

Liminal Travel

THE SPACES IN BETWEEN

VAGO DAMITIO

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to all of those who have encouraged me through the years, supported me, and listened when I start to talk crazy. Mom, Mike, Tim, Fawn, Stephan, Lena, Marie, The Dylans, Hanane and the Souidi Family, Denise, Uncle Larry, Kate, Skye, Sarah, The Rev, Tina, Nick, Dawn, Murray, Leigh-Anne, Kris, Kitty, all of the Walkers, and all of my friends. Thanks for everything. If I ever have a couch, you are all welcome to crash on it for as long as you want. I just hope it is a very big couch so you can all fit on it at once.

Liminal Pages

DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vi
How This Book is Arranged.....	1
Introduction.....	2
A Liminal Traveler.....	4
Hitting the Road.....	7
Finding Accommodation.....	12
Getting Something to Eat.....	17
Where Did My Money Go?.....	25
Keeping in Touch.....	32
Tourism on the Liminal Side.....	41
Activities for the Liminal Traveler.....	45
Getting from Here to There.....	54
What Are You Looking For?.....	60
Liminal Romance.....	65
Reaching a Destination.....	70
Liminal Suffering.....	73
Liminal Spirituality.....	75
A Few Specific Travel Suggestions.....	82
ABOUT VAGO DAMITIO.....	85

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND NOTES

This was written, by design to be a short manual. In keeping with that and the idea that brevity is the soul of wit, I'd like to offer my thanks to you for reading this and will abstain from saying anything more about it.

HOW THIS BOOK IS ARRANGED

I've attempted to set this book up in a way that the reader can consume the main course, the hows, whys, and what-fors of liminal travel without having to digest a lot of additional information.

The chapters are arranged in the order that I think most liminal journeys progress in. We begin with defining the liminal mindset, move on to beginning the journey, and then we progress to the particulars that a liminal traveler is likely to find. Finally, we reach a destination and try to make some sense of what the liminal voyager has hopefully discovered along the way.

Included in most chapters are small excerpts from my own travels in the liminal world used in the main text. My goal is to teach you how to travel differently from everyone else, by traveling as you. It's not perfect for me, nor is it likely to be perfect for you, but it seems to me a pretty good way to start if you haven't a clue as to what to do.

This is not a guide book and I am not trying to exhaustively cover any city, area, country, or state. Instead, I am mentioning a few things that I have found to be noteworthy in each of the places I have been. Some of them are well known, some are major tourist attractions, and some will probably never be mentioned by anyone but me. If you choose to visit them, please approach them with a naked mind. Your experience is bound to be different than my own, but hopefully you will enjoy.

INTRODUCTION

What does it mean to be liminal? If you have studied anthropology, you might be familiar with the term. If you haven't, you probably aren't.

Liminality is the state of being in between. The classic anthropological example is that period of time just before one leaves one stage of life for another. I remember one instructor in university said the bride and groom standing before the altar, before they have said their vows are in the ultimate liminal state. They are not married, but since they are standing at the altar, they are not single either.

So liminality is the state of being between two different stages in life. It is the state of being between two different places. It is the state of being in limbo, a no man's land of neither here nor there.

What does this have to do with travel?

Think about it and you will realize that it has everything to do with travel. Travel is that period of time following when you have left one place and prior to your arrival at a destination. Travel, is a liminal act in itself. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say travel has nearly always been a liminal sort of action.

The truth is, today, travel for most people is about as liminal as the rest of their lives. People know where they are going, how they will get there, where they will stay, what they will do, how to get from point A to point B exactly, and have already arranged money, budgets, expenditures, and every detail of their journey.

The age of the internet and mobile has ripped the soul out of travel. It has reduced the unknown to the mundane and made the trials of uncertainty as tame as the trials of using the toilet. Worst case scenario is there is no paper or you might have to use a plunger. Chances are, with travel insurance and e-concierge, that this is not the case, worst case scenario is that the plumber is waiting outside to hand you paper or plunge for you.

There is no longer any uncertainty for most travelers. There is no in-between state except for being between booked transport, booked accommodation, booked activities, and booked returns to booked lives. This is incredibly sad.

Just as our adolescent populations are struggling with the lack of a rite of passage to tell them they are no longer children, another rite of passage has all but disappeared. For travel and the uncertainties associated with it, has always been a way youth could prove itself capable of handling the hardships of adulthood. Somehow that doesn't seem to hold true when there is a permanent cell phone link between the child and parent and as soon as hardship arises, a press of the button brings help from home.

This brings me closer to what this book is about. This book is about the traveler who doesn't want all of that. This book is about the traveler between states. This book is about the kind of travel that brings a better understanding of who one is.

I can tell you from experience while all the modern conveniences have contributed to the possibilities available, they have also made it hard as hell to really live.

A LIMINAL TRAVELER

I am a liminal traveler. There are more than a few reasons I can say this. I don't travel for the destinations so much as for the journey. I rarely plan further than a few days ahead. If I book a return ticket, it is more likely I won't use the return than I will. I generally prefer not to fly because it means I miss what might be the best parts of the journey.

There is much more, but the reason I started to refer to myself as a liminal traveler in the first place is because of my place in life and my place in travel.

As I write, I am a 37 year old man who has never been married. I don't have children. I don't have a job. I don't have a lot of money. I travel for extended periods of time without having a real agenda. There isn't really a 'travel industry' for people like me.

The travel industry is geared towards other demographics.

Retirees. Retirees are those who have worked for most of their adult lives and managed to save enough money to go to the places they have always dreamed of. These types of travelers rent vehicles like RV's, they stay in villas or resorts, they participate in group tours and 'bus tourism', and they generally have a fair amount of money. They like everything to be planned out in advance; sometimes they have spent years making sure all the details are firm.

Families. Families are generally made up of two working parents (even if one is working in the home in domestic labor) and their offspring. These are people who tend to be +/- 10 years or so of my age. They usually take two weeks to a month to go to a place, visit theme parks, take in some cultural activities, broaden the minds of the children, enjoy some outdoor activities like going to the beach or skiing, and then they head back home to school and work.

