-patterned short sleeve shirt from Thailand and a cotton pullover shirt with intricate stitchery from India. That and a towel, and now my Hindu posters and a black leather jacket shorts. I also had a Yashica camera I'd borrowed from sister Nancy. That was it. Plus some cash, my passport, and the Aussie traveller's checks I'd gotten when I cashed out of the mine. Those were my possessions.

After a week in Kathmandu, I was ready to go down the mountain and face India, again. There was no other way home. I dreaded that bus ride down, but it didn't seem as winding and tedious as before. I would see Rob again, as he passed through Fullerton about a year later before returning up to Edmonton. He later relocated to Ottawa, where I saw him in the Summer of '79 while escorting a Fall Foliage bus tour group.

INDIA

When we got to the bottom, we crossed the border together and found a government-run tourist lodge typically near the train station in Raxaul. I'd joined a new group I'd met on the bus. There was Bob, the big Aussie and Tommy from London ("Tom-the-Pom") and a guy from Toronto. The four of us went in for a room together and I spent a fitful night with a mosquito buzzing about I could hear even through my dreams.

Our destination was Benares—Varanasi as it was now commonly spelled—the holiest city to Hindus where many came to die and be cremated. Getting there would require a few train connections and take us all the next day and night—a crowded ordeal. The heat, the dust, the crowds were all a challenge, and this would be the toughest part that nearly cost us our lives.

Travelling Third Class was cheap. Tickets were rarely even checked. It was very uncomfortable, even if you could find space on the wooden benches, and you had to hold or lean against your pack, lest it be stolen.

Our trip required a connection and a typical layover at a junction station. I tried out my new attitude on the inevitable beggars—mostly kids—that we attracted; being nice, friendly, talking with them (though they could not understand) but still not giving.

When our connecting train pulled in late afternoon, it was packed, so we and a few others scrambled to ride on top. There was an air vent to hang onto and the fairly flat roof and the slow moving train gave us some security and fresh air unavailable inside. Within an hour, however, it was dark, and there were no more Indians on top with us. Did they know something we didn't? At one stop a railroad man yelled at us in Hindi, but we paid him no mind. Luckily, at the next stop a man at the station knew English.

"You must get down off the train. It is very dangerous for you" he yelled in his clipped distinct accent.

“Why?” I asked. “It’s so nice up here, and there are no seats inside for us”

“You do not understand. There is a bridge up ahead, a very low bridge. There will be no room for you where you are. It is very dangerous. You must get down!”

That man just saved our lives. Whomever you were, wherever you are today--thank you!

We got down, waited on the platform and wondered what to do next. It was dark, we had no tickets and the Third Class cars were dark, packed and certainly inhospitable territory for pale hippies to get in with our packs.

Then I noticed we were standing near a baggage car with a large open sliding door. Inside there was luggage or mailbags and only one railroad man I could see. “Look—when the train rolls out of the station, we’ll jump in the car,” I told my companions. “They can’t get us out of a moving train. Besides, I think there’s only one guy in there.”

Tom and the Canadian stayed with me, but Bob was impatient, walking quickly forward toward the passenger cars yelling back “I’ve got get on the bloody train, mates. I can’t get stuck here” That was the last we saw of him till early morning.

True to my plan, as the train moved out, the three of us jumped into the open maw of the baggage car. Immediately we were yelled at in Hindi by a clerk none-to-pleased to share his accommodation with us. We laid back in the dark on some very comfortable huge mailbags, as he continued to yell. Nothing he could do, so he piped down and let us settle in. I’ll always appreciate his resigned hospitality

I was observing in the moonlit sky outside for this bridge, and sure enough I could see it. It was held up by a massive superstructure, with steel beams connecting both sides, beams that passed over the train with maybe 6” of clearance. Had we been on top we would not have made it, either struck dead instantly or thrown down into the river in the middle of the night.

The next day we pulled into Varanasi and hopped out of the car. What had become of Bob? A few cars ahead we could hear his booming voice: “BASTARDS, BLOODY BASTARDS!”

Rob was surrounded by a small phalanx of railroad officials, police officers and even an apparent soldier with a rifle. They were all in a heated argument.

“You rode Second Class without a ticket. You must purchase a ticket” demanded the conductor.

“Baksheesh, all you want is bloody baksheesh” responded Bob, “all everybody wants in the country is baksheesh!” Beggars always ask for “baksheesh” but in this case is had another meaning—Bob said he was being shaken down for bribes which he refused to pay.

“Is this your friend?” the conductor asked me. “He is very unreasonable, he is insulting me, he is insulting my country and he refuses to pay the fare. He was riding Second Class without a ticket. He will go to jail until he pays!”

I played the calm intermediary in the rising hot sun of the Varanasi railyard as hundreds of curious passersby stared and several guns drawn. Bob had snuck up into Second Class sometime during the night, then was caught without a ticket. Now, the conductor was demanding full fare, as if he’d ridden there the whole trip. Bob wouldn’t listen when I told him of my baggage car scheme. I hoped he’d listen now.

“Bob you’ve got to pay something, or you’re going to jail. You want to go to a Varanasi jail?” We agreed on a compromise amount of a few rupees, and they let him go. Close call. We all could have been killed by that low bridge, and now Bob narrowly missed jail time. Welcome to Varanasi. We did have a lot to be thankful for—we were alive and free, and Bob did owe the money.

We walked through the streets, crowded, teeming, hot, walking around the gray hump-backed Brahma cows that lounged across the sidewalks. No one bothered them in this, Hinduism’s holiest city. It isn’t so much that they are literally “sacred cows” but in a vegetarian culture, killing cattle would be pointless. They are more valuable for their milk (cheese, yogurt, curds) and dung, formed into dried

patties and used as cooking fuel. The strictest Hindus would not eat any animal flesh or even eggs. For others, fish and even chicken were ok. But beef was taboo to all.

We made our way to a “Tourist Bungalow” a generically named state-run chain of cheap standardized accommodation. There were tourists there, overlanders like us, as well as a number of Indian businessmen. A few young married couples, too. We settled in to a room with 4 cots for Rs.15, or about 80 cents each. There was a small dining room with an open patio, where we talked with curious Indians and fellow backpackers. We shared stories of our most miserable experiences, as one New Zealander told of camping on the beach at Mozambique/ “How was I to how it’s the only place in the world with salt water mosquitoes!”

As I wandered around this typically crowded Indian city, I saw one thing not so typical: A dead body lying on the sidewalk on a sheet, dressed up with coins scattered across and around it. No one seemed to be tending it. I dropped a few paisa myself. This was, after all, the holy city, and the coins doubtless would go toward paying for this man’s cremation.

Later, I came across a woman forming cow pies from fresh dung found on the sidewalks and street. She looked old and filthy, which she was, but perhaps not much older than me. For a second our eyes locked, each peering into two totally alien worlds. She had a determined look, for her job took tenacity. The moist pies were slapped on a wall, then would drop once dried and collected for cooking fuel, a kind of slow-burning charcoal.

Perhaps our worlds were not so alien, after all, for only two generations ago, my grandmother as a child took “meadow muffins” from the Dakota plains and dried them for fuel in a land where wood was very scarce.

Even at night, the heat was all encompassing and oppressive. I slept in the open on the roof on my sleeping bag---on it, not in it. The next morning I vaguely remembered brushing the cockroaches that I felt scurry across my face all night. That was the morning a small group of us went down to the banks of the Ganges River. All along the river bank there were steps leading down to the water, there were platforms for cremations and stacks of wood for same. There were temples and buildings with balconies overlooking the sacred shore. And people, so many people. Bathing, wading, washing and gathering samples of the water to take home.

This was a pilgrimage that devout Hindus took to the water, but like so much else in that vast faith, it did not restrict nor exclude. We could join the throng. My Hippie Trail had to include Varanasi, and anyone else’s must have as well. We paid a few paisa to a boatman to row us out on the river. There was me, the Aussie and a Canadian friend. We took turns diving in, submerging ourselves symbolically, while hanging on to the side on to the side of the boat.

We moved slowly along the crowded shore, lined with temples and steps that led into the water. We saw the dead being cremated and piles of wood assembled for coming immolations. Some too poor to afford cremations tie their deceased with rocks and throw them in the river. Eventually the ropes rot and the bodies surface. One such corpse—badly decomposed but still clearly human—floated by us shortly after our swim.

I know all this because of the talkative Canuck passenger who narrated what he knew of Hinduism and local practices. I was geographically, experientially and culturally as far from home as I would get. Travelling now I would be getting closer to home, not further away from it. From Fullerton, California, Varanasi was the opposite end of the Earth.

We met an Indian guy at the hotel who was in town for a wedding. We became so friendly, he invited us to join the reception. Sure. The three of us followed him on foot through the crowded dimly lit streets of Old Varanasi until we reached a substantial 2-story house surrounded by a 6-foot wall. We joined the guests outside, sampling the samosas and sweets and the hot milk tea, and talked freely among the guests. The hospitality was touching, but we were not invited into the house, where the older

couples gathered. Nor could we get onto the balcony above, where the single girls looked down on us with their finest saris.

“Look at those beautiful dark sheilas up there,” said Aussie Bob “We’ll be in their fantasies tonight, I bet, but a lotta good that’ll do us if we can’t even meet them!”

The next day, The Canuck and I headed to the train depot, bound for Agra. We parted with Bob, who’d almost landed in jail. He was heading south to Khajuraho, home of the famed erotic temples carved with statues of couples in various sexual positions. They were the only ruins where children are kept out due to the graphic statuary. That was India. X-rated temples. The Kama Sutra. The ancient world shocking the modern.

I could have gone south. I could have gone to so many places. India was a vast varied world. The Beaches of Goa, the Vale of Kashmir, Sri Lanka, Simla, Darjeeling. But my time and money had limits, even at the \$2-a-day I was typically spending. I kept heading west, rather than wandering. India also taxes you physically, emotionally. I’d learned to deal with the beggars, the squalor of the streets, but the heat with withering, relentless. I was there at the worst time, weather-wise.

I learned later that my mom was worried the most during this time. I was in the middle of a 2-moth stretch where they heard nothing. Calling home was possible from post offices with long-distance phone booths, but they were expensive. I knew I was fine, and that was enough.

The Agra train was an all-day ordeal. We’d joined some others from the Tourist Bungalows and met a couple at the station, so we could stake out a small area in a crowded car for self-protection against petty thievery that could quickly deprive you of your cash and passport, i.e. everything. It was dicey, but we had enough numbers to stake out our own space. When the train stopped, the chair vendors arrived “chai—gorum--chai” and passengers scurried off to stretch their legs, pee and smoke. Stops could be a few minutes or longer depending on what trains had to be allowed to pass.

One of our last stops was at “Agra Cantonment” named because this was the British military settlement. The British had been done for 25 years, but the station—and the neat rows of home and barracks—remained. Finally at Agra central station we got off.

We arrived where a few of us got a room at a small hostel near the station. A room with 4 wood framed cots for 10 Rupees a night, or about 30 cents apiece. The heat was oppressive, a dry blanket that reminded me of a summer stop in Bakersfield and the way to the Sierras.

People come to Agra for one thing—the Taj Mahal. I was one of them. To see it by moonlight is a vision of the grace, beauty, love and heartbreak that had built it. Looking like a stylized mosque—onion dome, for minaret-like towers—it is actually the tomb.

We bargained down to the lowest price of any trishaw driver we could find. Yes, he would cycle us to the Taj Mahal for a few paisa, but what we saved in cash we lost in time. He stopped at a half-dozen souvenir shops on the way, hoping for a kick-back on what we’d buy. They were filled with statuary, pictures, knock-knacks and other kitsch, for this was the singular attraction that all visitors to India must see. The Taj Mahal was on everyone’s A-List, from hippies to jetsetters, and a lot of Indians, too, seeing it for the first or tenth time,

We arrived around dusk, the heat still oppressive. We paid a little entry fee to get onto the grounds where the beggars, street urchins and vendors couldn’t follow. There it was, shimmering in the dusty sunset, a vision before us. Shimmering, glowing, brooding, a stark and sublime vision like out of a dream. Yet I was really here. We were free to visit inside, a compact inner room where the crypts lie together—Shah Jehan and the bride who predeceased him and broke his heart. She was only 16.

I was with an English fellow at the time, who’s name I’ve long forgotten. I do remember talking of the foods from home that we’d missed I told him of my longing for a taco, something I had to explain to him. After our visit, we splurged on a nice tourist restaurant, so clean, peaceful, uncrowded it seemed a world apart from the India we’d come to know.

Waiting for the train at the Agra station I met Kathy Fehr, with a friendly American accent, pretty face and long dark hair. She grew up in the Hollywood Hills, was travelling with a couple of other Americans and was on her way down to Goa. Too bad I couldn't join her, but I never forgot her. We exchanged info and phone numbers. I would see her when I returned a few times, and we recounted our mutual adventure.

The afternoon train to Delhi took about two hours and stopped often. The cars were packed, but I joined a small group of overlanders I'd met at the station for mutual support and protection. One never felt any threat of real violence, but nimble fingers were everywhere. Random Indians—always male—would often approach us with standard questions they'd learned in school: "What is your native county?" "What is your destination?" "What is your occupation?" Spoken English did not go deep into the masses, but having signs everywhere in it helped a lot.

I must have travelled with at least a couple hundred different people, sharing expenses and information as well as protecting each other's stuff. Some lasted a night, others several weeks. Most have long disappeared, a few I'm still in touch with.

Delhi was divided into the Old City, where I stayed and New Delhi, the newer government center built largely by the British. Delhi has the Red Fort. New Delhi has Connaught Circus, a giant raffic round-about surrounded by shops, restaurants and offices. I stayed there nearly a week, relaxing in a shared room, planning, seeing the town.

With a flash of a passport, I was able to get on to the US Embassy grounds, where I enjoyed the cafeteria and the library. In the rare luxury of an air-conditioned reference room, I was able to catch up on news from home. The Watergate Scandal had slowly been unraveling while I was gone. I wrote a long letter home, which I was able to mail off with a reasonable assurance it would get there. I learned later that my mom was worried—she hadn't heard from me since I'd called in Singapore and it would be a couple of weeks before she'd get this letter. It was hard for anyone to track my progress, but that was the whole point. I knew where I was, and that had to do.

My Dehli Belly was getting worse, and I had a long sit-down session at a rare western-style toilet in the embassy library

Local customs included chewing beadle nuts, which were elaborately wrapped on banana leaves by street vendors. They discolored your teeth and required constant spitting the red juice it produced. I didn't meet any overlanders who had tried it. Many of my fellow foreigners had tried the locally produced cigarettes, known as bidi. Beedis didn't meet international standard like prized imported Marlboros or Winstons but were far cheaper For the equivalent of a penny apiece, smokers could satisfy their nicotine needs. It was a need which I'd never developed. Smoking bidis became a point of pride and local acculturation to a number of backpackers I met.

I visited the Pakistani Embassy to obtain a visa, but the massive, ornately domed building had been closed since the Bangladesh War years before. There was a posted note that the Swiss Embassy was handling their affairs, but also said that temporary visas could be obtained at the border. That would have to do.

The next leg was to Amritsar, in the heart of the Punjab and the dazzling Golden Temple, another must-see. A holy city and site to Sikhs, but open to all to visit. It was an all-night trip, so I booked a reserved hard sleeper, after waiting in several lines at the sprawling Delhi station. The small extra price got me my own wooden plank on which to stretch out. With my sleeping bag under me, it was luxurious. The train left late, so there was over an hour to lay there before we got moving. I heard to voices of a Canadian couple, settling in down the aisle, Unfortunately, they both had fallen asleep just long enough to have their passports stolen.

"No, no, no" she cried. "Wake up—my passport's gone, money too! We just spent two weeks here getting them replaced!"

In the general hullabaloo that followed, they both got off the train. They weren't going anywhere that night. I checked again for my passport and cash—tucked in my crotch below a couple of layers of clothing. I slept on my stomach with my whole body on top of these irreplaceables.

The train took us into the sweltering summer of the Punjab, the great fertile plain of the Indus Valley, a great cradle of civilization since divided by the arbitrary India-Pakistan border the British drew when they left 25 years earlier.

Amritsar was as far west as you could go, to visit the Golden Temple and the sacred heart of Sikhdom. From there I took a minivan a short distance to the border, and walked across a kind of no-man's land to a Pakistani border checkpoint. It was a half-finished compact building with exposed wiring and active wasp nests occupying the exposed recesses where lighting was intended. My passport was stamped and I was told I have a visa for only 3 days and would have to have it extended in Lahore.

PAKISTAN

Back on another mini-van, my first vision of Pakistan was eerie and macabre—I saw my first burka-clad woman walking along the street, covered in black from head-to-toe. Muslims in Malaysia and India didn't wear such things, but here they apparently did. Not all, but many.

Crossing the border, the fashionable somewhat revealing sari had been replaced by the ghostly burka, and the switch was sudden and forbidding. No Hindus on this side of the border.

The heat was oppressive and it hadn't gotten below 90 all night since I'd left Nepal. I drank more pop than I should have, but it was easier to find than water and cheap, typically Gold Spot orange soda. The milky chai just took too long to cool off. In Pakistan I bought what I thought was a Coca-Cola (so the bottle said), but one swig told me otherwise. It was foul. I looked at the bottles and saw that none of the caps matched the bottles. They were reused Coke and Pepsi bottles refilled with some local cheap concoction.

When I got to Lahore, I went to the Immigration Office, as instructed at the border crossing. The building looked like it was under siege, with a mob outside and the doors and windows locked. When they saw me, however, I was allowed in, and the crowd outside accepted this double standard for a white foreigner. They, after all, were mere locals trying to get travel documents from their own government, while I was a foreign guest. I guess that mattered.

Once inside, was offered chai with steamed milk and treated as an object of curiosity. There were plenty of clerks inside the building to question and observe me, but they still didn't open the front doors to their public outside. Despite their hospitality, extending my visa would cost money and required a return trip the next day, which I was unprepared to do. Doing the math, I figured I could be out of Pakistan within three days, anyway.

The most obvious difference between Pakistan and India was the paucity of women in public. In India, the sexes mingled freely on the streets and shops, with the saris giving the women a stylish look. The social barriers were still there and I was unable to meet any of mutual interest, but at least there was something to look at. Muslim Pakistan sheltered and covered its women.

I was traveling now with an English guy I'd met at the Amritsar train station, with whom I shared a room in a mid-range inn catering to overlanders in Lahore. The next night we took an all-night mini-van across the Punjab Plain toward Jalalabad, near the Afghan border. I felt I was giving Pakistan short shrift, but the only parts I was really interested in were in the far north—the Hunza country, way up past Gilgit and not practical on this trip. Maybe later in my dreams.

