by Steven Andrew Martin

Great Expectations

I remember a statement by a man from Israel I met on a bus ride en route to the Dead Sea. He told me, "Travel makes you smarter but less happy."

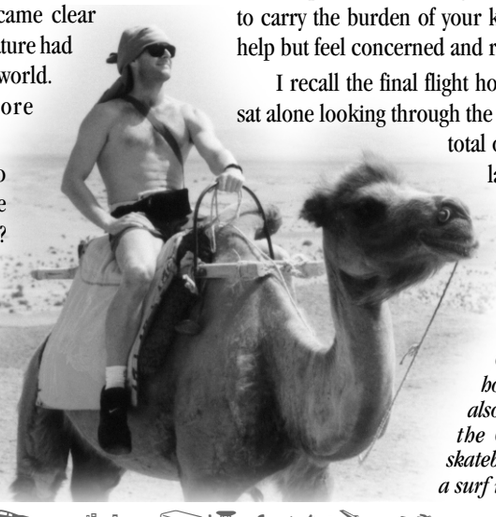
It seems strange to me now that I felt I needed to experience so many places, certain places, to know the world and find happiness. Traveling became my purpose, my inspiration, my destiny. I was a traveler in search of the truth. I had to know China, Japan, and the Middle East. I had to see the Amazon and Australia. I felt incomplete without Egypt, Morocco, and South Africa. I needed Spain, Paris, and Rome. Certainly I couldn't omit North America.

And so I ran to the arms of the world. I truly believed that the more I knew, the more I would enjoy life. The first ten countries I approached romantically, with enthusiasm and optimism. At this point my great expectations were fulfilled. I was seeing the world, having fun, and living my dream of travel.

> *"I had been seduced by the vastness of global knowledge, yet I became deeply concerned because of exposure to the magnitude and complexity of today's global issues."*

With the next ten countries things got more serious, and I knew that I had to continue the quest. I had been seduced by the vastness of global knowledge, yet I became deeply concerned because of exposure to the magnitude and complexity of today's global issues. My hopes for personal fulfillment had turned into a haze of quandary.

Beyond thirty countries lurked the twilight zone. Here emerged a sense of concern, confusion, and frustration. My mind became a sponge, saturated in the water of the world. I witnessed poverty and grave human suffering. I became aware of the many injustices among races and religions. When I added environmental concerns to the picture, it became clear that humanity's raging war on nature had spread to every corner of our world. Retrospectively, I had more questions than answers.



Had I become a cynic? Who were all these people? What were these cultures, races, religions? And most importantly, who am I? I felt bewildered and innominate, a blip on the radar screen of life. I hoped the Buddhist monk I met in China was wrong: "The individual's life is pointless."

I had seen DDT sold by bare hands in Ecuador. I had discovered gold and oil companies pumping mercury and lead into Amazon tributaries. I had witnessed how organized religions could tear apart a Holy Land. I had endured black waves of coal soot in the air of Beijing so thick that I could actually feel my life expectancy drop with each breath. I had encountered aggression, violence, and immeasurable queries regarding health and hunger in Africa. These were a few of the serious global issues that were hard to ignore.

Travel has taught me that I must, as far as possible and without surrender, be tolerant and amenable toward all persons. It has shown me that if you believe strongly in something, you harbor vested interests, often in forms of bigotry and intolerance. I've learned that the limits of my language are the limits of my world. I've come to realize the troubles of others are troubles of my own.

Albert Einstein once said, "The most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it is comprehensible." Do you want to comprehend? If your answer is yes, then you're destined to carry the burden of your knowledge. When I see things that I believe are wrong, I can't help but feel concerned and responsible. It seems as if the more I know — the more I owe.

I recall the final flight home from a fourteen-month journey around the world, when I sat alone looking through the tiny oval window next to my airplane seat. I had visited a grand total of nearly forty countries in my life and knew the tones of thirty languages. I had received a fantastic education but found myself more perplexed than ever. My eyes were fixed below on the puffy white clouds that blanketed the earth. I felt somber, serious, and aged by the ways of the world. Perhaps the jewel of travel comes at an infinite price.

***Steven Andrew Martin**, a student at Hawaii Community College, was internationally recognized for his essay that examines how the dream of world travel matches up with the reality. It was also awarded second place in the state for League of Innovation in the Community College Library Competition. Steve, pictured skateboarding on the Great Wall of China and in the Gobi Desert, is also a surf instructor and lifeguard here in Kona.*

P23GreatExpF6-00.p65 1 3/1/2002, 10:33 AM