Yuppies. I don't know what these people are called anymore. They are professionals without families who save up a huge hunk of money, take a little time off from their job, go to places where they eat, drink, and do exotic things, and then they go back to their jobs. They travel alone, in pairs, or sometimes in groups. Age range is mid-twenties to seventies. They are not poor. An increasingly popular way of travel for this demographic is eco-travel or voluntourism, where they pay to go to a poor place and work for little or nothing. Then, they return back to their jobs.

Backpackers. The travel industry used to ignore this segment, but finally figured out that hostels and budget travelers are cash machines. Backpackers tend to be 18-30 and just out of some sort of educational institution. They don't have jobs waiting for them, they are generally single, though sometimes traveling with significant others or have significant others waiting at home for them. Usually, they have a big chunk of graduation money or wages they have saved while working in service industry jobs. Travel time is between 1 month and a year though this will vary. Backpackers generally like to 'party', they like to 'hook up', and they like to find adventure and romance with other backpackers. They stay in hostels where they can meet up with others, they travel by whatever means is cheapest, and they look for ways to stretch their budget. When their travel is over, they

return to their home countries, find jobs, and work until they are either yuppies, families, or retirees.

In 2008, I finished up a bachelors degree in anthropology at the University of Hawaii, left my job as a nature tour guide, sold or gave away all my possessions, and started to travel. I didn't have a destination or a timetable (I still don't as I write this), I didn't have a job waiting for me when I finished my travels (if I finish), and as I said before, I am (as I write) a never married guy in his late 30's without much in the way of money. I had been a backpacker in the 1990's and then while I studied in the 2000's I had been engaged to a very generous woman and we traveled as yuppies. Post graduation and post breakup, I found myself too old to be a backpacker and too poor/unemployed to be a yuppie. I didn't have a family and certainly, I don't have the funds to be a retiree.

I don't want to get drunk with kids who are away from home for the first time, I don't want to take packaged bus tours, I don't want to spend the day with families at amusement parks, and I don't want to spend a lot of money.

It took me a while to figure out that there isn't really a travel label for people like me. I am none of the above.

Not long ago, I found myself sitting in a Paris backpacker's hostel. My bank had frozen my debit card because I wasn't yuppie enough to know that I have to inform them that I will be using my accounts outside of my home country. I used most of the last of my Euros to pay for my dorm room, buy some bread and cheese, and then, because I was in Paris and because it is the way I travel, I spent ten of my last twenty Euros to buy a better than average bottle of French red wine.

The backpackers in the common area were swilling cheap wine and having naive conversations about why modern art isn't art at all. They were getting ready to go to the red light district. They invited me and offered me some of their wine, but I found that I had no desire to go with them. They were all in their early twenties. I politely declined and instead went to my empty dorm room where I poured myself a glass of wine, moved the bunk beds out of the way so I could open the balcony doors, and stared out at the lights of Paris. I was perfectly content.

These are the moments I travel for, I thought. These moments of being in between, these moments of having no money but some nice wine, these moments of the four other guys that shared the dorm room being gone and having the room all to myself with the perfect breeze, the beautiful lights, and the sound of great jazz wafting up to me from some little café below.

My recent studies were still banging about in my brain and I thought "This is so liminal."

Then the wine did a little dance with my thoughts and I said out loud.

"I'm a liminal traveler."

HITTING THE ROAD

I'd like to make this a sort of handbook for liminal travelers, but it is also a travelogue, an autobiography, a guide book, and perhaps to some extent a motivational text as well. It's a liminal book.

I have a hard time jamming myself into one specific pigeonhole. Perhaps this is a characteristic of all liminal travelers. With all of that being said, it seems important that I introduce myself.

I'm Vago. Hi. (You can read more about me in the about the author section if you like)

Nationality- Luck of the Draw

I am fortunate to have been born in the United States of America and thus, traveling throughout the world has been made easier as a result of my American passport. In talking with people all over the world, I've often encountered the argument that I wouldn't be able to do what I do if I had been born in a country such as Morocco, Mexico, or the Philippines.

I don't buy it for a second.

I've met men and women from some of the poorest countries in the world on the road and they were doing the same things I have been doing...and sometimes more. These hardy souls have overcome prejudice, poverty, and bureaucratic red tape in order to follow the life they have chosen to lead.

The governments of the world operate under legal systems, but just because they are legal doesn't mean they are operating with justice. As an example, I am able to travel freely in Europe, Asia, and Africa with a minimum of red tape because I am American. If I were a Moroccan, in order to go to Spain I would have to go through a mountain of red tape, prove that I had a large amount of money, or find a sponsor that was willing to do the equivalent of taking out a bond on me equaling perhaps thousands of dollars. The same is true for Moroccans to go to the United States. Even though Spaniards and Americans are able to come to Morocco with no visa and stay for up to three months. Is this just? No way. Is it fair? No way. Does it make it impossible for a Moroccan to fulfill their dreams of traveling the world? No way.

I've met Moroccans who started out with no advantages except for their minds and their desire to see the world. And they have done it. I've met men and women from Laos, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Angola, Sudan, Bosnia, Ecuador, Mexico and just about everywhere else that started out with nothing or less than nothing. They had none of the advantages I was born with because of the simple luck of the draw and yet, they are traveling, they are living in foreign lands, they are making their dreams come true despite the obstacles that are placed before them.

Here's an extreme example of what I am talking about. A few years ago I met a Vietnamese man who absolutely blew my mind. He was a dwarf and stood about three feet tall. He was born in a rural Vietnamese village where his parents thought he was the result of a curse on them. His

grandfather tried to burn him alive when he was about seven years old. He managed to escape the fire and fled to some of the most dangerous areas of Vietnam in the midst of the war between Vietnam and the United States. He watched the soldiers and determined that he wanted to become an American. At eight years old he moved himself close to their base and started to do favors for the G. I.s.

Soon, because of his desire and his ability to work for it, he was living illegally on the base and getting the soldiers whatever they wanted him to get. He mastered English and at less than 10 years old, he was working as a translator for the Army. The United States was losing and he recognized that he had to act quickly or he would be left behind and lose his chance of fulfilling his dream. So he found an American journalist who was working nearby. If I recall correctly, it was Ed Bradley from the TV news program *60 Minutes*. This was before Bradley had become famous.