The next night we crammed into a mini-van and traveled all night across the Punjab and through Rawalpindi. By daybreak we were in the frontier city of Peshawar, where we transferred onto a large bus, where, right after buying my ticket my backpack was thrown on the top luggage rack. By the time

I climbed on top to check on it, my camera had been stolen—the only thing of value. The Yashica I'd borrowed from my sister Nancy. Now that was to be no more.

It was a large lumbering conveyance akin to a US school bus, but brightly decorated with red fringe all around and colorful mountain scenes painted on the side. It was also high off the ground, with thick beat-up tires. It took us into the foothills and toward the Khyber Pass.

AFGHANISTAN

Afghan customs was slow and leisurely, but that was ok. We were higher now and the air was crisper, cleaner. The Khyber Pass is where all migrations, invasions and retreats had passed for thousands of years. Now, everyone on the Hippy Trail passed through here, too. I lay back on my pack and talked with the usual assortment of travelers, trading stories and advice. Here I met Dean Lott, a friendly Kansan with whom I would travel through for the next 3 countries. I also met Billy, a tall unshaven American teenager who had left a life of luxury as a diplomat's kid in Delhi to travel to the US to attend Wheaton College.

Billy was American, yes, but had spent his whole life abroad in a series of privileged enclaves in South Asia. "It will be strange to live in a place where everyone is American" he said. He was condescending and nervous; "wormy people" was a phrase he'd use to describe locals. Yet he'd chosen to travel overland rather than just fly from Delhi to Chicago. He wanted a taste on independent life on the edge, but was unaccustomed to it. At the border he was particularly nervous about his pack being inspected, embarrassed that most of it was filled with toilet paper. He'd definitely not grown up with squat johns and washing oneself with you left had (and eating with the right one).

Dean, Billy and I found another Canadian and grabbed a van to Jalalabad, a few hours away, then a few hours more to Kabul where which we reached at sundown. We'd heard about Chicken Street, and the bus dropped us off nearby, as well as a few other Aussies on the bus with us. Chicken Street was a collection of shops, hotels, cafes and services catering to hippies. English was the lingua franca in a country where its speakers are much rarer than Indian and Pakistan.

I'd just changed the last of my rupees into afghanis, the local currency, at an exchange rate I never quite got used to, but our hotel cost us each about 35 cents each, four to a room. I hung out in Kabul for a few days, seeing the sights and pondering options. There was the northern route through Mozari-Sharif and the southern road through Kandahar. Both converged at Herat, just a few hours from the Iranian border. I had no visa for Iran, but heard it was easily obtainable in Herat.

One sight one couldn't see were any females older than about 14, when they became completely enshrouded in the ghost-like burka.

"I'd sure like to see what's under one of those" cracked my sunny Kansas friend.

"Oh, I'm sure they hide a lot of ugliness" opined our sourpuss college-bound companion Billy.

At that very moment, I looked into the dark liquid eyes of a beautiful Afghan woman, shrouded head-to-toe, but through a gauzy opening that allowed her to see, the connection was made. For maybe a second we looked in wonder, two worlds that could never meet, yet yearning for understanding, connection. She walked on. I remember her to this day.

The air was warm and dry, but—unlike India—cooled at night. Looming at a distance rose the Hindu Kush Mountains, "Hindu Killer" in Pashto because of the many Indian slaves who died being marched into Persia. The same moniker could have applied to the British, who fought three wars here, or later the Russians whose futility helped bring down the Soviet Union. Or later the Americans, who still fight our longest war here.

But those troubles were in the future. In 1973, Afghanistan was at peace. Mahammad Zahir Shah

had been on the throne for 40 years and his photo graced many shops. He'd played off East and West successfully, getting roads, bridges, airports and water systems from both Americans and Soviets.

There were two giant walled complexes, one Red, the other Red-White-and-Blue, where the expats and diplomats lived in safety and their women unshrouded. All it took was my US passport to get into the American compound, where I had all the comforts of home—at a price. I had a \$50 bill with a slight tear in it that a local bank had rejected, but I was able to change it in the compound when an Afghan clerk got the OK from his US boss. That would last me across 3 countries.

I met a Swedish couple who were leaving on an early morning bus to Herat. Sounded good to me. We met them at the terminal and boarded a sturdy used Mercedes, sitting in the far rear, three Americans and two Swedes, forming our little Anglophone space amidst a crowd of Afghans. It was a concrete paved road the whole way through fertile deserts valleys and barren mountains that reminded me of Nevada. We stopped at length in Ghazni, Kandahar and a few other places, exploring the bazaars and fruit stands, with melons, apples and pomegranates. At one station we met some overlanders traveling on an eastbound bus toward India. One was an American Sikh, blond and clad in all white, typical of US converts. He was discouraged at the anti-Sikh hostility he'd encountered in Afghanistan and hoped things would be better in India, which I'm sure they were.

As well as scheduled stops, the bus would stop and pick up anyone along the highway who could flag it down. In late afternoon, the passengers started yelling at the driver who pulled over at a particularly forlorn spot for no apparent reason. Sure enough, there was a tiny figure of a man running across a field toward the bus, waving his arms/ He finally boarded the bus, where he was greeted heartily as an old friend. The bus stopped at prayer time, too, as the passengers all disembarked and knelt toward Mecca on their individual rugs.

The most beneficial stop for me was at a roadside mud and brick house serving lamb and long grain brown rice. It was dark, now, and the place had no electricity, only Coleman-style gas lanterns. The plates were served outdoors, and one travelling companion had second thoughts, so I got his helping. That rice was perfect for me, settling my stomach and absorbing the bad gas I'd been having for the past weeks. The lamb was delicious, too, though overcooked to kill of contaminants.

We got into Herat about midnight and checked into a typical hostel near the station. Four cots to a room, it catered to hippies and Afghan men traveling solo. The next morning I met Lenny and Linda, a mid-20's American Jewish couple that had spent a year in Sri Lanka and were now heading home. Lenny was nervous, talkative, always on edge, while Linda was laid back, lovely and serene. The morning's topic was whether to trust the water, which supposedly came from a deep well behind the hostel.

I drank it straight, savoring the pure mineral flavors from deep beneath the earth. I almost had Linda convinced, but Lenny insisted on adding purification tablets, giving their water a bleachy flavor that would prevent them from getting sick. It worked—they didn't. But, then again, neither did I.

I strolled around Herat with Dean all the next day. We visited the Friday Mosque, with its soaring arches and peaceful gardens. The intricate turquoise and tan mosaic designs were startling, dazzling and serene all at once. There were other overlanders, but Herat is not a place to hang out for more than a few days, like Kathmandu or Goa.

Like Nepal hashish was legal in Afghanistan and the country was the world's major source of opium poppies. But beer, wine and whisky were a major offence, forbidden by Islam. In Afghanistan, adult male-on-boy pedophilia was widely practiced. There is no casual access to women (not even prostitutes) and the wealthy men took far more than their share of wives. This left a huge gender imbalance. Since men cannot even look at women's faces, adult attraction turns to young boys, especially among the dominant Pushtuns who had a word "bacaha bazi" to describe the common practice.

While adult consensual homosexuality is punishable by death, man-on-boy pedophilia is wide open. Middle aged commonly strolled hand-in-hand with pre-pubescent boys who were definitely not their sons. It was all a little creepy.

Begging was much rarer in Afghanistan than in India. “Baksheesh” was seldom heard. There was no teaming urban squalor, perhaps because the high dry weather seemed to make things brighter, cleaner. Heavily armed men were common, too. All men were turbaned, not the neatly packed turbans of Sikhs, but loser, with a long piece of extra clothe hanging down to their waists. Hippies didn’t attract the same attention as in India, maybe because urban crowds were smaller and there were just a lot fewer people standing around to stare at something strange. English was rarely understood, too. I remember a couple of Japanese backpackers struggling—in English—to bargain for some local handicrafts. He and the shopkeeper were just barely intelligible, but English was all they had in common.

We needed visas for Iran, and arrived at the consulate during posted business hours, only to find it closed. The gate to the courtyard was blocked by a guard, but by the looks of the place I could tell someone lived there, so I made a scene by knocking and yelling loudly and the someone finally appeared with the requisite rubber stamp.

It was a couple of hours from Herat to the border bus. Our group in the back now included Lenny and the lovely Linda, dressed appropriately for the area. Foreign women didn’t have to go native, but did need to cover their arms, shoulder and legs to avoid unwanted attention. Cut-offs were fine on the beaches of Goa or Bali, but definitely not in any Muslim country. I had loose white pants made of white lined I’d gotten in India, a sort-of sarong. I usually wore a batik-patterned shirt from Thailand or a couple of patterned embroidered long sleeve shirts I’d gotten in India. I did have an old pair of levis and a Brando-style black leather jacket when it even got cold. It all fit neatly into my backpack, along with my sleeping bag. I didn’t need much.

We all disembarked at the Iranian border. This is as far as the bus went. We were greeted with a high wooden billboard stating in a dozen languages: “The Kingdom of Iran prohibits the use or importation of all drugs and narcotics. Violators are subject to immediate arrest, trail and execution” No one was going to mess around with this, so we all scoured our things to make sure we were we’d all be above suspicion.

IRAN

The border crossing was neat, modern and the process highly organized, like stepping back into the regimented Twentieth Century. Baggage and passport inspection, cursory questions were conducted in passable English. At one point we were given three colorful pills and a paper cup of water.

“What’s this? What are they asking us to take?” Lenny asked nervously.

“Does it matter?” I responded. “Unless you want to stay in Afghanistan”.

We all took them. Probably some kind of anti-biotic. There were no alternate routes around Iran. I changed the rest of my Afghan money for a few rials with a street money-changer, the kind that greets you at every border crossing. There were mini-busses leaving from the border and we grabbed one heading west. The contrast with Afghanistan was immediate, like moving forward a few centuries.

At Mashad, we got a larger all-night bus heading for Tehran. We passed through many towns that night, each one with its central square and statue of the Shah’s father, Reza Shah who established the Pahlavi Dynasty in 1921. He was too independent for the big powers, however and was forced to abdicate in favor of his young son in 1941. Twelve years later, the new Shah was overthrown in a peaceful revolution and replaced by democratically elected Mossadegh, only to be restored in a CIA-led coup.

It was our original sin in Iran, for which we would later pay dearly. For now, the Shah was firmly in power, but what did we know?

During the heyday of the Hippie Trail, his huge photos hung everywhere, usually next to that of his wife, the Empress Farina. In the handful of real conversations I had with Persians, I inferred both genuine support and hostility to the Shah, as would be expected. English fluency here, however, was much rarer than places like India, Pakistan and Malaysia, and such conversations were rare.

In the early morning we were on the shores of the Caspian Sea, stopping at Gorgan, Sari and Babol. It was lush and green and I could have stayed longer and explored, but I only had so much money so I kept moving on toward Tehran. We had our own little area in the back of the bus—Dean from Kansas, Billy the diplomat's kid, Lenny, Linda and a couple of Aussies, Someone had a current Time Magazine, which we all shared. We played chess on a magnetic someone had brought. We talked about where we'd been, and where we were going.

We crossed over the towering Elbruz Mountains near the snow line then the long descent toward Tehran. Scattered farms and villages began to give way to a modern, intense and sprawling city. I'd heard from an Eastbound traveler that the Amir Kebir Hotel was hippy-friendly and a regular stopover for all overlanders. It was close enough to the bus station that we all walked there together, having gotten direction from a friendly Iranian eager to practice his English.

The hotel was in the middle of an automotive neighborhood full of mechanic shops and tires. Very convenient to the bazaar. Sure enough, we were greeted by signs in English and backpackers lounging around sipping tea and talking. I paid about \$1 for a bed in a room with three other guys. Linda and Lenny got their own room, and we parted ways. I would see them again briefly on a ferry in Greece.

Twelve years later, I would see Linda again at a League of California Cities reception. I was a Fullerton City Councilman, and she an Assistant Napa City Attorney. I'd recognized her soon after we started talking about our mutual travels in Asia. She was amazed it was me. She was married (not to Lenny) with two kids. I never saw her again.

Tehran was clean, organized and well-run, at least in contrast to medieval Afghanistan and the chaos of the Indian subcontinent. There were large metal urns of water placed along the sidewalks downtown, each with a yellow plastic cup tied with string. Each cooler was full of fresh water—and large blocks of ice. It was cold, refreshing, free and took organization to maintain and public order to prevent them from being abused. I'd never seen anything quite like it before or since.

I remember, too, the open gutters along the streets. In previous cities they were stagnant and putrid. In Tehran they flowed with water, to carry away trash and waste to some destination downhill. As the city sloped southward, gravity was an ally, but it took organization to keep them clean.

Getting around was harder because signs were all in Farsi, with no English or even Roman letters to give a hint. Numbers were different, too, using traditional Arabic numerals instead of our standard westernized version. Still, you make do. Hand gestures helped (though they could vary in surprising ways) and Persians were curious, friendly and helpful to foreigners, with a few knowing a word or two of English that proved helpful.

A few were eager to talk. Dean and I came across a strong opponent of the regime, highly critical of the Shah and his secret police, the Savak. He spoke in hushed English on a near-empty public city bus, with caution but without fear. Another man I met on the night train to Tabriz took out a picture of the Shah from his wallet and kissed it. Views varied, like anywhere in the world. In the end, while the Shah has presided over modernization and rising living standard, political repression remained.

Dean and I walked through an endless enclosed bazaar, viewing and smelling the sights and aromas of the various wares. At one point, I attracted a couple of Iranian guys who wanted to practice their English. One taught me the greeting “halay chatura?” (“how are you”) which I used freely to those

friendly. Women looked, too, and now we could see their faces. Most wore a hijab loosely over their heads, some pulling it tighter or gripping the loose ends with their teeth if looked upon. But they did look back. Fully enclosed burkhas were not to be seen.

Like all hotels along the Hippie Trail, the Emir Kebir has a huge bulletin board covered with messages from travelers seeking lost partners or overland bus operators offering rides to Istanbul, Hamburg or London. There were also job offers from local families, seeking live-in English tutors in exchange for room-and-board and a few toomans a week. I considered the offers, but felt the urge to move on.

After a few days exploring the city, my small group (Dean and Billy were still with me, along with a couple from Calgary we'd met) booked the all-night train to Tabriz. In my cabin I found myself sitting next to a 30ish Iranian man and his two cousins on the other side. One was typically Middle Eastern with olive skin and dark hair, the one sitting closer to me had lighter hair and white rosy cheeks. Like all countries, the variety of physical types and faces was endlessly fascinating, especially among the women. My new friend knew just enough English to carry on, and the two cousins followed smiling and giggling. The one next to him leaned over far enough we could have kissed, but alas, he never moved and I never got any closer. A public kiss would have created a scandal and I never was able to be with any local woman in private since I'd left Australia.

A porter came by to fold down the narrow beds, 3 tiers, 6 to a room. The ride was peaceful, the sleep comforted by the reassuring rumble of the train. At dawn I looked out the small window at the foot of my bed to see the shores of Lake Urmia, a vast inland sea, as the train snaked its way north.

Arriving in Tabriz, the two Americans and a new Englishman we'd met got a mini-van for the Turkish border at Maku. We ascended the steep foothills and into a deep gorge, where the border crossing was backed by a high cliff. Here, a succession of Persian dynasties had clashed with Greeks, Romans, Turks and Kurds.

TURKEY

Entering Turkey was pretty easy. Being from a fellow NATO country, I didn't need a visa. I exchanged my rials into Turkish dinars, then paid one for a crowded van ride to Dogubayazit, the nearest city. At the bus station, it was easy to check out schedules, since Turks use the roman alphabet. Our ultimate goal was Istanbul, a thousand miles away.

I'd heard that hitch-hiking in Turkey was easy, since drivers expected riders to pay a small fee and saw it as a source of extra income. Great idea. It made everyone on the road part of an informal transit system. There were three of us now—my Kansas friend Dean and the younger spoiled diplomat's kid from Delhi—Delhi Billy, we'd call him. Better than Delhi Belly.

We walked to the western edge of town along the main highway. In the distance dominating the horizon rose Mount Ararat, It loomed nearly 17,000 feet with snow covering the top third. It was the singular most mystical and memorable vision of my trip. I basked in its distant glow and singular magnificence. There it sat at the convergence of Turkey, Iran and the USSR, a sacred mountain to the Armenians and the traditional resting place of Noah's Ark. In the glow of a late Anatolian afternoon in June of '73, I stood in awe, and remains so today.

There was a more immediate concern that now drew my attention. A group of kids had gathered across the highway and were jeering and throwing rocks at us. Long-haired backpack toting overlanders were a common enough site, but we definitely stood out by our dress and demeanor. This was a kind of midway point on the Hippie Trail.

The kids posed no real threat, the rocks they threw wouldn't have hurt us and the men walking by just laughed at the scene. We shouted back and threw a few rocks back at them. No one on either side

hit anyone and soon a large truck stopped to pick us up. It was easy—no thumbs in Turkey, you just stand facing traffic and extend an open palm. We told him the only mutually intelligible word, “Agri” the name of the next major city we were trying to reach by nightfall.

With his fingers he told us how much he wanted, and we all chipped in the equivalent of a few cents each and climbed into the back. It was a huge truck carrying large boulders, so we spread our sleeping bags out to soften the jagged edges and lay down for the ride.

We got to Agri well after dark, and checked into to a small hotel (conveniently spelled “OTEL” in Turkish) with four cots in one room, There was an German guy who’s just arrived heading toward India in the room with us. He spoke fair English and we regaled him with stories about what to expect ahead. He told us about the Pudding Shop in Istanbul, where all overland backpackers gathered for sweets and tea. There was a huge bulletin board filled with messages from lost travel partners trying to reconnect.

The Pudding Shop. It was almost a mythical place, an urban legend that was real. Google “Pudding Shop Istanbul” today and you’ll read plenty. Long before the internet, the informational grapevine made it famous. I would hear of this place from a number of India-bound travelers and knew I’d soon be there myself. Who knew? Maybe there’d be a message for me.

The next morning we boarded an Istanbul-bound bus. I paid the whole fare for the 36-hour journey, taking us across the scenic and rugged Anatolian countryside, with its mountains, fertile valleys, sunshine and stopping over at some bustling cities. There was a small group of hippies at the back of the bus, chatting, playing chess, reading and philosophizing. The rest were Turks, getting on and off at various stops and few in it for the long haul, like most of us.

