

The Road Less Traveled

The travel bug grabbed hold of me when I was a kid growing up in the South. Every chance we could, my parents and I set off in the family's 1967 Cadillac Coup DeVille and explored back roads, big cities, and long stretches of sandy beaches. Being the youngest, with both my brother and sister away at college, I had the huge gold Caddie's backseat to myself and watched the miles blur past in between Dairy Queen stops, on our quest to see which one made the biggest chocolate dipped cone (outside of Decatur, Alabama). We were transplants from "Up North"—Oregon to be exact—and the segregated South was like a foreign country to us, with their "Yes, Sirs," "No Mamms," and "Y'alls," said with an accent as thick as fried chicken's crunchy crust.

We drove from our Nashville home to the tip of Key West just to ride across Seven Mile Bridge (the longest span at the time), then up to Kitty Hawk to kick up sand where Orville and Wilbur Wright learned to glide. Along the way we stopped at every Civil War memorial this side of the Mason-Dixon Line, for Dad was an engineer and a history fanatic. Once we drove the Caddie to Mexico City to see gigantic Olmec heads and Chapultepec Park's Aztec-era canals, and quench my mother's thirst for Mexican art.

From the back seat of that plush ride, I discovered the world was my oyster. Ever since, my journeys have uncovered pearls. Living in Guatemala as a teenager, I learned to navigate the streets. I would wander Guatemala City for hours on my own, walking miles and taking buses just to discover what was "over there." As an adult, I find strength in those wanderings. For if I could figure it out at 16, by myself, in Spanish, and without a navigational app, I certainly can unravel London's Tube, or Paris' Metro or figure out how to travel to Tangier from Seville, Spain on public transportation. I also learned that if I took a wrong bus, all I had to do was catch the same bus in the return direction in order to end up where I started. Both of these lessons have lowered my blood pressure in many a sketchy locale.

Travel is a central part of my life, so much so that one cousin after reading my descriptive Christmas letters asked if travel is what I do for a living. "Off the beaten tracks" beckon me—a hamlet at the end of Alaska's Kenai Peninsula, a Caribbean island reached via a panga whose outboard motor coughed for an oil change, Tangier's Medina with its pre-dawn invitational chants to prayer (a must do after reading a guide book warning not to spend the night there). No cruise ships, double-decker bus tours, or all-inclusive packages for me.

My itineraries haven't sat well with my family. My oldest daughter, having been dragged to see alligators, bears, and glaciers, once threw a hissy fit in the back of a Peruvian cab. Dodging llamas, chickens, and antiquated vehicles, our driver raced at top speed to catch up to the Machu Picchu bound train we had missed. After an oncoming bus nearly side-swiped us, Lyda screamed, "Why can't you just take me to Disney Land?"

Because we know how the ride turns out, that's why.

Whereas, our family trips are journeys into learning more about the world (i.e. there are no speed limits, or none that are enforced in Cusco, Peru) and ourselves.

I keep a journal of our experiences—a diary of what we did and saw; a record of favorite (and dud) corner cafes, hotels and rented apartments, bakeries with yeasty breads and gooey pastries; as well as our reflections about the places we visit and of each other. Discovering what makes the Harris clan tick is more important than catching the connecting flight or finishing the distance we set out to cycle that day. Because of our travels who knows when or if Lyda would have discovered her passion for cleaning up the ocean, Ava's gift of orchestrating pick-up games of tag among unacquainted children whose language is not English, or that my two daughters, born ten years apart, can collectively decipher train schedules when we have less than five minutes to catch the right one, where at home they fight like cats and dogs.

This edition of Tail Winds is about journeys—the journeys we take on a map and the journeys we take inside ourselves. Some writers tell of wonderful places in our backyard—the Arizona Trail, Arizona cycling rides, and a stone's throw away, Albuquerque, New Mexico. Others write of discoveries while cycling the Italian countryside or climbing an active Guatemalan volcano. In between the near and far, there are stories that tell of cooler, greener, and wetter experiences in Oregon and Washington.

This edition debuts *Journeys* a new column which features an essay on the exploration we take within, how a place or experience or the company we keep while traveling plumbs our depths and exposes something we didn't know about ourselves or weren't able to realize before.

Let's go, come along with me.



Lyda S. Harris Photo

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