My friend talked to Bradley and convinced him that his story was worth reporting. He effectively created, managed, and enacted his own publicity campaign to get himself taken out of Vietnam. As a result of his desire and his single minded determination he was adopted by a family in the USA.

When I met Lou, he was an accountant who drove around in a bright red Mustang that he had modified so his short legs could reach the pedals.

I know. It's extraordinary. It's a completely extreme example, but it's true and if it doesn't inspire you, then you might as well give up and do what most of the people around you are doing and simply accept what life hands you.

You have the potential to be just as driven, just as single minded, and just as successful as he has been. Chances are that you don't have nearly as many disadvantages as he had. Maybe you are saying to yourself that your situation is different, that he was able to do these things because he was a dwarf child, and that his disadvantages actually worked to his advantage. You are right.

But it would have been just as easy for him to let his disadvantages be disadvantageous. He took his lemons and he made lemonade with them. He refused to give up on his dream. When he learned that the Americans were leaving, he could have simply given up, he didn't.

Compared with Lou and literally millions of other people, my life has been easy. Chances are that in comparison with them, yours has too.

Before writing any books, I knew that I wanted to write books. I had created in my mind, the ideal situation in which I would write. I would have a quiet place to work, I wouldn't have to worry about money, and there would be no distractions to draw me away from the daunting challenge of putting 90-180,000 words on paper. I was waiting for an ideal situation to come so I could fulfil my dreams.

It wasn't working. I was on the island of Kauai and becoming increasingly depressed as I would almost have the ideal situation and then something would spoil it. As soon as one or more distractions came along, I would start feeling frustrated, throw my hands into the air, and go do something else. I had false start after false start. One day I was sitting on the beach feeling sorry for myself (I know, ridiculous right? I was in a beautiful place where I could sit on an amazing beach by myself and contemplate the world and instead of being amazed by it, I was depressed!) A friend of mine wandered down the beach and sat next to me. He was a drummer from Trinidad who had been born to a very poor sugar farmer and yet had somehow managed to emigrate and create a life for himself in the Hawaiian Islands.

He asked me what was bothering me and I told him about how frustrated I was and how my desire

to write was being dashed against the shores of broken dreams. I was looking for sympathy. Imagine my surprise when he began to laugh a deep throated and full bodied laugh. I started to feel angry at his insensitivity to my situation. He saw my anger and laughed more.

Then, in his lyrical Caribbean accent he said what were perhaps the most important words I had ever been told.

“All there is to it, is to do it.”

Maybe it was his accent, maybe it was the setting, maybe it was a thousand small details all coming into play, but his voice and his words are still rattling around in my head. I'd heard the same words before, I'd already learned that if I wanted to go somewhere or do something that the only way to make it happen was to go. For some reason, I had been unable to think the same way about fulfilling my dream of writing books.

I've thought about this a lot and what I am fairly sure happened is that I put so much importance on my dream that I became terrified of failing. As a result of that fear, my psyche created a barrier of resistance that wouldn't allow me to finish writing anything I started. I would start to find a rhythm and then I would remember that I had to work or I would become aware of the noise of traffic, or I would create a thousand and one distractions to give myself an excuse to stop so that I wouldn't have the opportunity to fail. If you never really try, you never really fail. Of course, the bigger picture is that you completely fail because you don't do anything but live a safe, secure, mediocre life.

Hitting the road is like this too. I meet a lot of people that tell me, 'I wish I could do what you do.' Then they tell me all the reasons they can't do it. I'm not even going to begin going into all the reasons. I've heard so many that it is ridiculous. I've heard people say they have too little and I've heard them say they have too much. The point is that if you are spending all of your energy telling yourself why you can't do something, it's not too hard to convince yourself it is true.

Why not do the opposite? Tell yourself all the reasons you can do it. You want to hit the road and do some liminal travel, right? Have a look at all the reasons why you can do it.

You are poor and so you have nothing to lose.

You are rich and so you have more than many who do the same.

You have a good job and you will be able to find another.

You have a lousy job and you won't miss it.

You are single and might find the love of your life.

You have found the love of your life and might have incredible adventures together.

You have no kids to tie you down.

You have kids that will benefit from the experience.

You are healthy and capable.

You are unhealthy and need to do this before you die.

You are young and the experience will benefit your entire life.

You are old and you deserve the experience.

And on and on and on. Notice how complete opposites can all be put into a positive perspective towards why you are in the perfect position to fulfill your dream. Ultimately, the reason you can do this is because you have the desire to do it.

**All there is to it, is to do it.
Hit the road.**

FINDING ACCOMMODATION

Here's the big question. If you don't go to hostels with backpackers, resorts with families and retirees, or boutique hotels with yuppies, then where do you go?

It's a good question. The answer isn't as easy as you go HERE but maybe I can give it a shot anyway.

If you are a liminal traveler and you are looking for an interesting place to stay where you can make friends who have similar interests then perhaps the first place you should go is to *couchsurfing.com*.

I was introduced to *couchsurfing.com* back in 2003 after I wrote *Rough Living*. I had written about the various ways that you can find a place to stay when you don't have any money. One of my suggestions was couch surfing. I didn't coin the term, I don't think anyone knows who did, but in essence, couch surfing is just finding someone you know with a spare bedroom, couch, or whatever and spending a few days hanging out with your friend.

The key to this is that you make sure that you are a good guest, pleasant company, and most importantly that you don't stay too long. After giving up my apartment in Hawaii, this is what I did. I called up friends and asked if I could stay with them for a couple of days. It was great. I got to hang out with people I like, have great conversations, great food, and in some cases get to know people better and deepen our friendships.

The founder of *couchsurfing.com* contacted me when he was starting his site because of my use of the term in my book. I read his email and signed up for his site, but I didn't really think it would work. After all, it's one thing to crash at someone's house who you already know, but who wants a stranger filling their living room?

Boy was I wrong. I forgot about *couchsurfing.com* until I was getting ready to do my style of couchsurfing in Hawaii. My friend Elise asked me if I was using *couchsurfing.com*. I had all but forgotten about the site but figure I would check it out since she said it was cool.

It's beyond cool.

The website is actually more of a community. It is a social network of people who like to travel and are willing to share their space or want to share your space. All of the reasons I thought it wouldn't work are still valid, but what is cool is that if you are smart and discriminating and use the site in the right way, it is not only a great way to avoid staying in a hostel or hotel, it is a great way to make new friends, see new places, and do interesting things.