There was often layover time in large cities where kids would approach me trying out their German. Returning Turkish guest workers had brought home the language, and my blond hair made me fair game. I’d play along, answering back in what little German a knew.

Giant portraits of Kemal Ataturk were to be seen everywhere, leading one in my group to assume he was the current president. He was quickly corrected by those that knew history. Ataturk had reshaped Turkey out of the ashes of the Ottoman Empire collapse. He replaced the Arabic script with Roman, banning the veil and fez and replacing the old Muslim sultanate with a nationalist secular state.

Physically, Turks varied widely. Mediterranean olive skin and brown hair predominated, but some had the Mongol features of their distant Seljuk ancestors. Others were fair, even blond, or with reddish auburn hair. After all, the Vikings had been down in this area, as had the enslaved Circasians and unfortunate Children’s crusaders. Turks coming out of Central Asia conquering the existing people, but not displacing them. They gradually imposed their language and religion, all the while intermarrying. A common pattern throughout the world.

At Erzerum, Dean and I met an American group heading east toward India, with whom we shared stories and information. One tip proved especially valuable.

“When you get to Kusadasi, look for a long peninsula at the south end of town. It’s own by a rich Turkish family. They have a son staying there—speaks good English and welcomes visitors. No charge.” We took note.

We passed through Ankara in the middle of the night, noting the monumental 1930s style government buildings erected during the height of Kemalist rule. Even as he westernized the country, he moved the capital away from Istanbul into the Anatolian heartland to emphasize a new Turkish identity.

The bus staff consisted of a driver and a steward who took tickets, assigned seats and saw to passenger needs. He stayed on the whole trip and took a disliking to our small group of about a half dozen hippies. All night we tried to get him to turn off the dome light above us to better sleep, but to now avail. He’d pass out snacks on the bus, then throw them at us. Petty stuff that was more like a joke

than serious trouble.

The trip finally ended at Uksuder, across the Bosphorus from Istanbul. We took a ferry across (bridges were still in the future). My delight, anticipation, sense of geography and history welled within me for a thrill still palpable. This Bosphorus connected the Black Sea with the Mediterranean and all the oceans beyond. It separated Asia from Europe. It was the hinge of the world sought over and fought over for centuries by Trojans, Greeks, Romans, Crusaders, Arabs, Turks, British and Russians. Anzac Day marks a futile WWI battle to seize it.

Istanbul was where I first touched European soil, now fully Turkish, yet it had once been Byzantium and Constantinople. Sections of the ancient walls were still intact, breached by the Turks in 1453. There were ancient buildings build on still more ancient ruins. It is architecture and archaeology all at once, if you know where and how to look. The streets teamed with people and the taxis were well-preserved 1950s American cars which really impressed me. Distinctively finned 1957 Chevies with space-age 1956 Oldsmobiles and even a horse collar-grilled 1958 Edsel or two. And so much more.

Right off the ferry we took a short taxi ride (1958 Chevy Impala) into the heart of the City. Dean from Kansas was still with me, as well as couple of Aussies we'd been with on the bus. We found a youth hostel literally in the shadow of the Hagia Sophia and checked in to a large bunk room at about 8 lira (56 cents) a night. I walked and walked and walked, taking the sights, sounds, smells, flavors and faces of this ancient urban wonderland.

The Hagia Sophia is one of the world's oldest intact buildings—and still one of its largest. Built by the Emperor Justinian as the Orthodox Church of the Holy Wisdom in 537 it was later converted to a mosque under the Ottomans, then secularized as a museum by Ataturk. Inside a vast interior space is sparkles by beams of light from windows high above. Huge Koranic inscriptions still hang on the walls, but the original Christian mosaics had been partially uncovered and restored.

Other must-sees included the Blue Mosque, a sort of counter-point to Hagia Sophia and a thousand years younger. Also the Topkapi Palace, home of the Sultans and now their vast treasures on display.

I walked over the bridge crossing the Golden Horn, a watery inlet off the Bosphorus. I bought a warm crunchy "simit" a circular sesame encrusted pretzel. For one lira (7 cents) apiece, you could live off these things!

We made a pilgrimage to the famed Pudding Shop. There was the huge bulletin board covering an entire wall. Folded messages were tacked to the thin cork backing, with a first and sometimes a last name written on the front. There were announcements regarding local jobs and people needing or offering rides to India. It was just such a message at the Hotel Malaysia in Bangkok that had lured me onto the Hippy Trail in the first place.

The place was full of people, English speakers predominating, but also Germans, French, Scandinavians and a few Japanese. Someone was playing the guitar on the patio. Many were smoking the acrid Turkish cigarettes, but apparently nothing stronger. Such laws were rigorously enforced in Turkey, as the true story from "Midnight Express" would later attest.

I wasn't particularly aware of it then, but as the Hippy Trail became better know later, the Pudding Shop is where it started, or ended depending which direction one took. Between Istanbul's Pudding Shop and Kathmandu's Freak Street it had taken me about six weeks. However, that segment was just a part of my much longer trail that took nine months. The whole world was my personal Hippy Trail and will continue to be so.

Few actually flew to Istanbul, took the trail, then flew home from Kathmandu, but that was the spine, the essential geographic funnel all passed through, like a modern-day Silk Route of adventure seekers with just enough money and time to make it. Some had the money, not the time. Others had the

time, but not the money. We had both, and there was just about a decade where it was open.

At the hostel I met Peggy, a cute, blond, toothy student at Millersville State in Pennsylvania. It was summer break now, and many I'd meet weren't taking the whole trail to India, but just bumming around Europe. She was sunny, happy and sweet and our few stolen moments together were delicious and intense. The hostel's bunkrooms were separated by sex, but daytime enforcement was lax. At night, there was no commingling.

Having just had a fight with a boyfriend, Peggy boldly joined Dean and I. We, in turn, met a guy from Palos Verdes and booked an overnight ferry to Izmir. We had a Second Class bunkroom with mostly Turkish guys and Peggy was assigned a bunk in the women's dorm. The deck, however, was fair game for all, and the moonlit night we could see the cliffs of the Dardanelles and the Plains of Troy. "There's a Moon Out Tonight" as the Capris had sung.

We arrived in Izmir (for centuries the largely Greek city of Smyrna, until Ataturk expelled them all in 1923) midmorning and checked into a cheap hotel with 2 large double beds that filled most of the room. I got the one with Peggy—Dean and the PV guy got the other and had their own separate sleeping bags.

We wandered the fascinating city and I began to appreciate the Turkish food and the way restaurants were organized. They all had their kitchens in the front window facing the street, so you could see the dishes being prepared. As you entered, you could just point to the dishes you wanted, all on small plates, tapa-style. A bell pepper stuffed with ground lamb and rice, stewed tomatoes, cucumbers in plain yogurt, white fava beans, beef stew, stuffed grape leaves. They were all 2 lira each; 14 cents. Prices, dishes and quality seemed pretty standard. A bottle of purified water ("su") was 2 lira as well. Then there was the warm, fresh flat bread, delivered regularly during the day from local bakeries. It was so delicious, each meal for well under \$1.

I appreciated the public toilet system, too. Usually near parks and squares, each had an attendant kept I clean, provided fresh towels and sold combs and other small toiletries. The small charge was worth the convenience. Curiously, all were marked with "WC" for water closet. WC, I was to find, was an international moniker, using a British term unknown in the US.

People continued to speak German to me, and I played along unless I needed deeper communication. Just a few could switch to a little English. I overworked the Turkish greeting "marhaba" and it got Peggy and I invited to a wedding reception being held on a large outdoor restaurant patio. We were hardly dressed for it, but it was a multi-generational family affair and very casual in the balmy July evening. The groom's father used all the English he had with us, and plied us both with raki, the licorice-flavored clear alcohol that turned cloudy when mixed with water. We were both astounded at the hospitality and the warmth of total strangers at a seemingly private family event, but the novelty of having a blond American couple was a happy curiosity for all.

My general strategy was to get over to the Greek Isles, make my way across Europe then fly to New York from London. Then I'd hitchhike home. Exactly how to do it could be improvised. Chios was the nearest such island to Smyrna, but it was a long ferry ride and local Turks were not helpful.

"Why would you want to go to Greece?" and agent asked me at a walk-up travel desk, advertising all kinds of domestic destinations. "There is nothing there for you. Stay here in Turkey. You must see Ephesus before you leave and the beautiful Turkish beaches".

Turkish tourist maps, in fact, did not even show the Greek Isles. It was just solid blue beyond the Anatolian mainland. He was right that Turkey still had plenty to offer. We got a bus headed south to the sprawling classical ruins of Ephesus.

For 2,000 years Ephesus had been a major Aegean port of the wealth of Asia Minor. Here was the Temple of Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The city had been abandoned for 500 years, plagued by earthquakes, war and the silting up of the river, creating a malarial swamp where

a port had once been. We joined throngs of tourists of every nationality up ancient stone streets where the grooves of chariot tracks could still be seen. There were towering facades of once-great buildings and assorted columns and crumbling walls. We climbed to the top rows of the outdoor amphitheater that held 25,000 spectators.

This had been a Greek city, a Roman city, a pagan center and an early Christian community to whom Paul wrote his Letters to the Ephesians. It was never a Turkish city, but the locals respected and preserve all such sites for the tourist dollars they attract. Th approximately \$1 admission fee was definitely worth it.

We got another bus to Kusadasi, just a half hour south, situated right on the coast. The four of us checked in to a hotel on the main street a few blocks in from the harbor. There were 4 cots in the room where we spread our sleeping bags. Next door there was an old mosque from which prayers were broadcast 4x daily on an obviously scratchy record. It was our alarm early the next morning.

It was some kind of holiday, as there was a large festive parade going on, complete with military bands and people dressed up in historic Ottoman garb. Other carried red-and-white banners and flags. The city was bustling and pleasant

At the docks giant cruise ships arrived and departed daily, filling the city with shoppers and sightseers, nearly all of whom boarded busses for the shore excursion to Ephesus. It was a regular stop for all Eastern Med cruises. There was a Club Med, too, for a mainly French clientele and lots of Germans.

Dean and I were determined to chase down the story of the peninsula we'd heard at the Erzerum bus station. We walked south along the shore and found a spit of land with a semi-wooded hill at the end. Sure enough, there were several friendly Turks hanging out, and they welcomed us to camp there without charge. This was a hippie-friendly group, whose leader's family owned the land and welcomed us. I would camp out there for the next week.

Earlier that day, Peggy had left on the ferry for Samos, leaving me a sweet note about needing to reconnect with the boyfriend who had brought her to Turkey in the first place. I never saw or heard from her again, but was happy for the time we had together.

Dean and I were soon all that was left of our little group, having travelled together since the Khyber Pass. The next day I'd met an American girl and her Turkish friend, whose name was Gulsen. She lived in Istanbul where the two of them were travelling to meet her brother in Bodrum, the next major city to the south. I hung out with Gulsen all day, and talked about society, politics and religion. Having a real live Turkish girl who spoke good English was enough of a novelty to convince me to travel on to Bodrum.

Evenings and mornings were lively in Kusadasi, as the massive cruise ships provided crowds for the shops and restaurants. Mid-days were quiet, as most cruisers were off on the day-long shore excursion to Ephesus. During one afternoon, I met an sweet, blond Iowa high school student. It turned out she was an exchange student, and was strolling with her Turkish host family. She was homesick and in severe culture shock. I tried to reassure her everything would be OK.

"It's all so different here, so poor, so dirty, so chaotic." She pleaded with me. "It's so not what I expected"

After India and Afghanistan, Turkey looked pretty good to me, but if I'd have flown directly here at 16 I might have seen things differently, too. I told her all the really great things I saw in Turkey, about how she should. Comparing Kusadasi with Kandahar was one thing—with Cedar Rapids, quite another. I walked with her for an hour, with her host family—mom, dad and a teenage daughter—walking just ahead, grateful that one of her own was reassuring her. I hope I helped. I'll never know.

Dean left the next day in the ferry to Samos. We'd stay in touch over the years, and he sent me

photos I'd treasure since my own camera had been stolen. He would run a photography shop in Wichita

and we went out for Indian food during a visit to LA. Dena died just last years, and I was able to write a few things in the online memory book.

There was a kind of small travelling carnival in town. Jugglers, rides for the kids, including a hand operated ferris wheel that could hold four. There were midway-type games, too, in small wooden booths. A girl of maybe 18 was spinning the wheel-of-fortune, taking small bets. I visited every day I was there, and by the second day she was noticing and smiling at me. Clear light complexion, long dark hair tied in a pony tail and a short-sleeved blouse tied up exposing her midriff. Provocative, but not cheap. She sure caught my attention. And I caught hers.

We flirted with smiles and looks. My use of *marhaba* was as far as we could go with words. By my third afternoon at the carnival, I was approached by a man who claimed to have her father in tow. I had no reason to doubt him.

"This is the girl's father. She likes you and we know you must like her. He wants to know if you are a good man with a good job and have American dollars." The intermediary asked me, in thickly accented English.

"Oh yes, good job, American dollars, too" I went along, to see where this would lead. I didn't consider myself a very good marriage prospect at the time, but to this father, and maybe to his attractive daughter, I was. I was fairly clean-cut as hippies came. Shaggy hair and sideburns, yes, but otherwise clean shaven.

"The brothers like you, too" as he waved at a couple of guys behind their father. Perhaps this small carnival was family-owned. If so, they definitely weren't poverty-stricken, but who knew?

"In Turkey a beautiful girl like her and big strong handsome man like you get married. Yes, you can take her to America".

"Well, I'd have to get to know her first, spend some time with her" I demurred.

"There will be lots of time for that—your whole life" he responded.

"You've given me lots to think about". And certainly they had. Lots to think about all these years. Though I'd never even touched her, in a sense this was as far this was as far as I got with any girl on the trip.

That evening I headed back for my last night in Kusadasi. I was the only one of the group left. There was a boat docked along the quay with a small sign advertising a floating bar/café. A blond German girl with a sultry accent usually greeted me and this time she beckoned me to come on board. I was the only patron and soon her Turkish boyfriend emerged seeing me more of a threat than a possible paying patron. I slipped off and made my way to the hilltop campsite. I fell asleep under a thin crescent moon over the Aegean Sea. To this day whenever I see a thin crescent moon I think of the Turkish flag and sleeping on its coastline overlooking the ink-blue sea.

The next day I was at the bus depot to grab transit south to Bodrum. There was a man there who must have recognized me from the carnival. He pantomimed two breasts with cupped hands and then formed a female silhouette. The he smiled at me and pointed toward the carnival. He was disappointed to see me board the bus—without my bride. You'd think the local guys would resent such a foreign hippie to take one their own lovelies, but they were on MY side. Male solidarity. Of course, I'd never see her again.

The winding road south passed beautiful vineyards and groves of oranges and figs. I passed a neglected cemetery, with inscriptions in the old Ottoman (Arabic) script.

Bodrum was the modern incarnation of ancient Greek city of Halicanarsus. It had been fought over by many for its strategic and beautiful harbor, flanked on one side by a giant crusader castle. It

was a magical place at sunset, smaller and quieter than Kusadasi without the large cruise ships coming

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and going, but an obvious hot spot for the jet set, by the looks of the yachts and beautiful people.

I found Gulsen at the address she'd given me. She found me a very reasonable room in a private house near the harbor. A few more interesting conversations, but that would be it. Now I was determined to get to the Greek Isles. The nearest was Kos, easily visible from the harbor. I learned there were two boats that made daily roundtrips, one Greek, one Turkish. The afternoon boat came about 4:00 when its captain would shout "Kos" and then sell you tickets. This is as much as the Turks would allow (and probably the Greeks on the other side, too).

"KOS-KOS-KOS!" Sure enough, as I hung around the inner harbor in the afternoon, I saw the man wander about purposely as he shouted "KOS-KOS-KOS!" This was the boat that would take me there, to Greece and away from Turkey. I'd grown to like the country, but this was as far south as I could go without heading east. And I had to keep going west. I was at the far corner of Asian Minor and I was running out of island options. So I boarded with a group of about six others. Halfway across the narrow channel he lowered the Turkish flag and raised the Greek, with its beautiful pale blue and white cross and stripes. Their colors would come to remind me of the whitewashed villages above the blue sea.

G R E E C E

"Ti kanis?" I greeted the customs official who met us at the boat at Kos. I remembered it from college classmate Nick Papageorge.

"Kala" he responded, as he waved us through.

There was huge hulking old crusader castle near the harbor and a prominent but shuttered mosque.

I teamed up with another solo American on the boat and we pooled some money to rent a room in a small house a few blocks from the sea. The bayside was festive with cafes and small pennants of various European tourist countries—no Turkish, of course. There was a huge, hulking crusader castle open for tours and an prominent old mosque forlorn and shuttered.

There were posters plastered everywhere extolling a "NAI" (yes) vote on the upcoming national referendum on the military junta. The clique of colonels took power in 1967, overthrew King Constantine and replaced parliamentary rule with military. Massive posters of Premier Papadopoulos were everywhere throughout the country. None allowed for the opposition.

The next day we hitchhiked to Kardamena, a peaceful town on the far side of the island where I'd heard free camping was allowed on the beaches. Unlike Turkey, Greek ride givers did not expect money. We approached the village from a high bluff and descended down to a beautiful place of whitewashed homes, a few bobbing boats in the harbors and seaside cafes.

We joined a group of obvious downscale tourists at a table and were directed to a beach where they were staying. There, just a short walk out of town were about a dozen assorted campers, some with tents, most with sleeping bags stretched out on the sand. Some napping, others talking, sitting, reading. There was an American just returning from a Kibbutz stay in Israel, a couple of pretty Kiwis, a German couple and a rough-hewn Aussie or two among the group.

I stayed there 3 nights and it could have been much longer. Though it was not a demarcated camping area, no one tried to charge or hassle us. The weather was warm enough to sleep alfresco and the water was inviting, calm and aqua-blue. Unlike the Pacific I grew up with, there are no waves in the Aegean. The sea welcomes you without challenge.

By day we would gather on the quayside tables, eat, talk, sip coffee, play chess, cards, backgammon and regale each other with tales as where we'd been and where we'd like to go. English

was the lingua franca, and it came in many accents. It was here I first learn to love tomatoes, as these

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were vine ripened and filled with a sweet rich flavor.

