One Must Travel Outward

By Benjamin Loehrke

Exactly six months ago today, I did not exist. There are few people that can say this, but I mean it in a very literal sense. There is no record of me being on this earth for July 15th 2006. While this sounds like science fiction, it is far from it. I did not leave the planet, I did not invent time travel, and I did not fall victim to any other anomaly of quantum physics. My method was quite simple, I applied to study abroad for the fall semester, and I bought a ticket on Qantas airways. This brought me away from life as I know it, across the international date-line, out of existence for a day, over the continent of Australia, and into Perth, WA. I landed on July 16th, 2006, and a lifetime has past me since.

Who was I when I left Bloomington in May of 2006? I was a student. I was a person whose longest stretch away from home had only been two months. I was a person who had a cemented group of friends that evolved with and through old hometown friends. I was very attached to my friends and family through phone calls and emails. I was a person who was very grounded geographically to Indiana. I did not even own a passport. Of course, this is only what I knew when I boarded the plane. Worried as I was about overcoming these things, I could never have dreamt of how quickly and unnoticeably all these would change.

The best way to describe the evolution of me throughout my travels, without going into a day-long epic of my antipodean adventures, would be to merely insert segments from my cherished and detailed travel-log. Thus, I bid you to imagine the fascinating life that would have strung together these quotes.

“So here I sit in the Indianapolis airport staring at the rugged tin can that is about to haul me across the country to L.A.”
- Indianapolis 7/13/06

“With my feet firmly on the ground for the last 24 hours, I finally feel like life is progressing to a normal state. By normal I mean not confined to a small seat, fed meals in cute little foil hobby kits, and bathrooms that manage to flush without water.”
- Perth 17/7/06

“We stopped off at a place called Cicerello’s (I think). It apparently used to be a dodgy place on the wharf that served the greatest fish n’ chips.”
- Fremantle 20/7/06

“Allow me to say this, I am happy that Perth enjoys a ridiculous isolation from other cities, because the beach was near empty and pristine. We threw around a football for a while, where the hell we got an American football I will never know, and some of the guys went for a chill in the ocean. It was a great afternoon. Then the sun decided to see what was going on in the other hemispheres. So, with a small patch of clouds providing a great texture for a sunset, the glowing rays of a Western Australia evening sank into the Indian Ocean.”
– Cottesloe 6/8/06
“Next stop, downtown Margaret River. Well, it rained, I couldn’t afford to eat there really, and we ended up eating pb&j outside a Target under a pavilion. You have to love being a cheap student tourist. So, that was Margaret River.”
- Margaret River 12/8/06

“I knew that my time here would fly, but this is ridiculous. I feel like I’ve been here barely long enough to stow away my suitcases, and yet it appears as if they wont be collecting much dust in the fleeting instant that they are wedged above my closet. Time here doesn’t fly, because when an object flies it can see the movement. In Perth, time is the business end of a delinquent bet made with a dodgie mob boss. You know that someday your doorbell will ring, and when it does your legs will be taken out from under you with a tire iron.”
- Perth 15/8/06

“Once I hit the suburbs of Subiaco, I became officially and utterly lost. My only hope at ever finding the second biggest ocean on earth was that I could follow the sun and eventually hit the coast. I knew I had to go up a hill first.”
- Subiaco 16/8/06

“G’day and welcome to the UWA inter-college 5k run. Each with 5 blokes per team, Tommy Moore, St. Georges, Currie, and Trinity are set to race up and down these bloody hills of King’s Park. It might be a beaut of a place for a walk, but the route they picked for these sorry lads was specifically designed so that the runners could be laughed at from passing automobiles.”
- King’s Park 25/8/06

“Floodway!”
- Exmouth 12/9/06

“I finished my last and only exam last Saturday, a fairly painless blood-letting in game theory. Since then, I have been a free man. I haven’t had studies. I haven’t had places to go. However, in being free, I also haven’t had many people to do things with. It seems like most of college is in study mode. So what have I been doing you ask?”
- Perth 10/11/06

“So… Australia was fun. It seems strange to put that in the past tense. For so long my life revolved around making the best of the best which I was given. Now it is all over. What next?”
- Air New Zealand flight #106 20/11/06
“The pressing factor was getting from the trail. We had no way of booking transport. Our only option was to hitch or prey that a bus would stop by the trailhead the next morning. It definitely seemed like we were going to sleep on the side of the road.”

- Rees-Dart Track, Otago, New Zealand 25/11/06

“We were walking in a snow storm, in summer, and through a rain forest. Unique.”
- Routeburn Track, Otago, New Zealand 1/12/06

“In between chats with an Irishman via Sydney and an Englishman via Hong Kong, I am trying to put down what life on and after the Routeburn Track has been. However, between the soon to be Irish plastic surgeon living in Sydney and the want to be rally car driving Englishman, I am finding it tough to split from the company.”
- Queenstown, New Zealand 1/12/06

“It’s been a strange trip leading to this point, and every minute of it has been either wet or amazing.”
- Air New Zealand flight #638 over Nelson Strait 4/12/06

The life that filled the gaps between these quotes will forever be the best months of my life. It is hard to think of a moment that did not either expand my horizons or make me appreciate more the life that I have. I now own an, albeit travel-worn, passport. I have eaten a meat pie. I have traveled more miles in six months than most people do in a lifetime. I have learned that relationships are worth what you make them to be. I now live by the rule of “you should always send people you care about postcards”. I have seen and felt how Americans are viewed from many global perspectives. At times I found this uncomfortable, and at other times I found it hilarious.

If you asked me for the most profound enlightenment of all my adventures abroad, I would most likely sit dumbfounded for a while in a state of euphoric recollection. Either that or I would answer you again with segments of my travel log. At the end of my journeys, with Australia all but over with, I closed off a journal entry with this quote. It maintains to define my experience in Australia and the person that evolved within and from it.

“you cannot appreciate life until you have pushed your concept of it. One must travel outward from what is comfortable. Then with the return, begin the infinite process of introspection. Find the world. Find yourself.”
- Perth 17/11/06

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