Here are the keys to making *couchsurfing.com* work for the liminal traveler:

- 1) Build a detailed and honest profile.
- 2) If you have the ability to host, host.

- 3) Read the profiles and make sure you want to know the person.
- 4) Participate in the community.
- 5) Don't think of it as a free bed, think of it as a chance to make new friends.
- 6) Think ahead, hosts sometimes have no space available at the last minute
- 7) Don't treat your hosts like a business; they don't get paid to do this. They do it because they want to make friends and make the world a better place.
- 8) Plan on spending some time hanging out with your hosts. Trust me, if you aren't making friends, you are missing the best parts of the community.
- 9) Don't try to promote your business with couchsurfing.
- 10) *Couchsurfing.com* is not a dating site. We all know that things sometimes happen, but don't use the site to try to find sex, love, or dates.

There are other sites that are doing a similar thing. *Hospitalityclub.org*, *Globalfreeloaders.com*, are just two of them.

As *couchsurfing.com* has grown, some problems have developed. There are now more than a million members. My guess is that most of the members are not hosting. People have joined and are using the site without the consciousness of what I wrote above and it is causing some serious growing pains. Several magazines, TV shows, and websites have suggested that this is a cheap way to travel without putting an emphasis on the responsibility and the community. Some members have used the site to try to sell tours or products to their guests or hosts. Some members have tried to use the site to solicit sex from their guests or hosts.

There is a very good feedback, verification, and rating system in place. If you use it, you will avoid the unscrupulous.

Maybe the biggest problem is that there are too many surfers and not enough hosts. I've had friends that told me that they receive as many as 200 couchsurfing requests a day. One friend maintains a calendar that looks like he is running a hostel. Time will tell if these problems resolve themselves or if the community will implode. My opinion is that it will survive. There is far too much good in it. Here are a few of my many experiences with *couchsurfing.com*

1. Meeting up with CS hosts in Salt Lake City and going bowling. Then going to a piano bar and hanging out. I saw things I never would have seen if I hadn't of couchsurfed and left SLC thinking it was one of the coolest cities in America as a result. I can tell you that I definitely wouldn't have thought that without CS.com
2. In Barcelona, I stayed with amazing hosts during what was called "The Roman Invasion." Over five days over fifty csers from all over Europe and North America ate together, had parties, raced go carts, took tours, and explored all that this amazing city has to offer.
3. In Granada, I was hosted by three female students. We hiked in the Sierra Nevada, ate free tapas, toured the barrios, made a big dinner, and had amazing conversations.
4. In Brussels, I stayed with a man and his daughter. Even though it was only one night that I was there, we had a fantastic walk through the city at night, he showed me places that you would never find in guidebooks, told me legends and stories, and along the way we became great friends.
5. In Morocco, I stayed with a girl and her family. Me and another couch surfer were staying at the same time. We had authentic Moroccan food, got to know the Moroccan culture, and got to see some wonderful places. In addition to that, my host and I fell in love and are now engaged to be married!

I know. I said that couchsurfing.com is not a dating site. I also said that things happen. If you think about it, it makes sense. When you couchsurf, if you are doing it correctly, you make sure that you

are staying with people that are ‘your type of people’. You read the profile, you find similar interests, you try to make sure that you line up so that you and your host can have a good time. Sometimes, you line up really well.

I’m not the first and certainly won’t be the last to fall in love because of couchsurfing.com or other travel networking groups.

I realize that I have spent a lot of time describing *couchsurfing* but certainly these are not your only option. My favorite option is still to find friends and family that I haven’t had the opportunity to spend as much time with as I would like. Here are a couple of examples.

1. In Hawaii, some friends invited me to make cd’s of my favorite music to exchange with their other friends and them. It sounded fun, so I compiled a cd, burned a half dozen copies and sent them out. I didn’t know most of the people I was sending music to, but they sent me music back and we all ended up getting some great music we might have otherwise missed out on. Several months later when I knew that I was heading to Chicago, my friend Paul reminded me that his friends Chad and Emjoy lived there. We had exchanged music but never met before. Paul gave me their number and when I got to Chicago, not only did I have a great couch to crash on, I also got to become real life friends with a great couple.
2. A few years ago, I joined a group on the internet called Interzone. The moderator of the group helped to promote my books, always was very interesting, and over several years, we formed a nice respect for one another. Later, when I knew I would be in France, where she lived, I emailed her and asked if I could surf her couch for a few days. Izzy, not only offered me a couch, but gave me her spare bedroom. For three days she showed me around the little city of Thoars, introduced me to interesting people, and we had great conversations and delicious home made French food.
3. My father’s wife is from New York. I knew her family was there but had only met her sister and brother-in-law. I kept hearing about her nephew, Chris, who lives in Queens and has a couple of restaurants. When I visited New York, I got Chris’s number, gave him a call, and ended up cruising some great bars, eating some delicious food, and surfing on his couch. In addition, I opened up a whole new family that I hadn’t had the chance to meet yet.

I could give dozens more examples. Are you seeing a theme yet? Finding a place to stay isn’t really about finding a place to stay at all. It is about building relationships. It is about learning the local experience of a place. It is about the surprises.

I’ve always been a fan of jazz but never knew why. A few years ago, I met an old woman while I was working as a limo driver. She was rich, but I don’t think she was famous. In any event, she caught me listening to Charles Mingus while I waited for her and it inspired a great conversation in which she gave me the answer to why jazz is so important to me. When I asked her what she liked about jazz, she simply said to me “The thing I like about jazz is that you can never be certain what will happen next. I love the surprises.”

I love the same thing about Liminal Travel. You could stay in a hotel room or book into a hostel, but these places operate on the principle that people need to know what to expect. Sure there is an element of chance, but not nearly as much as when you are staying with a person in their own space.

Using your personal networks is a great way to increase the value of your travel. Your networks are bigger than you think. I wrote my thesis on fans of the TV show *Lost* and how they form community around the show. *Lost* is filmed in Hawaii and as a result there is a thriving fan community there. The community meets in person to watch the show and also has several online

bulletin boards and forums. Through the forums, fans have met up with each other in Hawaii. I met fans who not only came to Hawaii and met other fans but they also were given couches or spare bedrooms, taken on tours of the filming locations, and given the chance to meet cast and crew members of their favorite show.