There were public toilets in town—dirty, but free. No on-site staff expecting a tip, as in Turkey. They were squat-style, the kids I was now quite accustomed too. My digestive tract had returned to normalcy and my elimination now bearable since my worst days of the runs in India. I passed one afternoon playing chess with Serena—Serena Rashleigh. She was a dark-haired rosy-cheeked Londoner with a flashing smile and a figure with all the right curves. She gave me an address in Leicester Square, but I was never able to find her when I got to London a month later.

After a few days on my Aegean beach paradise I returned to Kos town with a couple of people from our camp who also needed to move on. There we boarded an evening ferry headed for Mykonos. There was a hold for cars, and some private cabins but most people lay out on the deck, talking, sleeping, smoking, eating in many languages. The boat made stops at Kalymnos, Leros, Leipsoi and Patmos, among the scattered, jagged islands scattered like broken china across the azure Aegean.

People were getting on and off throughout the night, including Linda and Lennie, who I'd met in Afghanistan. Passengers had mostly laid out on the outside deck under a starry and moonless night.

I awoke when the boat pulled in to Mykonos. It must have been about 2:00 a.m. and the seaside village was quiet. The group of us that got off found a pebbly beach to lay our sleeping bags and crash the rest of the night. I'd brought food with me from Kos, some oranges, rolls and feta cheese, so I had an early breakfast and then got some more sleep.

When the sun rose clear and hot, I explored the beautiful harbor front of outdoor cafes and the maze of narrow little streets leading off into the town of classic whitewashed homes. It would soon be filled with people, mostly tourists like me. All ages, nationalities.

For months, I'd been told about the outlying nude beaches, where one could sleep free. They were legendary along the trail.

"You find the bus that goes to the end of the road outside of the main town" someone on the ferry explained. "There, you get on a little put-put boat that takes you to two beaches. They're surrounded by cliffs so you can only get there by boat. There's Paradise Beach and Super Paradise Beach. One's straight, the other's gay."

I asked around and easily found the bus, which took about 20 minutes to get to the end of the road. There we waited until a boat took us around the far side of the island to inaccessible beaches. On the Bus I'd struck up a conversation with a low key Californian about 30, a high school teacher from Hayward. We continued talking on the boat, until he got off at the first stop—a beach of only naked men. Obviously Super Paradise Beach.

"Are you getting off here?" he asked, hopefully.

"Oh, no. I'll be getting off at Paradise Beach" I answered.

And so I did, just a few minutes later, around an outcropping revealing a perfect crescent shaped sandy cove. I kept my backpack with me, as there was no place to put it. I slept out under the stars in the balmy night. I doffed my clothes and swam in the altogether in the beautiful sea. All around me were mostly French and German speaking tourists, many women travelling together in the altogether. After the initial novelty of seeing such young beautiful bodies, one gets accustomed to it.

At the beach, I had no waterproof satchel to take The Irreplaceables with me, so when I went into the water I'd bury them in the sand underneath my backpack and keep an eye on them while in the water

There was a taverna serving coffee, beer, ouzo and light fare as well as fresh bread, fruit and cheese. I tried my hand at chess with a smug, quick-moving German who dispatched me with aplomb. I was reading a used copy of John Fowles' "The Magus" a kind of surreal novel taking place in Greece. I stayed a couple of nights.

I went back to town the way I'd come the day before. I fell in with a couple of Scottish guys who

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were discussing strategy over the coming night's activities at the tavernas teeming with girls from all over the world. One had a map of Europe laid out on the floor of their small hotel room and I studied it, planning my next moves. From Greece to the rest of Europe overland would require passing through Yugoslavia or Bulgaria, both communist countries. I was hoping they'd be freer than the likes of USSR or East Germany, with prepaid itinerary requirements and strict currency conversion requirements. It turned out, they were.

I ate my souvlaki and dolmades as I waited for the night ferry to Athens. The summer was hot and the speck of barren volcanic rocks that was Mykonos had baked all day in the July sun. It made for a balmy, beautiful all-night boat ride.

By the next morning I'd met a schoolteacher Sue Somerville, Mass., who found herself alone after some plans went awry. Sue was mid-30's never married, quiet and unprepossessing. We agreed to check out Athens together, and arrived at its Port of Piraeus mid-morning. It was the beginning of another hot sunny day. We took the tram up to the Omonia Square station, which seemed close to the walkable historic sites. The same pro-junto political propaganda posters were everywhere. We checked in to the Atlas Hotel, a room with two single beds.

In the hotel lobby I had a stark reminder that world travel does not foster intercultural tolerance and appreciation in all. I met a talkative American who'd just returned from Egypt having all his photographic equipment stolen. "The only solution to the Middle East is to kill all Arabs" he loudly proclaimed. My intellectual pushback only hardened his views, so Sue and I left for sightseeing.

We spent the afternoon at the Acropolis to take in the Glory that was Greece. The view, the ruins, antiquity preserved in marble pillars and statuary. Tourists then were allowed to roam freely though the ruins of the 2,500 year old civic center. Just below was the Plaka, the oldest residential and commercial center still in use. Arrested decay lent itself to the charm of modern shops and tavernas. It was a wonderful day and I was glad to have female company for it.

Traveling with random guys is easy, but a female presented more complexity. Sometimes it stays platonic by mutual consent, sometimes it doesn't. Sue was open for the attention that she lacked during the previous school years, and the fact I was 10 years her junior gave it an extra edge for both of us.

The next day we boarded a northbound train for Thessaloniki, taking in the breadth of the rolling Greek countryside and a distant view of Mt. Olympus. The Athens train station was plastered with posters supporting the upcoming referendum on the military junta—all one-sided. The rigged election would later pass, but the regime itself would be overthrown a year later when multi-party democracy returned.

Sue was pretty soft-spoken, but knowledgeable in what she did say. She was pleasant company and we easily struck up conversations on the train. Her schedule was tighter than mine, having a set-date return flight in Frankfurt and a classroom to return to. She had a Eurail pass taking her through Yugoslavia, and would be going directly to Frankfurt through Yugoslavia. I'd planned a Bulgaria-Romania-Hungary route.

We visited the beach outside of Thessaloniki and visiting the beach, lounged in the sidewalk cafes and visited a couple of museums. The city has an ancient history, with Greek, Roman, Turkish and layers all atop each other. The most interesting place was the birthplace of Kemal Ataturk. It is heavily guarded by both Greek police and internal Turkish plain clothesmen as it now formed the residence of the Turkish consul. Once part of the old Ottoman Empire, it now finds itself a foreign shrine in hostile territory. Though technical NATO allies, Greece and Turkey of historical and modern grievances.

The next day we boarded the same train, but were assigned separate seats in separate cars. Mine was the last car, marked "Sophia". At one stop, my car was detached and left at a siding, as the rest of

the train took Sue in another direction. I never saw or heard from her again.

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A solo engine then pushed us for an hour or so further into the rugged Macedonia countryside and left us on a siding. There were only about a dozen of us in the car and we all got out at a small taverna to look around. Some Bulgarian border officials checked our luggage and passports and gave me a 1-week visa without charge. That was easy enough—I still had the backpack I'd bought back in New Zealand and not much in it. I changed my drachma into lek. We climbed back into the same car and were soon were on the move again, hooked onto the back of a Bulgarian train heading north toward Sophia.

BULGARIA

The hilly countryside was lush and beautiful, but the place had a derelict feel about it that I would find typical of communist countries. Our car was sealed off, and we were unable to walk into the rest of the train. Upon arrival at Sophia, I knew this place was different. Walking down a major street, everything seemed gray and depressed, like I'd stepped back into the 1930s.

There was none of the street life, the vendors, small shops and cafes that gave even the poorest cities such vitality. Physically, I could pass for a Bulgarian, but my clothes and backpack made me particularly conspicuous and people would turn and look stare at my patterned batik Thai shirt and loose white sarong-like pants I was wearing. I was definitely off the main Hippie Trail, but that made it all the more interesting. This was the result of the Great Twentieth Century hope—that a top-down, rational, scientific restructuring of an economy would lead to a just and fair society. Marx's promise of a communist paradise had inspired a generation of idealists, only to be trumped by human nature

I'd gotten a city map at the station which was written in Cyrillic alphabet, which I knew from my college Russian class. I could sound out street names and other places of interest and determined to make my way around town, looking for a cheap hotel. I knew a few Russian greetings like *privyet* and *zdrastuite* which were easily understood.

I boarded a bus and tried to pay but had no idea how. I offered a few lek. The conductor looked at me blankly and let me pass. Everyone seemed to have passes or tickets they'd bought elsewhere, but there was no way to buy them on the bus itself. My expression, my dress, my lack of Bulgarian let me slide—for now. Could a Bulgarian get away with riding the Metrolink for free? He bus was only half-full and other passengers who were giving me a curious, bemused look. I'd have to figure out the system if I was to continue to use it. As it turned out, I didn't.

Central Sophia was a mixture of the old (classic European) and the new (drab Soviet). It was interesting visually, but it lacked the street life, the chaotic commercialism which made walking so interesting in many of the places I'd been. It also lacked the beggars, local hustlers and the middlemen for vice

I checked into the Hotel Moskva (Moscow) in the center of town, charging about \$7 nightly. It would have to do until I found something cheaper. Lia, a friendly desk clerk with passable English promised to see me when she ended her shift. At first I'd hoped that meant coming up to my room, but that was never going to happen. Security was multi-layered. I never got a key, but was given a slip of paper at the front desk to give to a lady on my floor who sat behind a large table at the end of a long cavernous hallway. She took the paper dutifully, then walked me to my room and opened it for me. She took note, too, when I left. When I did, Lia was already gone.

There was still some light left, so I walked around the heart of town. The Tomb of Georgy Dimitroff was right across the street. A classical mausoleum guarded 24 hours by Bulgarian soldiers in ceremonial garb. Dimitroff headed the first communist regime, installed by advancing soviet troops in 1944. He died 5 years later under mysterious circumstances in Moscow while visiting Stalin.

while allowing a hint of Bulgarian nationalism. The multi-domed dramatic St. Alexander Nevski Church harkens back to the Byzantine past. The Banya Baski Mosque, on the other hand was shuttered. There is no room for any fond memories of Ottoman rule.

Bulgaria had been a German ally in two losing wars, but had never gone to war with Russia, either czarist or Stalinist. Slavic solidarity was too strong, as well as memories of Russian help in ending Turkish domination.

I visited a giant statue of Lenin, pondering what he'd meant in the current state of world geopolitics. Ideas are powerful things, even when they turn out to be mistaken. I'd grown up to fear communism, then realized later that it was really a beautiful concept that would be impossible to implement beyond just a very small group of people, like a family or commune. Its attempt to remold human nature required the killing of millions of actual human beings--all to no avail. Noble theories do not always do so well in practice.

The city was utterly bereft of the street vendors, food stalls and outdoor eating options I'd come to rely on for cheap eats. So I entered what I thought was a cafeteria and got in line for a standard meal of some kind of stewed beef, potatoes and carrots. When I tried to pay, however, my money was refused. It seems all were paying in coupons, and I had no ideas where or how to buy them. Seeing I was a lost foreigner, a friendly man paid for me with one of his own, and offered a seat next to his at a long table, where we tried to communicate based on the few words we knew in common.

Later, I went into a bakery crowded with people. I pointed at a loaf behind the counter, then to my money, but the lady behind the counter just shook her head. Luckily, a friendly East German girl ("I'm visiting from the DDR") explained to me in a very sweet accent what to do: I pay a lady behind a counter who gives me a ticket, then I give the ticket to another lady behind another counter who gives it to another lady who gets my bread and hands it to me behind a third counter. It was like negotiating the DMV, but I did get my bread. It was warm and delicious.

Nighttime activity in Sophia was subdued. I was definitely on an obscure tributary what could be considered the Hippie Trail. I saw no one who could remotely be considered a backpacker and groups of even western Europeans were scant. English was never overheard.

Then, suddenly, three boys scampered past me on the sidewalk, each shouting in Spanish to one another. Spanish. Now that was familiar, the sound of home.

I reached out as best I could with a "Que pasa, muchachos? Hablame. Donde van?"

That stopped them in their tracks and they did a quick doubletake. Hearing random strangers speaking Spanish in Sophia was rare for them too, especially from a shaggy-haired gringo-looking guy wearing a flowered shirt. They were university students from Cuba, on their way back to their apartment. They invited me to join them, and I readily agreed.

They lived in a typical old-before-its-time soviet style apartment block that dot the skyline of Eastern European cities. They shared two rooms with a common kitchen and bathroom down the hall. It was a fascinating entre for me to see the other side of the geo-political chasm then separating the world. Two of them had Bulgarian girlfriends who later joined us, smiling curiously at the American suddenly in their midst.

Security in Bulgaria was pretty casual compared to some other East Bloc countries where foreigners wouldn't be allowed into such a building without a shakedown. We talked much of the night in Spanglish—it turned out one of them spoke better English than my Spanish. They needled me on the Bay of Pigs and Vietnam and I held my own on a few other issues. I was not apologist for US foreign policy, but I knew they were open to hearing different points of view and I had to stick up for my

I crashed on their couch and left early the next morning, back to my room at the Moskva Hotel. I had a long morning nap, then wandered about the city. I struck up a conversation with a middle-aged couple who turned out to have a son who was a UCLA professor. Dr. Zette Blecker.

Later I went to check out the nicest hotel in town, with overstuffed couches in the lobby and décor that seemed frozen in time. There were no western papers available at the newsstand but I did buy a couple of post cards and stamps and sat down to write one to friends. Then I overheard English being spoken at the front desk, heavily accented by the clerk and a familiar American accent by a patron.

I immediately went to introduce myself. He was Mark Schwartz, a Jewish guy from New York who was driving his Porsche solo from Athens to London. Yes, he had room, and yes he would give me a ride as far as our paths converged. We arranged to meet in the lobby the next morning. We'd split the hotels we stayed at, but he'd pay for all the gas.

I would travel with Mark for the next five days through Bulgaria and Romania, until he met a girl who joined us and I graciously left them to themselves. Mark attended Alfred University in upstate and we shared stories of where we'd been as we drove through the hills and fertile plains of the beautiful Balkan countryside.

There were two tales he told that stood out. Once he'd gotten lost in rural Mississippi and was chased by two rifle-wielding rednecks in a pick-up. He said his New York plates, accent and Jewish appearance set them off. Another time he'd spent a summer working in Barrow, Alaska, where he became close to some local Eskimo girls, whose beautiful bodily complexions he described in detail. Of course, I had stories of my own.

Stories. Some are embellished while other leave out embarrassing details. Men make up stuff they've never done and deny things they have. It doesn't really matter, so long as you're not relying on the information for some important decisions.

Our first night we stayed in Pleven, where we met two cute local girls. One was a waitress at the hotel and there seemed to be some kind of party conference. There were stout men walking around with medal-bedecked chests, many bearing red stars or Lenin. The other was her friend who later joined us over cheap soda pop at the hotel restaurant.

They seemed both proud and curious to be with foreigners—rare here. My few words of Russian and their fewer words of English combined with hand gestures, smiles and local charm made it a sweet, memorable time. Not enough, however, to get them to our rooms, which was Mark's plan I didn't consider realistic for a number of reasons.

My ability to read the Cyrillic road signs helped a lot, getting us to the city of Russe the next day, along the Danube. We crossed the Friendship Bridge, a marvel of Soviet engineering completed in 1954. It was the last bridge across the river before the Black Sea and over a mile and a half long.

ROMANIA

We passed through the border post at Giurgiu with ease and changed our lek into bani. The guards were more curious than suspicious. No visas, no mandatory police check-ins were needed. We were now crossing the Plains of Wallachia, wheat country. of Wallachia. At a railway crossing there was a man in a little guard shelter who manually lowered the gate when he spotted a train coming. We waited as the train passed and he hand cranked the gate back up. It was his small piece of the full employment policy in a planned economy.

Mark had spent a year in Italy and that helped a lot in communicating. Romania is named for the

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Roman soldiers who intermarried with locals and created a permanent enclave of Latin language that withstood the waves of Germans, Slavs, Magyars and Turks. In Bucharest we found a hostel with mostly Western European students. Here we met Lisa, a slender, talkative New Yorker who'd been travelling with a couple of girlfriends with whom she'd quarreled. She liked our laid-back attitude and began travelling with us. Eventually, she and Mark would hit it off, forcing me to strike out on my own again.

Bucharest was a nice mid-range capital city, with pretensions of grandiosity exceeding Sophia's. It was that combination of decaying-but-still elegant pre-war buildings (mostly pre-WWI, imitating the Belle Epoch of France, with whom it had close relations) and the gray soviet architecture.

I was able to hand-deliver a letter from my Romanian co-worker back in Australia, locating his brother in a gray apartment block. He spoke no English and was very grateful. I changed some more money on the black market, which consisted of a few Romanians approaching touristy-looking people in the main square.

That's where we were approached by a man offering the three of us lodging for half what the hostel charged. Sure. He got into our car and led us to a huge soviet-style apartment block. We stayed there that night, realizing that we'd taken their whole living room and that his whole family was crammed into the tiny kitchen. All for the precious hard currency they were glad to pay.

After two nights in Bucharest, we three headed north through the wooded, hauntingly beautiful Transylvania Mountains. The 2-lane highway traffic was moderate, with locals constantly crossing the road at random times, misjudging the Porsche's speed.

We stopped in Pitesti at an ultra-modern building that stood out so much from the ageing town. At the time we arrived, it was hosting a show featuring folk dances and songs with brightly clad youngsters in traditional garb. We wandered in and took in most of the show. Seeing we were foreigners—and Todd's fancy car—we were ushered into good seats with no need of tickets.

It was a beautifully choreographed program, light on politics and heavy on traditional themes. The featured singer was a stunning bright-eyed young woman with an angelic voice and intense personality. She was given flowers when the show was over, and later came up to greet us with her parents. No one spoke any English, but that made the experience even more memorable. We all shared a feeling of elation as we continue our way into the heart of the county.

We spent that night in Sibiu. Inside the usual ring of gray soviet-style apartment blocks was an old distinctly Germanic city dating from the middle ages. Until 55 years before, this had long been part of Austria-Hungary, and pockets of German-speakers still remained. We watched "What's Up Doc" with Barbara Streisand at a local movie theater, in English with Romanian subtitles. Todd and Lisa were getting chummier, but the three of us still got along well and shared a room in a mid-range hotel for about \$2 apiece.

The next day we made it Arad, where we met a few locals at a café. Anxious to talk with outsiders, they told us in hushed tones their thoughts about the regime. Nikolai Ceaucescu was a combination Dracula, Stalin and Romanian nationalist who tilted toward the US in foreign policy as a way to play off against the Russians. Though we as foreigners travelled freely, it was still a police state. There was a disco on the top floor of our hotel where we mixed freely with locals. There I met the beautiful Angelika, an 18-year old gymnast, who was "Half Hungarian and half Slovak" and who almost made it to the '72 Munich Olympics.

As we danced semi-slow, I felt the graceful, firm contour of her waist as it narrowed from her back and flared out into a perfectly proportioned derrier. Her English harkened back to a teenage Zsa Zsa Gabor. We went outside, sitting on a park bench, talking. Our English attracted too much attention for her, however, and even I was vaguely aware of a couple of men looking in the dark.

“Securitate, securitate” she whispered to me, referring to the police. “We must go back inside!”

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We did, where it was too crowded for my liking. She left for home, alone, promising to meet me in the lobby the next morning. I never saw her nor ever forgot her again.

I got back to the room late and plopped onto my bed. On the bed next to me I could make out Todd and Lisa were amorously engaged. At least someone was getting some lovin’ that night..

“I’ll leave you guys alone for a while. Be back in about an hour” I was happy to give them some alone time, but I’d paid my share and still needed a place to sleep, too. No one said a word about it again, but it was clear the trio would soon be a duo. The next night, they’d have a place to themselves.

HUNGARY

There was a noticeable contrast as we entered Hungary, from the poorest Warsaw Pact state (not counting Albania) to the richest. “Goulash Communism” was a bargain with the Russians—absolute loyalty in foreign policy in exchange for more personal and economic freedom at home. The rich, rolling countryside was beautiful. We passed through Szged and onto Budapest by late afternoon.

Budapest is a huge city with imperial pretensions still apparent from the days of the old dual monarchy. Having lost two wars within the past 60 years and now subject to Soviet domination, they still struggled to stake out their own—not Slav, Germanic, nor Latin. Buda is hilly and dramatic, with Pest flat and sprawling. The Danube River ran between them.

We found a university dormitory doubling as summertime student/tourist housing. A bed could be had in 12-bunked room for about \$1 (14 Hungarian florints). Sounded good to me. I waited in the lobby to check in and pay. It was the last time I saw Mark and Lisa, as they went off to make other arrangements. It was a romantic city for a young couple like they had become.

There were large groups of people slightly younger than me, including an auburn-haired lady holding her Soviet passport. I’d never met and actually citizen of the USSR before, as it was rare to find them even in the Eastern European countries. We exchanged a “zdrastuite” I’d learned in college, but she seemed a bit nervous talking with an obvious westerner. Curious, but nervous.

In my bunk room I met a Polish guy who was more talkative, complaining about how the Russians bought his entire potato crop at a discount last year, forcing tighter local rationing. His English was good, and he was travelling with a few fellow countrymen. I left my back-back in the room, keeping my passport and money as always on my person. My backpack had a few clothes and the sleeping bag I’d bought in New Zealand. It had the rolled up Hindu religious posters I’d gotten in Nepal and the leather jacket I’d bought for \$10. I wore the jacket back to the lobby with me, as it was getting chilly outside

I started out on foot in the late afternoon, sunny but cool. I explored the Soviet War memorial in a park in the hills of Buda, with a good view of the Pest across the Danube. Hungarians had fought Russians in two world wars and the ’56 uprising, but the monument was proof that the Russians had the last word, at least for now.

Written and spoken Hungarian bear no resemblance to any language I’d heard. It’s supposed to be related to Finnish and Turkish. It has a lot of consonants in unfamiliar combinations, as well as many accents marks that made even trying to pronounce it intimidating.

Later that evening I joined a group of 20 or so for the restaurant. It was a nice, very old place from Hungary’s own Belle Epoch, and we had a nice dinner of beef goulash and cucumber salad. I sat between a very friendly older Italian couple and a couple of Finnish girls, who were as blonds as they were taciturn. The mood was festive as we listened to the plaintive notes of the gypsy violinist.

I joined a Canadian couple I’d met who’d decided to strike out on their own after dinner and explore the city. We took the subway to no place in particular and walked around the ornately imposing

parliament building along the Danube.

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I crashed late, and most of my bunkmates were fast asleep. The next day I explored the city on my own. I went into a big hotel and actually found a Time magazine available over-the-counter, in English. It was the first I'd seen in a long time, so I caught up on the latest Watergate news. I struck up a conversation with a British businessman who treated me to lunch at a nearby restaurant catering to foreigners.

I went to a government office to get my visa extended, but the line was long and didn't move for an hour. I met a mid-20s American gal there who was on her way out, so I tagged along to pick her brain about Hungary. It turned out she was born in nearby Szged and fled with her parents after the failed '57 uprising when she was 10. She was on her way to Lake Balaton to join relatives they'd left behind. I'd hoped to hang with her more, but she grabbed a taxi and was off.

When I got back to the office, it had closed early and would stay closed until Monday. I had to leave right away. I took a public bus as far out of town as I could, then began hitchhiking. There was the usual assortment of Czech-built Skodas, East German Trabants Polish Zils with a few Mercedes and VWs driven by West Germans. I got a ride with a young couple, the better half of which was a pretty freckle-faced redhead who had a sweet accent in good English. She asked to see my passport and was amazed at all the place I'd been. She showed me hers as well.

"We live in a socialist country and we can only visit other socialist countries" she said. They were listed in three languages: Hungarian, French and Russian. Mine was the opposite, spelling out the countries I was forbidden to visit: Cuba, North Korea and North Vietnam.

My last ride in Hungary was with a BMW-driving German couple who would take me across the border with them. It was dark when we approached, with soldiers and barbed wire and tough-looking Hungarian guards. They searched the trunk for any unauthorized passengers. My 2-day visa was still good, just barely. With more planning, I could have stayed longer and really enjoyed Hungary, but I had a long way to go on limited funds.

A U S T R I A

In the dark, we crossed a 100' no-man's-land, then were greeted by a corpulent Austrian customs official who blithely waved us through after checking our passports. They were spending the night in Rust, so I got out and traipsed through the darkened little town, coming across a lakeside park where it seemed safe to lay down my sleeping bag and spend the night.

It was a mild night with heavy morning dew. As I awoke early a light mist hung over the Neusiedl See. The lake is wide and shallow, and I'd heard of numerous attempted crossings from Hungary, just over on the opposite shore. By an accident of history, it now lay astride the Iron Curtain, separating East and West. Mitteleuropa was no more.

I wandered into Rust, quiet, quaint and peaceful. There were stork nests and much artistry devoted to storks, as I learned that the area was a haven for the long-beaked birds who legendarily brought us all to earth. I noticed, too, a war memorial in the central square, a steel-helmeted soldier of carved granite looking dejectedly down while leaning on the butt of his rifle. No celebration here.

They had only themselves to blame. Austrian bullying of Serbia led directly to the start of World War I. A multi-lingual empire presided over by an octogenarian emperor could least afford war, and didn't survive it. Professional armies can fight short wars with a few battles, but long struggles need motivated conscripts backed with popular support, which the old polyglot Austro-Hungarian Empire could not provide.

The rump state that emerged briefly found such a cause when it acquiesced to union with Nazi Germany under its locally-born Fuehrer, but that only led to a far worse disaster. Now the Neusiedl

See, once in the heart of an old empire, now lay astride an Iron Curtain that separated it.

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I found a bakery open and bought a crispy/flakey apple pastry. I had no Austrian money, but she gladly accepted a \$1 bill I was able to dig out of petty reserve cash. One dollar was pretty expensive, but since I'd slept for free, I allowed myself the treat. Still, I'd have to watch myself, now that prices were sure to be higher.

I got back to the main highway and stuck my thumb out in the direction of Vienna. A few rides took me through a blooming and prosperous countryside and into Vienna. Ahh, Vienna. It's been described as a "Capital Without a Country." Though much has been rebuilt since WWII, there is much of the imperial vainglory and the old days when this was the royal seat of a large empire.

It's a wonderful city for museums, parks, music and opera houses. I got a room in a dormitory, and set out to see the city with a few new friends I'd met. I picked up some mail, too, from the American Express office on the Kaernterstrasse. In all letters and cards home since Australia, I'd left this address for any mail, for I figured I'd have to pass through Vienna at some point. There was a nice letter from home, along with five \$20 bills my dad had inserted. That would help. I still had about \$700 in travelers checks and assorted cash to last me.

I took a guided tour of the royal palace of the Habsburgs who once ruled here. I'd teamed up with a pair of early 30ish American school teachers I'd met earlier at a café outside the American Express office. Our conversation was interesting, but even more fascinating was a young Israeli student travelling alone. Danielle Halasz, the name stands out even now. She was 18 and just entering the army, or so she said. Her grandparents had fled the old Empire when the fleeing was still possible, and she still spoke a little Hungarian as well as Hebrew and English with the sweetest breathiest accent I can still remember well.

We toured the adjacent museum, which interestingly displayed many maps showing the A/H Empire with its 1914 borders, with industrial, agricultural, educational and linguistic information. It seems for much of Europe, 1914 was the last really good year. Two world wars have left their scars, though the West has more than recovered physically.

I tried to spend as much time with Danielle as I could, but she had to go back with her group with only vague assurances that we could meet later that night. That afternoon I had more practical considerations than the whiff of passing romance. I had to figure out how I'd get home on my existing funds.

I had three contacts on the Continent on which I was basing my unfolding route. In Geneva I had the name and phone number of a cousin of an old college friend, Paul Uhlmann, who would be good for a night's stay and some interesting conversation. Also in Switzerland was L'Abri, a Christian community that fed and housed drop-ins free of charge, according to my old high school friends (and campaign manager for my ASB President election) Lee Hardy, who'd stayed there the summer before. In Frankfurt, there were Bob and Cynthia, who I'd met on the flight to Singapore. I had a number and address and a promise of hospitality and red cabbage.

That afternoon, I got to a student-oriented travel bureau, offering discount air and rail rates to those with the International Student ID cards. I still had the one forged for me in Calcutta. I could fly to New York one-way for \$175, but I wasn't ready for that, yet. I'd fly out of London, then hitch-hike my way home across the country, my own personal 20-state hippie trail that would lead me home.

So I got a great price on a Vienna-to-Geneva train ride. It would take about 16 hours with a change of trains in Zurich and would leave tomorrow at about 2:00. OK—I was set. I bought a roll and a sausage and proceeded to sit down in a little park and enjoy my picnic, but a policeman soon hassled me. Sitting in the park was not allowed, at least not for people like me. Strict rules here. I couldn't be allowed to start some hippie encampment. The benches were ok, apparently, for my kind.

Back at the dorm there were the usual group of backpackers and EurRail passholders. Few were

India-bound, but many would liked to have gone, had they the time. They were college students or

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teachers on summer break. I was solo at the time, feeling a little lonely and taking the afternoon to write a few postcards and update the journal I'd been keeping off-and-on since I was 15.

I was hoping to see Danielle that night, but never did. I did some laundry on the few clothes I was carrying—one pair of jeans, a couple of t-shirts, a kind of a draw-string white sarong, a batik button-down shirt and a long-sleeved cheese-cloth pull over shirts with hand-embroidered flowery designs I'd picked up in India. I had an old pair of blue trunks, too—reddish from the iron-laden soil of the Australian mine where I wore it daily to work. I'd swum in it, too.

I had my colorful Indian religious posters carefully rolled up around a can of Australian bug repellent. And I had a fold-up bronze and steel knife I'd gotten in Afghanistan. My New Zealand sleeping bag and back pack frame were light and compact.

I slept in the next day, pondering my next moves, anticipating Switzerland, Germany, getting to England, then the USA. I was mapping out the stays at friends and relatives that would take me in a snake-like journey across the U.S. After that was a blank. I knew I loved the classroom and wanted something to do with teaching. I Helping to open other's eyes to the world, sharing the perspectives I'd gained would be before me, as well. It later turned out that I would teach high school history teacher for over 20 years, as well as a charter bus tour guide for 5 years in Canada. Then politics.

I was floating in a sea of time and space, between the worlds of full-time student and full-time adult. I knew what it was like to be on the edge, how little it really took to survive. A few dollars, a few cloths, a golden thumb for hitching rides and a positive attitude that the next person you met would share what they had, just as I would in their shoes. There was work available, too. The bulletin boards of the hotels hostels, inns, tea rooms, coffee houses and pudding shops were replete with notices seeking native English-speakers for school, tutoring and live-ins for wealthy families wanting to give their kids an early linguistic head-start.

Yet I knew I was a sojourner, a traveler for whom the USA was both a starting and an ending point. I would neither wander aimlessly nor be an indefinite expat. I had a vague plan to return to grad school or work somehow in the travel industry. I had a vague plan, too, of pursuing politics, starting with the Fullerton City Council and work my way up from there, which is what did happen.

Politically, I believed in personal freedom and respected market forces in shaping economies. Opportunity was more important than enforced equality, but only if the opportunities were real. I could see, however, that vast swaths of the world had no access to the sea of choices that I had. Their lives were circumscribed by tradition, faith, clan and authoritarian government. Yet they, too, could be happy. I'd seen the happiness in the smiles of children and the ready hospitality and curiosity of those who—by Western standards—were destitute and living in unremitting poverty.

I veered from Goldwater in 1964 to Eugene McCarthy in 1968. I was at the 1964 Republican Convention when the conservative delegates booed Rockefeller, and at the 1968 Democratic Convention with the anti-war protesters. My radicalization was against a war my peers were being drafted to fight that should not be fought and could not be won.

By my senior year in high school I studied and debated Marx with a few close friends. I realized its full

promise of paradise-on-earth and of the state withering away after human nature had been altered. I

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realized why million would fight for it, especially when combined with anti-colonial nationalism. But I also realized its impracticability outside of a small group. In the end, it was the cold-blooded calculations of Adam Smith that prevailed over the romantic dreams of Marx. Scientific socialism proved to be an oxymoron. People needed incentives.

I grew up with an impending sense of doom hanging over me that belied my secure middle class Orange County surroundings. First it was the threat of nuclear war, which was unsurvivable. I read *On the Beach* at 12, and was haunted for years by its predictions. By the mid-60s, however, it looked like we'd learned to live with the bomb. Now it was the population explosion and the impending ecological collapse. I devoured Paul Ehrlich's *Population Bomb* with the same horror as I read Neville Shute's earlier novel of doom. India seemed to confirm this Malthusian nightmare.

I remember looking into the eyes of little babies being held by their mothers and thinking it wasn't possible they could survive into adulthood. Now they are in their 40s and living in a world far better than we thought possible. It is the hubris of each generation to think they live in a particularly doomed time. Millenarian movements—secular or religious--always disappoint their followers. The end, as it turned out, is not near at all.

Humanity has its own Hippie Trail of adventure, doom and ultimate triumph. At least so far. My own personal adventure in 1973 was giving me a perspective about that humanity and my place in it. Before you can have any answers, you must ask the right questions. As I grew older I knew the beginning of wisdom was to ask those questions and not jumping to any quick answers. 1973 was the year that put those questions into perspective.

I went to the Wien Sudbahnhof, to find my train, which was clearly marked and its track easily located. In my assigned compartment was a group of friendly Norwegian teenagers, including Hanne Evensen, with whom I'd have a lifetime friendship. Hanne was and is a rosey-cheeked strawberry blonde speaking nearly perfect English, almost with a British accent and the up-and-down lilt of a Scandinavian. We played chess, flirted, shared food and had a great time as we passed through the stunning scenery of the Austrian Alps. A couple of times we'd go to the end of the train and stand in the exposed vestibule together, keeping each other warm as we watch the Alps pass by..

They were on their way to Paris, and urged me to stay along with them. From there, they'd stay in Brighton, England where the drinking age laws were pretty lax and high schoolers could bar-hop. She gave me an address and phone as to how to meet up with her there. Sure!

SWITZERLAND

I left them and the Paris-bound train in Zurich around midnight. I'd hoped to see her later in Brighton, but I'd paid for Geneva and had three connections yet to make, so I kept to my course.

I had three hours before my connecting train left at 4:00 am, and the Swiss depot police didn't take kindly to those they suspected of using the station as a default crash pad. There was a fine line between sleeping during your layover and using the waiting room as a hotel., and they pushed it hard. At one point I was roused and herded along with a multi-national group of others, mostly Turks and Yugoslavs. We were pushed out of the main waiting area and into a side room where we were told we could wait only if our trains left before 6:00 a.m. Mine did. The others were told to vacate.

Swiss rail connections were brief and punctual. I'd bought this ticket at a discount agency in Vienna and now I knew why. It had a big gap in the middle. I held my seat and played chess with a couple of Croatian guest workers and watched the clock for my Geneva train. When I boarded, I felt the train gliding as if on ice. No clickety clack here. By dawn's dim light of the gorgeous countryside and neat little towns and clean industrial complexes. I got to Geneva early in the morning, where I used

a pay phone to call Peter.

He'd been expecting me and knew all about me, thanks to my old college friend, Paul. He was friendly, picked me up in a Porsche convertible and gave me a brief tour of the city on the way back to his home, including the Palace of Nations, headquarters of the old League of Nations. They had a very nice apartment where he lived with his parents, whom I didn't meet. He fed me breakfast of cheese, coffee and a flakey fresh croissant and let me take a nice hot bath in their gleaming bathroom, a rare luxury I savored as I planned my next move.

Peter had been nice enough, but had to go to class and made no mention of my staying on. It just before noon when he dropped me off at a roundabout where he said would be a good spot to hitchhike at the edge of the city—the main highway along the north shore of Lake Geneva.

I faced a line of constant traffic, walking backwards a bit as I stuck out my right thumb and looked smilingly, pleadingly as each car passed. To me left below was Lake Geneva and the towering mountains on the other side. I walked for hours along the highway with no luck. On the other side of the highway was the railroad, heading my direction, but I had to try my luck with hitching before succumbing to the cost of a ticket.

My goal for the day was modest—make it to the east end of the lake to Montreaux, then ascend the mountains to L'Abri where I'd spend the night. It could be done in a couple of hours by car, but my hitchhiking was not bearing fruit. Traffic was thick along the highway, but nobody was stopping. The afternoon was pleasant and the scenery spectacular, so I wasn't too worried. I never did get a ride, however, and finally boarded the train when I reached the next station on foot.

I got off in Montreaux where I transferred to a narrow gauge line ascending the mountains toward Villars. It took about a half hour to get up a steep valley, with spectacular mountains all around. L'Abri was a short walk from the Villars stop, and got in late afternoon, with still plenty of light.