GETTING SOMETHING TO EAT

And now we move on to a different topic. How do you fill that belly of yours with nutritious and delicious foods.

A lot of work has been done on how to fulfill our basic needs. Abraham Maslow, a psychologist, constructed a pyramid of what all human beings need. His pyramid from bottom to top are: 1) Physiological: hunger, thirst, bodily comforts, etc.; 2) Safety/security: out of danger; 3) Belonginess and Love: affiliate with others, be accepted; 4) Esteem: to achieve, be competent, gain approval and recognition; 5) Cognitive: to know, to understand, and explore; 6) Aesthetic: symmetry, order, and beauty; 7) Self-actualization: to find self-fulfillment and realize one's potential; and 8) Self-transcendence: to connect to something beyond the ego or to help others find self-fulfillment and realize their potential.

Maslow and others who have constructed similar lists are all in agreement that one thing all humans share, regardless of religion, culture, sex, or health is the need to eat healthy and nourishing food. If you aren't grinding away in some soul sucking job, how are you supposed to eat?

The Western mode of obtaining nourishment is seemingly simple. You go to the store or a restaurant, you get food, and then you consume it. Sometimes you have to prepare it and other times you don't. Sounds pretty easy, right?

In fact, there is nothing simple about this model because there are a whole series of steps involved that have nothing to do with chewing, digesting, and eventually excreting. Maybe you've already figured out where the complexity comes from.

Money. If you want food from the store or a restaurant, you generally need to have money. To get money, you generally need to sell something, whether it is your time or your possessions, and essentially even if you are selling your possessions, you are still selling your time. So in essence, the western model is that you spend X amount of time working, selling, hustling, or stealing and then you trade the results of that time for cash. Then you take the cash and you trade it for what you wanted in the first place, food.

What if there was a way to cut out the middle man and get rid of all that time that you have wasted going to your source of money, transferring the money to a form you can use in the store or the restaurant, and then getting yourself to a place where you can consume the said nourishment? Wouldn't it make a lot more sense to simply put your energy into getting what you want in the first place?

Of course it would. The first step in this process is recognizing that you don't want money to buy food, you want food. Ah ha! Think about that for a second. One of the keys to capitalistic exchange is that you end up trading down when you utilize cash. Since cash can be used for lots of things, the value for any specific thing in cash needs to be higher than the value of the thing so that the provider of the nourishment can make a profit on their work.

So, the first thing you need to realize when you want to fill your belly, is that the cost of food in cash is higher than the cost of food without it.

Here's an example that makes this clear.

Let's say that you work in a restaurant or grocery store. You work X hours a week for Y dollars per hour. Since you are a human being, you have to eat and each week you spend a certain amount of your money on food. Let's say that you work for \$10 an hour and that you work 40 hours a week. So you are making \$400 a week. That sounds pretty good, right?

It's not as good as it sounds. The tax man is taking at least a quarter of that so you are actually making \$300. You like to cook at home and you like to eat healthy foods, so you spend about \$100 on food. That leaves you about \$800 a month to fulfill all the rest of your needs.

That's the traditional way of doing things.

Let's tweak it just a little bit. You are already spending \$100 a month on food so you might as well take advantage of the fact that your employer is buying food at lower prices than you can get it for. You make an arrangement with your boss that instead of paying you \$400 a week, he pays you \$8.50 per hour and gives you \$100 per week in wholesale groceries that he is able to write off as a legitimate business expense.

You might be saying, what's the difference? It's huge. First of all, you are getting more food for your \$100 than you were before. Probably an extra \$50 worth of food. Secondly let's look how this affects your income:

\$8.50 per hour for 40 hours is \$340. The tax man is still taking $\frac{1}{4}$ of your money, but now he is only taking \$75 per week instead of \$100. So at the end of the week, you have \$265 instead of \$200 and at the end of the month you have \$945 for your other needs instead of \$800. And in a year, you have an extra \$1450 plus you have been eating significantly better.

In fact, since you have an extra \$200 worth of food each month over what you had before, you have room to be creative with it. Maybe there is a service you utilize on a regular basis like a mechanic, hairdresser, or a housekeeper since you are so busy with your work. Maybe, you can lower the cost or eliminate the cost of what you were paying before through sharing the wealth in food that you are accumulating? Uh oh, now you need to add more money to that extra \$1450 bucks at the end of the year. That \$50 of food at wholesale prices might be worth \$300 or \$400 in services each month. Since this money isn't coming from your money reserved for other needs, you can actually add that money to the amount you are saving. So if you are really good at your exchanging of food, suddenly instead of an extra \$100 a month you have an extra \$500! That's an extra \$6000 a year you just earned by taking a cash pay cut! Even if you only trade the food for its wholesale cost you are still looking at an extra \$3600 at the end of the year. Not bad, huh?

But let's say you want to go even further. Instead of cooking for one or two and eating the same boring meals all the time or going out to restaurants, you figure out that since you are getting a better deal on food than other people, you might as well share it around and put some excitement in your dining life. How?

Simple. You find a few friends that you want to spend more time with and you set up a dinner exchange. Let's say your friends the Mertzes live across the hall. Talk to them about them joining you for dinner on Tuesday's at 6pm each week and then you join them for dinner at 5:30 pm on

Thursdays...or something along those lines.

It's actually cheaper to cook for more people than it is to cook for just a few. If you set up three dinner exchanges a week, that still leaves one day for you and your honey to cook up a special dinner and enjoy a little time gazing into each other's eyes over candlelight.

And as strange as it sounds, you are actually saving money by doing this. And when you are saving money, what you are actually saving is time. And when you are saving time, you are saving something that is more valuable than money.

How is that? Time is money right? Wrong. Money is infinite. Time is not. Maybe you are saying to yourself that money isn't infinite, but this is what I mean. Money doesn't die. You will. If you knew you had only 24 hours to live, how much money would you trade each hour for?

See what I mean?

So that was one example of a person working with food in some way and how they might change their thinking a little bit and become healthier, wealthier, and probably more happy as a result.

Now let's look at an example that doesn't involve employment. In *Rough Living*, I wrote about a lot of ways that you can get food if you don't have any money. They still apply.