I wasn't sure what to expect. Lee told that one could stay and eat for free, high in the Swiss Alps, as long as you partook in communal activities studies and light chores. Appealing and intriguing. L'Abri had been founded 20 years before by Christian philosopher/author. Francis Schaeffer and his wife, Edith. It was theologically conservative with a counter-culture edge. Like the Schaeffers, the staff and most students attending were American.

I was assigned a bunk room and ate at the dining hall, where we served ourselves and washed our own dishes. Some light housekeeping duties were assigned. I went to sleep not knowing what to expect the next day or how long I'd stay, but felt fortunate to be taken into such a beautiful place with such nice people.

The next day I attended seminars where I sat on a couch surrounded by other mostly American college students and a leader studying Schaeffer's works and theology. I started dozing off in the afternoon, and it must have been obvious, since I was later told that I was not a serious enough student to stay any longer. My first day would be my last. It's not that I wasn't interested in the subject—I was, after all, a Religious Studies major in college. I was interested in all beliefs and accepted at face value the sincerity of all believers of every faith. Schaeffer and I were both Presbyterians.

However, sitting through daylong lectures and seminars was not my thing—I was a traveler, not a student, and they were right that I'd come more for the free room and board than for a long-term commitment.

That afternoon I'd met Stacy, an Ohio college student whose hair was as dark as her complexion was porcelain-white. She'd come by way of Frankfurt and her return flight was three days away. She was intrigued with the idea of hitch-hiking with me, a first for her, and of course I was accommodating. That night it was arranged to stay in the home of a local lady who put up students in her attic when

L'Abri had overflow. I tried to bargain her down from her asking My price of about \$8 for a shared

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room, but she got very upset and yelled at me in French. I was OK with that. I lay in my cozy bed in the middle of the Swiss Alps and looked forward to another day.

Between the depot cops, the unaccommodating drivers and crabby landlady, my general attitude toward the Swiss was not a warm one. That would change the next day.

I met Stacy in the morning, as we enjoyed coffee and croissant. Stacy spoke more French than I did, which could help us on our trip ahead. She was friendly, but reserved.

We easily picked up a few rides as we headed north toward Germany. We passed by the capital, Bern, without much of a look. The countryside was lush, farms neatly laid out and clean prosperous cities. There was a separatist movement in the Jura region we passed through, explained to us by our driver at the time, punctuated by an occasional bombing. The first I'd heard of any kind of internal Swiss divisions.

By mid-afternoon we'd reached Basel, where Switzerland, France and Germany meet. On the German side began a long onramp to the Autobahn, where there were a long line of people hitchhiking. A lot of competition for us. Hitch-hiking in Europe was called "autostop" then and this was the thickest collection of autostoppers we'd seen. The etiquette was that new arrivals took their place at the front of the line. This seemed counter-intuitive to me, as we'd get first crack at the drivers. The thinking was, however, that drivers would more likely stop at the end, having looked over the other choices before making up their minds to stop. Whatever, Stacy had turned out to be a pretty good sport.

She was wearing a plaid long sleeve flannel shirt hanging loose over her contoured jeans. Her hair was pulled neatly back into a pony tail. She looked good next to me, a little older, a little shaggier, with my beat-up blue backpack I'd picked up long ago and carried halfway around the world. Her pack was fresher, bigger and she carried it well. Now, both of our packs lay in the grass of the long sweeping onramp that cars too from Switzerland and onto the northbound autobahn up the Rhine River Valley.

GERMANY

We stood by there for nearly an hour until a friendly German businessman picked us up in his Mercedes. He drove us for the next 4 hours, with Stacy riding in the front seat and me in the back. Anything to accommodate our talkative and generous driver. He stopped for a delicious sausage & sauerkraut lunch with beer. All on him.

His English was pretty good and he welcomed the chance to improve it, focusing his attention mainly on Stacy, but with an ear to some of the adventures I'd had, as well. He pointed out vineyard, towns, castles and other points of interest along the Rhine. Passing by Heidelberg was a highlight, as I remember my Dad's fondness for the musical *The Student Prince*.

Our driver was hospitable and informative. He explained how the autobahn had no specific speed limit and that whenever anyone was tailgated, they were obliged to move over to the lane on the right and let the car pass. Traffic was thick but moving consistently.

By late evening we'd reached Darmstadt, his final destination. It was only about a half hour south of Frankfurt by train, so he dropped us off near the station and we bought our tickets. It was getting too dark to continue hitching, but we'd saved quite a bit already with our generous driver, and Stacy was feeling pretty good about the day's adventure.

The Frankfurt station was a huge rambling affair that doubled as a shopping mall, with restaurants and shops. It's century-old superstructure had survived the war, and new construction was everywhere. It was getting late and the commuter crowd was thinning and mostly foreign guest workers were hanging around, with a few backpackers and very late commuters. I found a pay phone and got the right change to make it work. My call was to Cynthia & Manfred's house, out in the suburb.

Cynthia's voice rang loud and clear. She'd been half-expecting me for the past month, but not

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really sure if I'd really make it. It last seen her and Manfred at Singapore customs after our BOAC flight from Darwin. She had a breathy Indian accent. German was her third language, but now her most heavily used. She was always up, always excited and hopeful and a joy to be around for the next couple of days. It was past midnight when she picked us up in her BMW and drove us back to their home in Karben, about 20 minutes north.

Her husband was there waiting for us, with beer and pretzels and a friendly welcome. She always called him "Bob" when speaking English to him, but she was Cynthia in both English and German. She had a Hindi name she used with her parents who lived in her native Muzzafurpur. I told her I'd been through her hometown, where the businessman had bought the fresh leeches. She could imagine what my impression had been.

Indians I meet to this day wince a little when asking my impressions of my '73 trip. They know of the culture shock I felt, the crowds, the chaos, the dirt and poverty. I skim over all that to say it's the most interesting place I've ever been. *Interesting* can be such a loaded term. Today, they'll say "you must go back—it's changed so much" but Cynthia only said, "you're brave man, to travel the way you did!"

Bob's spoke English pretty well, and ruminated over some of the spy scandals then rocking the West German government. He owned a cloth importing business, specializing in silks and batiks from India and Southeast Asia.

They both liked Stacy a lot, and were vocally impressed at how I'd picked up such a sweet and lovely travelling companion. "You're a brave woman, too, to travel like he does!" We assured them we'd ridden in the lap of Mercedes luxury practically the whole day.

After some late-night chitchat, we were led down to the commodious cellar. There was thick carpet, a couple of couches and a ping-ping table and upper windows above ground level that let in light. There was a bathroom and shower, too.

The next day we met their daughters, Magda 14 and Elke 16, a striking Indo-German mix of blue eyes, dark hair and clear complexions not quite as dark as Cynthia but much swarthier than Bob. They all spoke German with each other, but their English was good with a curious German/Hindi accent, having learned it from their mother.

"I spoke mostly English with them growing up so Bob could understand—so their Hindi isn't very good," Cynthia explained.

Cynthia drove us around town, a gracious and enthusiastic hostess. She saw things through so many eyes—as an Indian, a Hindu, an artist, an adopted German and through our projected eyes as Americans. Her home, her attitude and generosity were comforting.

Early the next day, she took Stacy to the airport for her flight home. On the way, she dropped me off at an autobahn on-ramp for my onward trip north.

Stacy I would never see or hear from again, but pleasant memories remain. I can still see her face with her dark hair pulled back in a pony tail and her Ohio State sweatshirt covering her lithe frame. Cynthia and her daughters made several trips to LA later, and she once joined my mom and dad for dinner where she regaled them with her stories.

At the onramp, there were commuters passing by going to work, and a number of mini-vans with signs in Turkish picking up foreign guest workers. I got a few rides from friendly Germans, and spent my lunch in a small picturesque village that had apparently escaped the wartime bombings that reshaped the bigger cities. I was bound for England, but probably wouldn't make it that night. Where I'd sleep was up to chance or fate, however you choose to look at such things.

BELGIUM

That afternoon I crossed into Belgium, a clean, compact country of waffle and sprouts fame. It's still large enough, though, for a language controversy. The line between French-speaking Walloons and Dutch-speaking Flemings runs right through the country, with Brussels a bilingual zone.

One of my rides was a 40ish salesman with a deep, dramatic voice. He explained to me the differences.

"When I am with the French, I speak perfect French to them, but I never let them accept me as one of their own," he went on. "I always remind them I'm a Flemish boy!" Apparently even bilingual fluency doesn't erase the split. Being simply "Belgian" is not an option.

Another ride also identified himself as Flemish and told me of being conscripted to working in a German munitions plant during the war. He described how he tried low-level sabotage so as to not to aid the enemy.

By sunset I'd found myself in a huge traffic circle in Brussels, with major highways heading all different directions. I could see the Atomium, remaining from the 1958 World's Fair. I remembered it from pictures in Life Magazine when I was in Third Grade. It still stands, now over 60 years later, a towering stainless steel model of an iron crystal.

The interior of the circle was as big as a football field, a well landscaped ground with no pedestrian access. A good place to camp that night, I figured. No one would bother me here in this inaccessible no-man's land. There were a few hitch hikers along the edge, and I positioned myself so as to attract a ride northeast toward Ghent.

My luck held in more ways than I could have imagined. I got a ride into Ghent, and figured I'd find a park to sleep in. There, I met a curious teenage boy on a bicycle who told me in good English I could follow him back to his house, just a few blocks away. Sure.

There, I met his mother and father, and the smile and glow of his father's face still shines in my memory. He was filled with warmth, happiness and hospitality. He'd just returned from a prayer meeting and was living the love. Many parents might be put off by one of their kids bringing in a foreign homeless hippie at midnight, but they treated me like family. His wife spoke no English, but happily put me up in the den, sleeping on the couch. I was offered beer, coffee, cheese, bread—all of them delicious. His name was Kornelius—another friendly Fleming, and this was to be my only night in Belgium. His English was very good, and he wanted to know all about me and my trip. Stories for food? Sure!

The next morning after a generous breakfast, he dropped me at the nearest on-ramp on the highway headed for Oostende and the Dover ferry. It took me a while to get a lift, but I was so happy and overwhelmed by the hospitality and shared happiness of these total strangers, whom I would never see again.

As was typical at such spots, previous hitchers had left messages on the back of a road sign: "It's a long way from Adelaide" inscribed one Aussie, along with his name. I responded "It's a long way to Fullerton, CA, too!"

I got a ride into Oostende by another friendly Fleming. We zipped right past Bruges, and he told me of its history, canals and medieval architectural wonders, untouched by either world war. The Belgian countryside grew flatter as I reached the coast, dotted by neat, well-kept villages and farms. It was mid-August, the days warm and the farms lush.

I was dropped off at the ferry terminal where I purchased my ticket and got right on board. The trip would take a couple of hours, about like from Long Beach to Catalina. A short hop for me, but that 30-mile channel had thwarted invaders since William the Conqueror had crossed it 900 years before

and defined England as a nation. I was leaving the Continent and going to the Mother Country of my own.

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The air was mild and breezy as I sat on deck and joined a small gaggle of similarly-aged passengers to share stories. One was a Dutchman driving a taking his VW bus over to Britain to make a movie, taking advantage of direct government subsidies supporting such creative work. He suggested I join him the van when we reached land.

“Immigration is tougher on pedestrians. If you’re in a vehicle, they tend to go easier, figuring at least you’ve got a ride somewhere” he told me in lightly-accented English.

GREAT BRITAIN

He was right. When we reached Dover, I got into the van with three other Hollanders and I was the only one questioned as we stopped at British customs and immigration.

“Which one is Mr. Norby?” The agent shouted as he eyed our small pile of passports. “How much money have you got?”

I exaggerated my available cash by a factor of ten, and made up a story about my PanAm executive father awaiting me in London. He shrugged and let us go by.

I could have ridden on to London with my new Dutch friends, but I needed to find Hanne and the Norwegians in Brighton. I was left at the nearby train station where I grabbed a ride to Brighton. I could have tried hitching, but it was late afternoon and wanted to get to Brighton by dark, so I sprung for the expense with the Pounds I had traded for on the ferry. My forged student discount card I’d picked up in Calcutta gave me half-fare.

English now all around me. I could understand passing conversations for the first time since I’d left Australia. I easily struck up a conversation with a middle-aged businessman wearing a fancy coat and tie, dancing around various political, economic and social subjects without disagreeing too much. It was pleasant, as the lush rolling countryside passed by. He got off in Hastings, and I continued on.

It was sunset when I reached Brighton and I located the small hotel Hanne had told me about. Soon enough, I linked up with her and her two friends and I joined them for some late-night pub-hopping. I picked up a paper and read about Vice-President Agnew’s resignation. Hanne had made up with an old British boyfriend, so my personal possibilities were not what I’d hoped.

She couldn’t quite say it then, but explained it later in a letter. I left the group. I walked around the town and struck up a conversation with a couple of Mormon missionaries. I slept alone that night.

The next morning I wandered around Brighton and its ageing pleasure piers punctuated by massive pavilions with bars, restaurants and arcades that had a kind of Victorian grandiosity. The weather was drizzly and the beaches were rocky. If this was the best they could do as a seaside resort, it’s no surprise why those that could flocked to Greece, Italy or Spain.

I did say goodbye to Hanne, and she turned out to be the longest-lasting friend I’d made on the whole trip. We traded letters and she visited California several times, the last in 2004 with husband Frank and three children. By that time, we were old friends.

In 1997 after Mom had passed away, Dad and I visited Norway and stayed with Hanne, and her family. By that time, the both worked in IBM and were living in solidly middle class existence (in Norway, everyone is middle class). She picked us up at the airport, showed around Oslo and had helped us contact distant relatives who we visited in a distant farm near Morgedal.

My son Alex and his mom Charlotte visited her during an Oslo stopover during a 2010 Baltic cruise.

With Hanne, my Hippy Trail lives on in this ongoing relationship. She’s still there on Facebook when we need each other. Her and her now-grown kids still often visited the US and sometimes drop

by.

My afternoon took me through Kent, flowery, green, radiant and awash in the late summer sun. Months before, I'd met Rolley in a New Zealand youth hostel and had tucked his address away—like many others—hoping to make contact later. I got several rides from friendly Englishmen, the last one going slightly out of his way to take me right to the house in Petts Wood, Bromley, Kent.

I was about 7:00 when I got there, with the sun just setting. His mom met me as if she were expecting me—friendly, with tea and bickies. Maybe she was, or just was used to world travelers dropping by that her son had met along the way. My mom and dad have done the the same, as they would meet many I had met at our home just below Hillcrest Park in Fullerton.

People are the ultimate adventure. In the broadest sense meeting new people *is* the Hippie Trail untethered to any time or place. That was my real lesson from 1973, that adventure lies without, but also within. Travel expands these opportunities to meet such interesting people in interesting places, yet they remain all around us.

Rolley came home in about an hour. He updated me on his newest business venture—importing used wine casks from New Zealand and using them as planters, furniture and various other in-home uses. He has an operation in a nearby industrial park. We left for a nearby pub, and entered a cozy living room-like lounge.

We talked about New Zealand, about our travels in between and he gave me advice on how to approach English women. “They need some initial chitchat, some witty bantering that can show them you’re interesting. You’re accent will help, too!” OK.

They gave me a pull-out couch to sleep on in the den, which was pretty luxurious by what I was used to. His mom really showed off her hospitality and skills at breakfast, down to the ham-like bacon, scones and heavy cream for the tea. I ate heartily, not know when I'd eat again but knowing it would probably cost me money—and that was dwindling.

I walked to the nearby train station, and looked rapt at the approaching city, as tidy suburbs gave way to row houses, warehouses and factories. This was London. When a man tired of this, he was tired of life, Samuel Pepys once wrote in his journal.

The train pulled into the Charing Cross Station, and I lost myself walking the compact streets, shops, parks and so many people places of this vast city. Vast, yes, but on a very human scale at street level.

I took in the movie *Soylent Green*, with its grim apocalyptic view of the future. Some scenes were eerily similar to what I'd seen in Calcutta, and it supported my long-held view that we were headed to some sort of ecological doomsday.

While the Hippie Trail represented hope, there was also a sense that one must see the world before was too late. That the future of our generation was limited, limited by impending nuclear, ecological or demographic holocaust. Belief that one is living in the End Times is an arrogance of each generation, making us feel special. The end will may come some day, but it is always farther off than we imagine and in the meantime the world and humanity survive. Even thrive.

As much as I was fascinated by other peoples and tied to understand them on their own terms, I didn't have any real belief that their future could be better. Was there really any hope for India? Now, my Indian friend I meet wince when I say I was there in 1973. “Oh, you must go back—it has changed so much.” Yes, there *is* hope.

Here in England were the trappings of a vast empire of only a generation ago. Royalty and a rigid class system had still brought the liberating force of free commerce to much of the world, and a lingua franca that made my trip so much easier.

Street level Brits were warm and friendly, eagerly responding to casual tourist inquiries. My accent immediately told them I was a Yank, not quite a total foreigner. Cars drove on the left here, so I

had to look both ways crossing the street.

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I'd heard of the great live theater in London, and heavily discounted tickets available to students. With my student ID card, so I made good use of it and got a high balcony seat to see Lauren Bacall in "Applause."

"What is it that we're living for? Applause, applause!" Those words were prophetic as the following year I'd be watching my sister Polly star in the ingenue role with Nanette Fabray at Long Beach Civic Light Opera. But that was months, and many miles, away. Bacall's weakness as a singer was more than made up by her earthy, sensual charisma as a woman who grew better with age.

After the show, I went for a walk with Anne-Marie, a German I'd met in the balcony. She was blond, a little stern but pretty and about 10 years older. She was an English teacher travelling alone and staying in a special women's hostel. We agreed to meet the next evening and I got back to Petts Wood on the last train. It was very late and the house was dark, so I slept in the back yard in my sleeping bag.

I greeted them the next morning, shared tea, took a welcome shower and headed back into London, this time with all my stuff in tow. I'd never see Rolley or his mum again, but he knew he was always welcome should he come to L.A. I guess he never did.

There was a heat wave in London, with afternoon temperatures nearing the 90s. Nobody here had AC and some neglected older ladies were reportedly dying in their homes. I found a public locker for my backpack, located under a bridge near the station, so I could roam the city unencumbered. I did what I could of the British Museum, the bits and pieces of a far-flung empire brought back and put on display, as well as endless rooms of paintings.

The Tube was particularly fun and easy to ride, so well-marked with its color-coded lines. I'd been down in a few subways before, but this was the most far-flung yet simplest to navigate. Big Ben, the Parliament House, Westminster Abbey, the Tower all lay before me in the coming days.

I'd made a date to meet Anne-Marie that evening at in front of Harrod's, off Picadilly Circus. We walked to an outdoor theater in a park to see Shakespeare's "Midsummer's Night Dream." Appropriately titles, as Anne-Marie was my midsummer's night dream. We walked around the city in the balmy evening after the show, talking and holding hands. Her father had died at Stalingrad when she was only 3, and she and her mother ended up in East Germany which she fled before the barbed wire went up. She taught English near Freiburg and still hoped to marry and have children. She was flying back via Frankfurt the following day, so this was as much of a vacation romance as she'd have, and she valued it and the hours we spent together.

I would see her again, 5 years later, happily married with rosy-cheeked little boy. She took a Saturday to drive may all around the Black Forest and her little medieval town of Gengenbach, an unbombed jewel in the Rhineland. I last saw her and her husband Rolf as the left me at the station for the night train the Milan. Danke schoen, Anne-Marie.

It was very late when I got back to the locker where all my stuff was safely stashed. Too late. The area under the bridge has been secured by a roll down grated gate, probably to keep people for sleeping there. I couldn't get my stuff, not even my sleeping bag. A nearby hotel was way too expensive. I lay down in some landscaped areas, using my fold out city map as my only blanket. Luckily it stayed warm enough through the night, as I was wearing only a thin, long-sleeved embroidered cotton shirt I'd gotten in India. It was a fitful night.

The next morning I went to a cut-rate travel bureau who referred me to a hostel out in Clapham Common, a few easy stops on the tube. It was a friendly place run by a sports club. It had a men's and women' bunkroom and a pub in the basement. It was about \$5. a night, which included s hearty English breakfast. It was my home for the next four nights.

The place looked like a modest 2-story home from the outside, bereft even of a sign. The pub was homey, a mix of cut-rate travelers who came and went and regular locals who drank and chatted

together. I'd heard a lot about Brits drinking "warm beer" but cool English room temperature still tasted pretty good, compared to Aussie's ice cold preference.

There was a large group of Portuguese high school kids staying there with Ana Bela as the sweetest and most fluent in English. There was a controversy about Premier Caetano's visit, with Portugal still fighting colonial wars to hang on to its African colonies. That forced her into the middle of middle of some animated conversations with left-leaning locals. UK and Portugal had the longest bilateral alliance in the world, dating back to the 1300s, so she should be given a break.

There were Yanks staying there, too, including several from Orange Coast College, or "Coast" as they referred to it. We coasted around London, of which Pepys never tired. I spent Sunday at Speaker's Corner at Hyde Park, engaging all kinds of people on all topics. There were Irish nationalists blasting the Crown, all sides of the Arab-Israeli conflict going at it and speakers of various religious stripes. Some had crowds, curious or angry. Others were virtually ignored.

Clapham is a modest working-class suburb on the south side of London, where my typical fare was fish and chips wrapped in newspaper, with on occasional curry chicken bowl—cheap enough for my dwindling reserve.

I shopped around at some cut-rate travels agencies that catered to and found a one-way ticket to New York for about \$120. Now I knew I'd get home. The flight left September 1, which gave me about another week in England. I'd use that to visit Pat up in Manchester.

I checked out early in the morning and took the tube as far north I could to Colindale. I walked to the main northbound highway and got a ride right away with a trucker. He was heading all the way north to Perth, in Scotland. Tempting—a ride all the way to Scotland. I could say I'd visited both Perths, at opposite ends of the realm. But I had to see Pat in Hazel Grove, which he was passing right through. I'd called ahead so she was expecting me.

We spent half the day driving through the midlands and around Birmingham. He bought me lunch at a roadside restaurant and we chatted lightly about family and politics. It was late afternoon when he dropped me off just south of Manchester, in the village of Hazel Grove.

Pat lived in a comfy 2-story brick cottage with her mother, who was in the house the whole time I was there. They were both at home at happy to see me. They brought me tea and sandwiches and I we traded stories of our trip from Bangkok, where we'd met.

Pat had flown from Bangkok-to-Calcutta, where she joined a Penn World overland bus to London. It wasn't quite as casual as the famed "Hippie Bus" but did offer all the sites of overland travel while sticking to a fixed itinerary with pre-set stops. She paid about \$750 up front, plus all hotels and meals separately in between. It took 72 days.

I had taken longer, seen more countries and spent considerably less, but for a solo English far from home, it was a pretty adventurous trip. We speculated on what it would have been like making the trip together, on our own. We traded stories and experiences. She would be starting soon as a teacher, and looked to settle down.

I was shown to my room, very nice with a view of their backyard rose garden. The next day, we took a bus into Downtown Manchester, about an hour away. She showed me as much of the city as she could. I'd taken my backpack with me, so she saw me off at a nearby interchange as she headed home. I thanked her profusely, with regards to her hospitable mum. We traded a couple of Christmas cards before losing touch.

I got a ride with a young couple driving a VW bus, passing through Liverpool and on into Wales. We stopped for groceries at the beautiful village of Betwys-y-Coed, with its slate-gray buildings crowding the narrow main highway and nestled into a verdant valley of cold running creeks. It was one of the most beautiful places I'd ever seen.

Another half hour took us to Capel Curig, where there was a large camping area to spread out my

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sleeping bag. The couple had been quarrelling some, and I knew this would be my last stop with them—all the way from Manchester they'd taken me. It was Bank Holiday—a 3-day weekend that traditionally marked the end of summer—so the ground was filled with vacationers.

There was a pub in the village where I grabbed a beer. Then a fight broke out and the place cleared out and I returned to camp/

I lay down my sleeping bag in the open meadow, surrounded by the time-worn hills of northern Wales, gentle and undulating. I felt suspended in time and place. Behind me lay seven months and three-quarters of the globe. I was secure now that I had a ticket to the U.S., but it would be many weeks before I'd reach California and home. I had a week left to float here in Britain, floating now between the starry moonless sky and the soft fertile ground of a Welsh paddock surrounded by scattered vacationers.

They, too, were suspended between another passing summer and the fall ahead. Like the 3-day Labor Day weekend at home, this was a time to look back at the summer, in nostalgia or regret. The weather was still unseasonably warm, and my light sleeping bag I'd carried from New Zealand was still adequate. I drifted off.

In the morning, I ate a couple of apples and some cheese that Pat had packed for me my morning before I'd left Manchester. I gathered my things and headed to the road. I easily picked up a few rides throughout the beautiful green countryside.

One of my rides treated me to lunch in Bala, at the shore of the lake of the same name. Bala Lake, or Llyn Tegid in Welsh. This is the heart of the Welsh-speaking country, the only place I could hear people speaking it in one-on-one street conversations, I strained to overhear. I had a leisurely afternoon with a few rides and a few villages to wander through. It was an enchanting time.

In late afternoon, I arrived in Corris where there was a youth hostel I checked into. About \$1.50 in a bunk room. I wandered about the town and came upon a large furry gray cat that I petted along a bridge. Her fur matched that of the slate gray roofs so typical here. A middle-aged lady walking by striking up a conversation—Catherine was her name. It was her cat She took me home with her to meet her husband. It was a cozy affair with a few stuffed chairs and old family photos on the walls. Hugh was Welsh and spoke it fluently, and hearing of my linguistic interest, took out his large Welsh bible and began reading. It was melodious with rare sounds, like speaking backward.

I marveled that I'd been around the world speaking English because of the influence of the British Empire, yet here barely 3 hours from London survived a tongue as different as any I'd heard.

They shared some dinner with me, then I returned to the hostel, sated, happy and grateful. Later I would trade Christmas cards with them for the next 10 years, when Catherine told me Hugh had passed away. My mystical vision of faraway Corris.

The hostel had the usual cross section of backpackers, young couples and locals. I drifted off. No one was snoring in the guys' bunk room, thankfully.

The next day I had a succession of rides that would take me all the way back to London by late night.

By noon, I'd reached the Irish Sea at Aberystwyth, an old castle and university town ideal for walking, exploring and dawdling—which I did as if in a dream. I was treated by a friendly local in Llandidrod Wells; sandwiches, stew and piece of cake. The whole day had been a piece of cakes; short distances, plentiful rides, interesting conversation and beautiful scenery. The heat wave had ended now, and fall was in the air.

I would have been happy to stay in Worcester, the Cotswolds, or Shakespeare's hometown of Stratford-on-Avon. However, I'd gotten a ride all the way back into London with a young talkative couple in a VW van, so I went with the flow. My flight was just two days away.

They took me directly back to Clapham Common, but the hostel was overbooked with a big

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group in from Italy. It was late, I'd nowhere else to go and money was tight, I slept out in their small backyard under a tree.

The next day, they referred me to a cheap B & B in Finsbury Park, a short ride away in the tube. It was in a ramshackle century-old mansion in which 3-4 beds were crammed into each room. It would be my last night in England and not a pleasant one. Two of my roommates were Scottish alcoholics and the other of unknown origin, who affected a very effeminate accent and wore only speedos while in the room. The beds were so close together, he could pretend he was rolling over in his sleep, while inadvertently his open hand on my tush, to which I had to replay "Get your hand off my ass or I'm gonna kick your ass!" That seemed to do it.

That day I had wandered about, making one last attempt at Serena, to no avail. I linked up with an American girl for that evening, where we later met up with an older local businessman who treated us to late night drinks at a private club he took us to. He may have had private hope, but that was all that came of the night.

I boarded my flight the next day at Heathrow. It was some kind of charter that had sold extra seats at the discount I'd gotten and most of the passengers seemed to be American students returning from group tours to Europe. I was wearing the black leather jacket I'd bought in Kathmandu and checked in my beat-up blue backpack with my sleeping bag on a few clothes and mementos inside.

On the flight I chitchatted with a few teachers who'd accompanied their students on the trip. They were in awe of my trip and adventures, but I, too, was in awe that they had steady secure jobs with enthusiastic kids. I had teaching in my vague plans when I returned. I didn't know it then, but my first position was just two years away at St. Joseph school in Placentia.

My immediate plan was to hitch hike across the U.S., staying with friends and relatives along the way. Some knew I was coming; others would be totally surprised. They were about 200 miles apart, an easy day's thumbing, and were scattered about the country. It would be a connect-the-dots game to see them all, but I had the time. Time. Time like I might never have again. Time and enough money, maybe \$100 cash when I changed it at the airport. In New York I planned to visit Sylvia in Queens and my old college friend Barry in New Jersey.

U S A

For some reason, the plane was rerouted to Washington, DC and we were taken by charter bus into New York. Fine. It was dark when we arrived at Dulles is far from the sites of the capital, so the trip was an uneventful ride through 5 states and ending at the Port Authority bus terminal at about midnight.

A friendly guard there assured me I could sleep in the station, as long I was awaiting a connection—which I sorta was. A connection with my country. A connection back home to California. He even showed me an out-of-the-way spot on the pavement that would be dark and fairly obscure until morning. "No one will bother you here" he assured me. That was nice.

Before settling down for the night, I got out to take a look at the city. It was my first time in New York, and walking down 42nd Street at midnight was a passing parade. This was 1973 and the peep shows and strip clubs were crowding the Broadway theaters. Giant smoke rings wafted from the hole in the mouth of the happy Camel smoker on the billboard.

I slept in the bus station that night, awakening at first light. I called Sylvia.

Sylvia and I had fallen in love one night two summers before when I met her working in Glacier Park, Montana. She was staying with her two girls, 9 and 11 during a New York-to-Oregon road trip to visit relatives. She was 35, with a blond beauty that hid a horrible divorce that had left her devastated. I

was 21, and we shared a brief passion that helped restore her self-worth, something I was quite happy

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to do. She sent me provocative photos and sweet love letters during my senior year in college, but there was nowhere it could go. She later remarried to Fred and had another child at 37. Baby Tara.

I'd gotten a letter from her at the American Express office in Vienna, assuring me I'd be welcome for a visit and that Fred was happy I'd "put a little zip" in her life when she needed it. I called her in the morning and she gave instructions about how to get out to Queens on the subway, where we'd pick me up. Her NY accent was just I'd remembered it.

It was daunting down in the subway—none of the friendly color-coding of the London tube. The cars were a colorful cacophony of graffiti. The giant, stylized letters could pass as urban folk art, but there were layers and layers of them indicating the City had given up all hope of visual maintenance. The 70s were a tough decade for New York City.

After passing under the East River, the subway rose up to become an el, and I could see Shea Stadium and the airport. Sylvia was waiting in a station wagon when I arrived, and hook me to her neat compact house in College Point. Her older girls were at school, but Fred was there and greeted me warmly. Little baby Tara was so cute, their pride and joy.

Sylvia was just as I remembered from two summers before when we walked along Swiftcurrent Lake outside the Many Glacier Hotel, not knowing exactly what to do with this sudden attraction, this meeting of two worlds. She was statuesque and fully formed, yet with an innocence that was so sweet. I was too taken with myself for being so attracted to one 14 years older. Her parents had both come from Germany and she belonged in a tightly knit German protestant church and social world. She'd married at 18, then split up at 34 over her husband's affair.

I toured the small house and the doughboy pool in the backyard, then slept on her couch a few hours. I'd called my friend Barry from Oxy. And he agreed to drive to the City and meet me that night. Sylvia took me back to the subway station and bid goodbye. I wouldn't see her again, but did exchange Christmas card for years. I recently got her new address through Spokeo and sent her a card. I got a nice letter back from her retirement home in Florida. She's now 82, a grandma several times over. Fred died 20 years ago.

I met Barry in the lobby of the Hilton. We'd been close in college, where we'd pulled a number of capers together. We were charter members of the OTRs, an alternative frat I'd helped create my junior year among some close dorm cronies. We had our secret handshake, songs, Rag newsletter and our faux Latin battle cry *Oh Shihbigtidius Rex*. Barry had made me a Mets fan when they won in all in 1969 and my Dodger loyalty was dormant.

We walked around the City late that night, Barry and a friend he'd brought. We talked to a guy in a ramshackle homemade camper parked along 5th Avenue. We bought milkshakes at an all-night deli. Then we got back to his place in Belmar, NJ.

I slept in the next day, hanging around his house and watched some college football. He has some work in the morning, so I went to the beach--"the shore" as they call it. Barry's apartment had a couple of roommates and I was welcome to sleep on the couch for a few days with no hassle.

The next day Barry took me to Ocean Grove, "God's Square Mile." It had been founded by a Methodist revivalist group in the 1890s, a seaside resort for the temperate and reverent. It was Sunday, so no cars were allowed into the tiny town, the streets filled with residents, vacationers and sightseers. He took me to the Great Auditorium during a service, sitting in the balcony. All built of wood in the 1890s and with a capacity of over 10,000, it was a marvel of Victorian optimism, style and technology.

We went to a cafeteria converted from a kitchen of one of the grand mansions that lined the main street, eating in the living room. Very homey. Hundreds of summer tents were pitched in the park outside, rented out to vacationers by the month. Revivalism among Methodists had faded, and many vacationers were not particularly religious, but the Sunday ban on cars and temperance were strictly

abided by.

I hung out for the next couple of days at Barry's apartment, going to the shore and planning my next move. I'd gotten in touch with John Albrecht, another Oxy classmate, who lived in Philadelphia and was soon driving back to LA. John picked me up in the morning and we headed west in his jam-packed VW. I bid Barry farewell. I've stayed in touch with him ever since, on occasional forays to NY/NJ, and when he visits the West Coast.

John picked me up in the afternoon and we made our way to Wilkes College in Wilkes-Barre, PA, where we were able to sleep on some dorm couches where his friend was in school. The town had seen better days during the height of its mid-century industrial boom and seemed to be in slow decline. The next night we crashed at some friends of his in Selinsgrove, where I had my first Rolling Rock beer. When it reached the West Coast in the 90s, I was able to savor again that distinct painted white-label-on green bottle and think back to '73.

John wasn't in a huge hurry to get to LA, and I even less so. We regaled ourselves with college hijinks of the previous year, like the library TG and when we took flares, flashlights and signs up Fiji Hill behind Oxy to harass the LAPD helicopter, The copper coppers were new back then, shining their spotlights down below at the slightest provocation.

John's wildest stunt was riding on top of the rooter bus to the Oxy-Pomona game after the bus driver wouldn't let him on. He grabbed the rear ladder, climbed up to the luggage rack and hung on for dear life all the way to Claremont to cheer our 14-8 victory over the Sagehens.

John was an ATO at Oxy, so we were able to sleep in the living room at the house at UVA in Charlottesville, then at UT in Knoxville, travelling the beautiful Blue Ridge Parkway in between. The colors were about to turn in a way I'd never seen in SoCal.

We finally parted ways in Chattanooga. John was heading west to L.A. I was heading south to Atlanta to visit relatives. I easily got a couple of rides into downtown, where Aunt Bev picked me up and took me to suburban Decatur. "Bob-and-Bev." They were almost one word growing up. Uncle Bobby was mom's younger brother and had lived many places throughout the country while in the sporting goods industry. Two of my cousins—Scott and Peter—were staying with them in their spacious home in a golfing resort. Bobby was a hale-fellow-well-met type of uncle and Bev was as nice an aunt as you'd find.

I picked up some much-needed cash when I helped Scott paint the doors of the condos. The Association had hired him—an annual door painting came with the homeowner fees.

I would stay close to all of them for many years until Bob and Bev passed away in the 2010s. Scot went on to invent Croc Shoes and remains a top manager in the company, with homes in China, Italy and Newport Beach, where he still hosts the annual family day-after-Christmas party.

I called home from their place, assuring all I was safe and on schedule to return in another month or so. Before then, I would stop at friends and relatives a few hundred miles apart—easy hitch hiking distance. I also called Ginger, an old co-worker from Glacier Park two summers before. She worked as a stewardess for Delta, so we arranged to meet down at Hartsfield Airport where Bev dropped me off.

Ginger was happy to see me and had a few days off, so she took me to her parents' house about an hour south in Thomaston. It was late when I arrived, so I was ushered into my own room in the richly paneled home; a room of one of her older brothers, now gone. Ginger still had her own room in the house. Her parents were very nice, and after breakfast Ginger drove me around the countryside, highlighted by a visit to Warm Springs, the "Little White House" where FDR had taken in the soothing waters for his polio-afflicted body and where he died in 1945.

We had Sunday dinner back in Thomaston, where Ginger's dad was watching the end of the Falcons' pummeling the Saints, 62-17. They liked the Falcons, but the real loyalty was to Auburn, where Ginger had graduated in 1972. At Glacier, Ginger had been the best friend (for the Summer) of

my girlfriend (for the Summer) Linda Henderson. Linda went to Baylor, who rarely won, and Ginger was an Auburn girl, who won a lot. That reflected on the relative intensity of their loyalties.