You can dumpster dive, cafeteria graze, forage in nature, go to parks where they feed the homeless, check out food banks, or participate in organizations like Food not Bombs.

All of that has been written about a lot since I wrote about it. There are even people who are dedicated to not paying for food. They call themselves Freegans.

However, let's move past dirt bagging and scavenging and into something more satisfying. Let's move into manifestation.

You want fresh herbs to cook with but you don't want to pay \$12 an ounce for them. Buy some seeds. Don't have space for a garden? Wrong! You only think you don't have space. See those weeds growing over there in the median of the road? That's a free garden space. See that abandoned house with the overgrown yard? That's a free garden space. See that empty two liter plastic bottle? Yes, that too is a free garden space.

I bet you thought I had forgotten about the ability to move.

Drop a little bit of soil in the bottle. Make sure it's good healthy soil. Throw in a few coffee grounds. Drop in a few seeds. Drop in a little more soil. Put in a little bit of water. Find a nice place in your backpack for it and make sure you don't turn it upside down. Most of the space in the bottle is air so it shouldn't be very heavy. Let the seeds germinate for a few days in the dark of your pack. Take the bottle out, take off the cap, put it in the sun and after a bit add a few more drops of water. Now just take it out of your pack and give it some sunlight every day. Faster than if you were growing it in a garden, you will have fresh herbs. Cut the top off the bottle and enjoy.

Maybe it's not very practical, but it's fun and almost free.

And, it really points out that you can grow food anywhere. Growing your own food is the second best way to get fresh delicious food.

Yes, I said the second best way. The best way for all of human history has been foraging in nature and it is still true today. Foragers spend less energy and time finding their food than farmers. Farmers spend less than those who buy farm goods wholesale. Wholesalers spend less than those who pay retail. Where have you been getting most of your food from?

Does it make you feel stupid to be a retail consumer? It makes me feel stupid. That's why I try to avoid it.

Being a modern forager doesn't mean you have to wear dreadlocks, patchouli, and tribal kaftans. In fact, I for one would prefer that you don't. Since foraging is humanities oldest method of obtaining nourishment, a lot of people become confused and think they have to adopt the culture of the Yanomami, Aboriginals, or Native Americans. That's just stupid.

If you want to adopt those cultures for other reasons, fine, but if you think being a modern forager requires it, I repeat, that's just stupid.

Wherever you are, there are an abundance of wild sources of food that you can gather, eat, and share.

In Hawaii there are mangoes for six months of the year, guavas year round, papayas year round, and plenty of herbs, seaweed, and vegetables. Not only can you legally gather these things and eat them, you can also trade them for other things.

In Morocco there are wild herbs, onions, fruit, figs, and vegetables everywhere.

In California there are dandelions, wheat grasses, oranges, pine nuts, and more.

In the Pacific Northwest there are apples, peaches, and mushrooms.

In Japan there are seaweeds, cherries, and herbs.

In China there are herbs and root vegetables.

In short, there are wild resources available everywhere unless you are in Antarctica or the middle of the Gobi desert, and I suspect that if you do your homework, you will find that there are lichens and cacti in those places that will provide you with at least something.

What do you need to forage? Not much. A bag, a sharp stick or small shovel, a knife or a sharp stone, and most importantly knowledge of what you are looking for.

The bag you can make from an old pant leg with one end tied and the other strung with a loop to go around your neck or over your arm.

The sharp stick or stone can be found in nature. The shovel or knife should be easy to locate if you want more modern tools.

The knowledge is the part you need the most. Where do you find it? It's not hard. You can probably find information about foraging in your locale on the internet. You can certainly find it in a library or bookstore (you don't have to buy the book!). The best place to find it though is from a person who lives in the area you want to forage in. Look for community gardens, senior centers, or find friends in the area who are interested in nature through websites like *craigslist.com*, *couchsurfing.com*, or *facebook.com*.

If you want to eat, you should use your head and not your money. Paying for food is not efficient. In fact, I think it might actually be immoral.

One last suggestion if you want to eat. Share your food. I can't promise you that this will bring you a meal or even give you the same amount as you give, but it has always worked for me. Here are a few examples:

In Alaska, there were times that I would go to a strangers campfire. I would call from outside the fire's light, "Can I come to your fire?" If the answer was yes, I would walk in, introduce myself and start to make conversation. Then I would ask if they minded if I roasted some marshmallows on their fire.

The answer was always yes. At this point I would pull out my bag of marshmallows and then offer them around to others. I might even start carving some pointed sticks and handing them to my new companions. Everyone loves roasted marshmallows.

I took my game to the next level though once the marshmallows were roasting. That is when I would pull out chocolate bars and graham crackers. S'mores!

At this point, if they are making dinner or going to make dinner or have dinner left over, they have always offered it. I've feasted on elk, salmon, king crab, and had more than a few beers for the cost of a few marshmallows, chocolate, and graham crackers, certainly less than a couple of dollars.

In Morocco, when I hike I usually carry a fair amount of candy and cookies. Recently, I was hiking in the Atlas with friends and we came across a number of small boys herding sheep near a Berber village. I pulled out the cookies and began sharing them with the kids. A man from the village so this and came over to say hello. He had some cookies too.

He invited my friends and I to his house for some tea. Actually it was tea, olives, oil, Berber bleu cheese, and fresh baked bread.

Then he offered to take us on a small hike to see some of the surrounding area. He showed us how his mother weaves blankets and bakes bread. He gave me a pillow cover she had made as a gift. Then we were invited for lunch and feasted on couscous and lamb with his family.

When we offered payment, he solidly refused. We had become friends. It cost less than 10 dirham or about 80 cents for the cookies.

I don't offer these examples as ways to get over on people or to 'trade up'. In both examples I was making friends and my offers were not given with the intent of getting anything in return besides conversation and good will.

I offer these examples to show that sometimes giving food is better than giving anything else. Imagine if I had offered \$2 to the Alaskans or 10 dirhams to the Berbers? Imagine if they had offered me cash instead of hospitality?

Do you see what I mean?

Food is life. It is necessary. It is free, or it should be. It is worth more than the money we pay for it. We need to respect our food.

WHERE DID MY MONEY GO?

When is the last time you ran out of money?

I don't mean the last time you didn't have access to an ATM, the last time you spent everything in your pocket (but still had more somewhere else), or the last time you realized you would have to use a credit card because there wasn't enough cash in your wallet. I mean the last time you ran completely out of money. The last time you spent your last twenty-five cents on something and knew that you didn't have another twenty-five cents. Have you ever done this?

I have. Several times. I can tell you in no uncertain terms that the first time I did it, it was hard. I wanted to hold on to that quarter of a dollar like it was a million. Instead I bought a box of Lemonheads. They were the best candies I have ever eaten. Think about it. I spent every bit of money I possessed to buy something as frivolous as a box of sour candy. Then, I walked around eating those candies and enjoying them for the next few hours.

You know what happened next?

While I was walking around in Bellingham eating those delicious little candies, I noticed that there were some books in a pile of rubbish. Being a book lover, I picked them up and thought, wow, I can't believe someone is throwing these books away. I don't remember what they were, probably some sort of non-fiction books.

So I took them all and loaded them in my pack. Then I ate some more Lemonheads. At this point I was tuned into the rubbish even though I was heading to the park to check out my new books. I noticed a couple of bike wheels with good tires on them in one rubbish pile.

I ate more Lemonheads. Then a bit further in the day, I noticed a bike with two flat tires in the rubbish. Then I passed a used bookstore. Then I ate a couple more of those amazing Lemonheads.

You can probably guess what happened next.

I sold the books, put together a pretty decent bike from the rubbish, and suddenly from being a guy who just spent his last twenty-five cents, I had become a guy with twenty-five dollars and a bicycle on his way to the park to read one of the books the book shop hadn't been willing to buy.

There's a couple of reasons I am telling you this.

First of all, trust me, you will always have more money. Even if you do absolutely nothing. You will find money, someone will give you money, you will earn money, or something will happen. It's an absolute. The only way that any money will be the last you ever possess is if you die or take a vow not to possess any money.

Second, if I had held on to that quarter dollar, I probably would have walked around all day in some

sort of a pity party about the fact that all I had was a quarter. I probably would have missed the books and the bike. I wouldn't have had the mindset to notice them if I was fixated on my twenty-five cent life savings.

Third, if you are going to spend money at all, spend it on the things you enjoy. Especially if it is the last of your money for a while.

I've completely run out of money at least twenty times since that day. At this point, I almost look forward to it. The feeling of spending that last bit of legal tender is as liberating as the feeling of quitting a job you never enjoyed in the first place.

I'm not telling you to quit your job or go out on a spending spree with your savings. What I am telling you is not to worry about it. There will be more money. The bills will eventually get paid, or maybe they won't, but life will go on. The end of money is not the end of life.

In fact, part of the reason I enjoy spending the last bit of money is because it feels like I am really alive at those points. The middle man is gone. I think that money stands between us and real life. Money stands between us and what some people call Allah, God, Nirvana, Enlightenment, the Eternal Now, and Christ Consciousness.

There's a reason why Jesus overturned the tables of the money lenders when they started charging interest and making monetary transactions in the temple. It's because the profit motive, the need for cash, interest, and capitalism are the biggest acts of hocus pocus since the invention of time. And if you aren't looking at reality and instead are enraptured by the illusion of monetary wealth, then you are never going to understand even a little bit of the bigger picture of what this life is all about.

Here is a quick example of what money is that might make you think twice about the value of your bank account.

Imagine there is an apple tree next to a spring. The tree produces a lot of apples. More than enough for everyone that lives near it. One day, a new guy wanders into town and sets up a stand next to the spring. As everyone is picking apples to take home, he tells them "Look, here is an idea for you. Why don't I keep the apples safe for you until you need them. I'll give you these apple dollars that you can spend for other things and any time you want the apples, you just come redeem the apple dollars for your apples." At first, people are skeptical, but every time someone wants an apple, he has one for them.

Pretty soon everyone has their extra apples in his care. Mostly, they only want one or two apples at a time so he has lots of extra apples. Sometimes though, someone wants more apple bucks than they have in account. In these situations, he says, "Okay, I'll give you 100 apple bucks but you have to pay me back 150 real apples." Sounds fair right?

Wrong. Whose apples are those he is loaning out? Your apples. Whose apples are those he is taking in payment? Your apples. Or at least they were. Pretty soon he is lending out more apples than he actually has based on the fact that most people won't come get their apples anytime soon.

Before long, he convinces everyone that in order for him to keep their apples safe, he needs to take the spring and build a cool place to store them. As a result, he has to charge a small amount of maintenance money for anyone wanting to use the spring.

Not long after this, he builds a wall around the apple tree and offers to manage these important assets for the good of all. Since he is in control of everyone's wealth. Those who want to eat

anything now have to pay for it with apple bucks. People use apple bucks to pay for things they never needed or wanted before. Apple bucks become the thing everyone is living for.

And disaster, no one has any apples any more. Well, maybe this is a good time to devalue the value of an apple buck. Now one apple buck only buys ½ an apple.

There goes paradise. Welcome to the world we live in. Only it's even worse than my little story makes it. We are all slaves to a guy that showed up in town with less than everyone else possessed. At least if we are slaves to the money man.

All of this might lead us to the answer of where your money went. Hopefully, the answer is that it went to something that you wanted to enjoy or something that made you feel good.

As to how to get money, here are a few of the ways I've used. Your skill sets may be different than mine, actually, they almost certainly are.

Selling used books.

I'm pretty good with spotting a book that might be worth something. I go to garage sales, antique shops, junk shops, and keep my eyes open in the trash for books that look interesting. Then I sell them in one of a couple of ways which I will list from lowest to highest profit.

- 1) Used bookstores. Mostly, they rob you because they need to sell the books for a higher price than they buy it for and they are greedy about it. Lowest of the low ball.
- 2) E bay You have to deal with shipping and packaging, listing, and feedback, but usually you can sell books for more than you get at the bookstore.
- 3) *Craigslist.com*. I actually managed to pay my rent a couple of times selling books on craigslist. Downside is you have to deal with flakes that say they want the books and never pay or show up.
- 4) Virtual bookshop of your own. Set up a shop on your own website and utilize services such as *amazon.com* or *abebooks.com*. Set up a paypal or other online merchant account so you can accept credit cards and voila, you are in business. Downside is that you have to make sure that you describe your books in exact detail, packaging is professional, and you have to work to get people to find you. Upside is that unlike a brick and mortar shop, you don't have to pay for a shop.