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The next morning, Ginger drove me into Alabama and gave me a tour of the Auburn campus. She still had ties her through her Chi Omega sorority alumni group. Mid-morning, we said goodbye as she dropped me off on the west side of town. That was the last I'd ever see her, but we've kept in touch lately on Facebook, especially when they beat Alabama. "War Eagles all the way, Teddy!" she last said to me. It was her nickname for me after I my Elvis impersonation ongoing *Teddy Bear*: which she loved so much.

I got a ride quickly. I looked the driver right in the eye and smiled—my best highway pose. I could sense his hesitation as he drove passed, then stopped on the gravelly should about a hundred feet past me. I grabbed my pack and ran toward the car, lest the driver change his mind. He didn't.

I'd ride with him for much of the day as he took me across the breadth of the state. A friendly travelling salesman, he was headed to Tuscaloosa to service a major account. Just my good fortune, a drive spanning the most intense college football rivalry then—and even more, now.

"Chris, I don't normally pick up hitch-hikers, but I got a long way to go and you looked like a safe, friendly guy" he told me. My roadside pose and demeanor had worked again. We talked a lot about the coming football season. "Chris, I'm an Auburn man, but I do respect Alabama and Coach Bryant. I just have to hate him one day of the year!"

He bought me lunch, ordering typical Southern fare like fried okra. Before dropping me off in Tuscaloosa, he showed me the private street "where the Alabama coaching staff lives."

He also had warned me, "Chris, Mississippi isn't like Alabama. Much poorer. You don't see nice shopping centers and things like we have. It's just a different life over there."

I don't remember his name, but it was one of the best of hundreds of rides I'd gotten in '73. Alabama is not normally considered part of the Hippie Trail. In fact, it was a dangerous place for hippies, as rednecks and sheriffs loved to hassle anyone resembling them. For, me, the whole world was my hippie trail, and my first foray into the South was as illuminating as anywhere else I'd been.

I got a lift to Gorda, then another one into Starkville, Mississippi, where things were a bit different. From there to Winona, where I got a ride up the I-55 to Batesville. From there, a local farmer took me into Marks, where I was delivered right to the doorstep of Rex, who I'd worked with the Many Glacier Hotel. "Norby, I never thought I'd see your ass, again!" was his friendly greeting. It was late, so I crashed on the sofa after a few beers.

The next day, we had lunch over at his parents' house, a big, friendly clan honored to have such a distant guest as me. Rex had grown up in Marks, graduated from Delta State and now worked in the family appliance sales and service business, living in a small frame house with a friend.

"Norby, you be proud of us. We got a nigger sheriff, now," was Rex's way of extolling and bemoaning racial progress. Since blacks had regained their voting rights recently, they were now a majority of the electorate in Quitman County and throughout most of the Mississippi Delta.

I headed north the next day, through Memphis and across the mile-long Mississippi bridge and into Arkansas. It was a pretty typical day hitching, with about a dozen rides getting me into St. Louis by late afternoon. An old high school friend—Ed Humenny—was in med school at Washington University and I had a standing invitation to stay in his apartment. My last lift dropped me near Busch Stadium and the stainless steel arch, amidst an inner city in the midst of a long, slow decline.

I called Ed and he picked me up, giving me a quick St. Louis tour along with his colorful commentary. I had the couch to myself. That night we watched the much-hyped Bobby Riggs-vs-Billie Jean King *Battle of the Sexes* tennis match on TV.

Ed and I had co-produced a student movie in high school *Ozone 367* a sort of sci-fi spoof that featured many off-limits places on our old FHS campus. He was a confidante during my 1967 ASB president effort. On election eve, he predicted that I'd get 40%, just 10% short of the actual tally. My

own best friend didn't even think I could win! While in St. Louis, I linked up with another old classmate, Wayne Ritchie, a math whiz who'd served with me on the Executive Board.

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I recrossed the Mississippi, heading east on I-70 to Terre Haute, Indiana. I walked in on a dry cleaners managed by Chip Calwell, another old Glacier buddy. Calwell was freaked out with delight.

"Norby, I had a vague idea you were out there somewhere, but I didn't really think you'd ever make it to Terre Haute" he told me. He was working on a counselling degree from Indiana State, and we went to a football game that night against Central Michigan. *March On, March On, Ye Fighting Sycamores!* Chip could sing along. The next night, we went bar-hopping with a few friends in Bloomington, home of the Hoosiers of IU. Chip was full of Indiana lore and local stories, loyal but jaded about his hometown. I saw Chip once again, about 25 years later in Glacier Park.

I got a few easy lifts up to Palos Heights, a Chicago suburb where high school friend Lee Hardy attended Trinity Christian College. Lee was a self-taught graphic artist, and had personally designed and drew my every ASB campaign poster. He was the school newspaper editor his senior year, serving on the Executive Board with Wayne and me.

Lee had spent a summer in Europe a year before, and it was upon his advice that I went to Kardamena (Greece) and L'Abri (Switzerland).

Lee was a little older than the other students, erudite with a dry sense of humor. I attended the required daily chapel of this close-knit Protestant Reformed campus. Lee didn't have a car, so I remained on the fringes of Chicagoland and left the next day. I appreciated the couch in the dorm lobby and the guest pass he got me for the dining hall.

I was now heading west on I-80. It was cold, drizzly with a slate gray early autumn sky. The black leather biker jacket I'd brought from Nepal felt real comfy now. I got a ride to Joliet where I splurged and paid \$5.95 for a lunch buffet at a café next to the gas station. I was making good enough time and felt I'd definitely be in Rock Island before dark.

My luck held. Walking back down the on-ramp toward the interstate, I passed a backpacking couple. The girl was cute and smiling, the guy scruffy and sour. He'd hide in the bushes as she thumbed solo, then the plan was to re-emerge so an unsuspecting driver would have to take them both. It wasn't working.

"This place is a bummer" he told me as I approached them. "We've been stuck here for 2 hours—it's a bad, bad trip!"

As was hitchers' etiquette, I walked past them 20 yards or so to take up my position, leaving them with first crack at the next car. It was a 1950 white Ford that passed them right up, even though the driver couldn't see her boyfriend behind the bushes. He stopped for me, instead. He was overweight with his belly touching the wheel.

"Thanks for picking me up, when you could have picked up that girl back there" I offered.

"I never pick up broads," he responded. "Nothing but trouble. They'll ask for money, then claim you raped them. Rip-off!"

I got a couple more rides that took me right up to Augustana College in Rock Island. There I met up with Kathy and Becky, two Glacier Park co-workers in their senior year. They were amazed and happy to see me, and I regaled them with stories as they fixed dinner in their tiny apartment.

Both grew up on farms. Kathy's tall, blond, willowy with an easy smile and laugh. Becky was darker, shorter, deeper and more serious. She was part Indian and had been adopted by her Danish-American parents. It was with her that I'd had some brief chemistry during my first week at the park. Life is compressed when you're thrown in for just 2 months with people from all over the country in an isolated mountain setting. So many Glacier people with whom I was reconnecting, like reliving the Summer of '71

They lived above a garage just up the street above the leafy Lutheran campus. I awoke early from the small couch and left when they walked to their morning classes. I was sure I'd never see them

again, but this time was one more time than I would have thought before. Goodbye Kathy and Becky.

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My trip that day took me only about 75 miles west to Iowa City, where I was to meet Gail, another Glacier girl in grad school at the U of I. Or so I'd thought. She wasn't there, and I couldn't locate her. The dorm where she'd been living said she'd moved out the past summer. No problem. I did get a bed in a bunk room at a hostel for \$3 and walked around the campus and town till dark. I reached Gail by phone. She was happy to hear from me, apologized for the misunderstanding and explained she was now living in Chicago.

I would see her 25 years later on a road trip to the Northwest with my son Alex and nephew Perry. She lived with her husband and daughter in Helena, Montana, where they happily put us up for a night and showed us around.

My next day's leg would take me across Iowa and up into western Minnesota, where Grandma Norby lived in Canby and Aunt Bernice and Uncle Lindy lived in a farm a few miles out of town. I was hassled by an Iowa State Trooper in Des Moines, where I was searching for the right off-ramp. Just after that, I'd boarded a VW bus bound for San Francisco, sitting with a nice girl in the far back seat who welcomed the company. Very tempting, but family came first, and they dropped me off outside of Omaha.

There I was on a quiet on-ramp that joined the Interstate going north. It swept up ahead of me, up a mile-long gentle grade. Traffic was light. I picked up something peculiar from the roadside gravel and detritus. It was a link of steel chain, about an inch long. It could have been lying by the road for years. It was link, but not linked to anything. Just by itself. How did it get separated from the rest of the chain? It was strong, circular, complete, yet unattached. Was there an allegory there for me? I put it in the pocket of my jacket, where it remains today.

Then I got a ride headed north through Sioux City and Sioux Falls, then back into Minn.

Rides we frequent on the 2-lane country highways, but usually short. The last obliging farmer took me right to the end of Lindy & Bernice's driveway up to their farm. The Hanson Farm. The 2-story classic house, the red barn with the silo, the pig pen, the woods, the fields, the crops and cattle—it was all there, a timeless touchstone with the land and a couple of summers I'd been there growing up.

They were so happy to see me. This was family, now. Bernice Dad's youngest sister, who stayed close to home and married Canby High School sweetheart Lindy, both full Norwegians. They'd been on the farm ever since, having raised my two cousins, both in their late 20s and long gone.

Minn-talk is definitely an accent, but also a cadence, reflecting widespread Scandinavian roots. But it's also similar to Canadian accent. "Oh, sure, now" "by golly", "don'tcha know, now" and "you betcha"

I spent three very quiet nights on the farm in a cousin's upstairs room. We went into Canby to visit Grandma Norby who joined for dinner at nearby Lake Cochrane. I walked around the town of barely 2,000—smaller than when Dad had left it in 1937. I got to see Canby get throttled by Ortonville in high school football. Small towns in the Midwest are much smaller than they are in Southern California, where places like Fullerton still claimed a small-town vibe. No—125, 000 is not a small town—2,000 definitely is.

That would be the last time I'd see Grandma Norby, as she would die the following year at age 90, taking her famous cinnamon roll and lefse recipes with her. The next time I'd see Lindy 15 years later, he was suffering from Alzheimer's, with Bernice tending to him 24/7. He didn't really recognize me, but could still play his accordion.

That same visit, Dad drove me around Canby, extolling the virtues of growing up in such a small idyllic place, compared to suburban LA. At the same time he extolled the innocence of his childhood, however, he told me of bootleggers, a suicide in the ice house, a deadly farmers' strike against the creamery and his best friend killing himself over a high school romance gone bad. And there was also a

grouchy neighbor's Model "T" he and his friends hot-wired and drove around town before returning it—minus one headlight.

Those times didn't seem that simple to me, but of course things always look rosier in past tense. The golden gauzy haze of a youthful retrospect trumps all. Stuff kids can get arrested for today are innocent hijinks of the past.

It took me a half a day's hitching to make it north to Fergus Falls, where I met the Sandersons and stayed in their well-appointed home. Jane Sanderson had been a girlfriend of my brother Eric's during his summer of '68 at Glacier Park, and he'd kept in touch ever since. I'd seen Jane just the summer before, in a big reunion at Swiftcurrent Campground last summer where I'd met Jane, a happy, blonde gushing with energy. Jane was not at Fergus Falls when I'd stopped by—her parents and a sister were, and they were very hospitable. The big news on TV that night was the coup in Chile that deposed Allende.

My next 3-day stretch would take me across the length of North Dakota and Montana, chilly now, with a hint of Fall in the air. Fields were brown and the scattered trees were changing color. Traffic was so light on the Interstate that I took to hitch hiking right on the freeway, where I did get rides. At Jamestown, I cut northwest on US 52 to Minot, where I picked up a few things from a convenience store and headed west on US 2.

That afternoon was like something out of the Twilight Zone episode appropriately titled "The Hitch-Hiker". It was a 2-lane highway and I was standing outside of Stanley when a white delivery truck passed me by, the side panels emblazoned with potato chip packages and other products he was supplying to communities ahead. He must have given me a glance, and I paid him no more mind than the thousands of vehicles that had passed me by along the Hippie Trail.

Then a guy picked me up in a two-seated sports car, rare for these parts. He sped a head and quickly passed that lumbering truck and dropped me at the next junction. A few minutes later, the same potato chip truck passed by. Right after, a guy in a pick-up truck gave me a lift, passed by that same white paneled truck, then dropped me far up the road before turning up ND 42. For the third time, the same truck approached me. This time he stopped.

"I could get fired for picking up hitch-hikers" he told me. "But I'd passed you up twice before, and it was getting weird, like the Twilight Zone. No way I'd pass you a third time!"

I thanked him and we chatted as he took me into Williston. It was getting too cold to try to sleep out anywhere, so I spent the \$5 for a small room in an old hotel with a bath down the hall. Luxurious!

The next day was a chilly, cloudy and beautiful day to be on the road. It was a long haul into Chester, Montana, where I spend the night at an old hotel for \$7. The building is still there—now the refurbished Westland Suite, transformed from an old railroad rooming house to something upscale. Then, it hadn't changed much since the Great Northern went through 80 years before. Still, 7.50 was a lot, as I was now well under \$100 in cash.

The next day I made into Babb, on the Blackfeet Reservation just out of Glacier National Park. Ah, Glacier. My family roots there go back to my Dad living at the St. Paul YMCA, when he got a summer job there through Great Northern Railroad, which then owned the park hotels. They hired mostly Minnesotans to run them, as they were headquartered in the Twin Cities. He worked there three summers, then my brother Eric for three summers, then I got a job in '71.

The trails, the view, the people were all defining experiences. So many college students from around the country—still predominantly Minnesota Scandinavian---it was an existential experience of compressed time, relationships and epic mountain hikes. And now, my Glacier friends make my Hippie Trail much more practical.

The tiny town of Babb was on leased Indian land, but the Motel, store, gas station and café (One

of each) were all owned by Thronsons. I knew then through my brother Eric, whose girlfriend (and

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future wife) Geri he'd met while at Glacier, and she was part of the clan that owned the town. Geri was in Missoula when I arrived, but I'd met her mother before and she happily let me crash in an extra bedroom.

I got a ride up to the Many Glacier Hotel, now shuttered for the winter. The alpine valley was quiet, and the surrounding peaks and glaciers timeless, like I'd never left the place. The road ended at the hotel, a massive, wooden rambling structure that still stands, though now tilting toward the lake. The employee dormitory's still there, too, where I'd bunked three-to-a room.

I had a Rainier beer at the Babb Bar and crashed for the night. It was in Glacier as a summer employee where I'd first learned to hitch-hike, and the next day magic continued. I got a ride with a midwestern couple in a station wagon, all the through the park on the Going-to-the-Sun Highway, with scenic stops along the way. The mountains were nearly bare of snow, quiet and brooding and awaiting the oncoming winter that would close the road entirely.

At Whitefish, I spent nearly all the rest of my money on an all-night Amtrak ticket to Spokane. While awaiting the train, I took in a Whitefish-Kalispell high school football game, a huge rivalry in these parts. I slept in the coach car as best I could, imagining the scenery in the blackness outside. There was a feeling of coasting, now, like my trail was nearing its end. I got into Spokane very early and took a city bus out to Whitworth College, where my sister Nancy had enrolled as a Freshman that same fall.

I stayed on-campus at the home of college president Ed Lindaman, who was an old family friend. Ed went from managing operations for North American Rockwell's Apollo Project to an author, lecturer and self-described "futurist." We knew Ed and his vivacious, gracious wife Gerrie through Fullerton Presbyterian Church. They were happy to have me, and hear my Hippie Trail stories.

I stayed at Whitworth a couple of days. I watched the Pirate football team beat Pacific Lutheran. I explored the area with Nancy's old VW, which she'd driven up from Fullerton. One of the guys—Bryan Lindaman was heading back down to Fullerton Monday, and I got a ride with him.

We took US 395 south across the Columbia River and down into eastern Oregon. After Pendleton, it was a 2-lane highway through the Blue Mountains. We talked of many things and he was my best friend for a day and a half and the last person I'd meet along the Hippie Trail. Speeding down through Alturas, past Susanville, we reached Lake Tahoe late at night, and spent a few hours at Harrah's Casino.

Brian busted early and went back to sleep in the car, but I'd doubled and tripled my last \$20, and felt pretty good. My last night on the road was a lucky one—at least, in terms of money.

I slept as Brian drove a leg down to picking up the I5 near Stockton. We grabbed some breakfast at a truck stop south of Fresno, to hear that Yom Kippur War had broken out between Egypt and Israel. Traffic was heavy as we descended into LA, but it didn't matter I knew now I'd make it home, and I had all the time in the world to start a new life—or resume my old one.

As we got off the Riverside Freeway and up Lemon Street, it was if I'd never left—or I'd been gone forever. He dropped me off at the front of my house. I walked up the stairs inside. Mom was there. We embraced.

For me, The Hippie Trail had ended. However, there are still many Hippie Trails out there, both physically and mental. Where and when you go is not as important as the attitude you take with you. The ultimate adventure still lies within.

I came back with was a sense of the possible. A sense that the world is a welcoming place filled with opportunity for adventure—and that people are the ultimate adventure. The people you meet and the person you become.

Most importantly, I learned that happiness is not what you have materially, but in you

relationships with friends and family. It lies not just in things, but in your attitude toward them.

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Gratitude is the most important virtue of all, and I was grateful for the opportunity to make this Trail an important part of my life.

Most of the people I met, the people who helped me and gave me company and affection; the people with who I swapped stories and food—most of these people I never saw again, but a few have become a part of my life.

The travel skills I developed served me in good stead, in South American, in Asia and other places I've travelled since. The last great Hippy Trail out there is to visit the Mud Mosque of Mali. Once I reach there, I will have seen it all. That's for another story, so at 68, with most of my life behind me I want to think forward. It's so easy to look back, but the Hippy Trails that lie ahead—for me, for you—are the most important ones of all.

The Hippy Trail

Feelin' Free in '73

by Chris Norby

The Hippy Trail

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Singapore	15-17
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MAPS:

1. Australia & New Zealand: *Auckland-to-Darwin*
2. South Asia: *Singapore-to-Herat*
3. Iran, Turkey & Europe: *Herat-to-London*

4. USA: *New York-to-Fullerton*