Maybe you aren't into books like I am. No problem, figure out what it is that you are into and do the same things. I've had pretty good success with selling other things I pick up at yard sales or used shops in the same ways.

Blogging

As I write this in May of 2009, I earn between \$180-\$260 per month with my blog. I am confident that I can increase that by at least a factor of four times in the next four months.

Up to this point I've resisted doing all the things that are required to 'monetize' a blog. I haven't utilized search engine optimization, maximized advertising, or worked hard to create traffic. I actually thought having a pleasant design and interesting content were enough. I spend about an hour a day on my blog at this point.

Rabbit Farming

As I write this, I have invested about \$100 in a rabbit farm in Morocco. I bought four rabbits (three female, one male), some chicken wire, and a big bag of food. About one month into the experiment we have about 12 baby bunnies, three pregnant females, and five chickens we bought as chicks as part of our experiment.

Travel Business

My friend Ludwig and I started a business called Sun Sea Adventures back in 2002. So far we haven't done much but we have managed to pay for our business cards, phone, and a place to get mail. The good news is that we have never had an unhappy client and we are sitting on the positive side of the balance sheet. We will certainly do more with this business in the future.

Student Loans

From 2005 to 2008 I pretty much stopped working so that I could be a full time student. Truth is that I probably could have worked, but I didn't want to. Instead, I borrowed about \$35,000 to pay for tuition, books, and living expenses. In addition, I managed to get grants and scholarships along the way. Now I have to figure out how to pay them back. Of course, if I default, I wouldn't be the first one to do so. And they can never take away my education.

Writing

I like to think I'm a pretty good writer, but I've never made very much money at it. I've made about \$1000 from writing books and maybe half that much writing for small periodicals. Writing for weeklies, I used to get paid mostly in gift certificates and food. As a radio copywriter I was making a pretty decent living, but I've never felt more like a prostitute in my life.

Paid employment

I've had a lot of jobs. The best ones have been short term working for film or television crews. The pay is usually pretty good and the people I've worked with have been pretty fun. Next on the list is working as a tour guide. The pay is great but the downside is that you have to deal with tourists and generally tourist areas are expensive places to live so that great pay goes out the window pretty quick. Food service jobs can be fun and pay great, the downside is that you have to deal with customers and let's face it, is there anything more pathetic than a lifetime career as a waiter?

Of course, all of this has to do with my skill set. You need to examine your skill set and figure out what it is that you can do to make money.

Someone told me once "Do what you love and the money will follow" and while I haven't exactly found the money following me yet, I think the first part of the advice is valid.

Life is too short to waste it on a meaningless job you hate.

When I was a kid, my father was a musician. He had managed to scrape together enough money to build a small house on a dirt road next to a lake in a small mountain town. After my little sister was born he decided that he should quit music and get serious about making money to support his family so he mortgaged the house, built two more houses, and sold them. Then he spent the next thirty years or so building houses and selling them.

A few years ago when I was visiting him, he showed me his net worth. Then he took me on a drive and showed me that little house he had built for us all those years ago. He had sold it not long after he embarked upon being a contractor. It had just sold again.

The price that little house he had owned free and clear was about 10% higher than his net worth. Imagine if he had decided to focus on his music and loving his little family instead of doing the 'responsible' thing. We could have made it, maybe he would have made it big with his music, and even if we only managed to squeak by, he still could have sold the house and been worth more than he was by being so responsible.

I've wondered whether the lesson I got from this is the one he intended, but one thing is sure. I definitely got a lesson from it.

KEEPING IN TOUCH

I realize that the heading of this chapter might sound like it is about how to send email, letters, and make phone calls to the people you love. In one respect it is. But it is also about more than that. It is about maintaining your contacts and keeping your personal networks alive and well.

I've been a fool many times in my life. I've burned bridges behind me and done plenty of stupid things with the idea that I would never have to deal with a person again or that I never wanted to deal with a person again. Sometimes, you don't want to deal with someone ever again, that's fine. Certainly it is sometimes necessary to lose a person from your life. I'm not against that.

What I am talking about though is when it really isn't necessary. In the past, back in the age of letters and long distance phone calls, I had a lot of really great people in my life that I just stopped calling, neglected to send a letter to with a forwarding address, or otherwise lost contact with.

Years later, I've found myself wondering what happened to that person and wondering why I wasn't a better friend. This happened with my friend Johnny who I traveled in Asia with back in 2001 and despite some efforts made recently, I haven't been able to find the guy.

I can't help thinking that if I had answered more emails or made a phone call that he and I might still be exchanging our thoughts about this wild life and the philosophy that comes with it. He's not the only one, I've met people and gotten their email addresses and then never used them because I get busy with something else. Then later I find the address and have done nothing with it. It's a shame.

It's not just a shame on a personal level, but also on an existential level too. In *Rough Living*, I wrote a section on the things you have available in this life to do the things you want to accomplish. This list by the way came from a lecture I attended by a man named Bill Larson. Bill said that all we have to work with are the three A's. The first A is our accumulations, the second is our abilities, and the third is our access.

Access is who you know and where you can go. Simple as that. The more people you know, the better off you are in this world. Let's look at it from a completely materialist perspective for a moment. If you know and are on good terms with a person in every city you visit, you automatically have access to their knowledge of that place. You might also have access to their couch or extra bedroom, maybe you have access to their refrigerator. And this is one of the things that I am trying to do as I write this book so that I can show it is possible, you might even have access to their friends.

Let me state unequivocally here that I am not in favor of maintaining friendships just because you can get something out of it. Friendship is a two way street and it requires that you give at least as much and sometimes more than you get. To me, the real value of knowing people is being able to share ideas, thoughts, creativity, and joy with others. When I meet a new person, I tend to ask a lot of questions. This isn't so that I can get something or find out what they have, it's so I can figure out

where that person and I connect. It's rare that I've ever met someone I can't connect with on some level. Even the biggest jerks in the world probably have something interesting and good about them. It's part of your job to find it.

Thankfully, most people aren't jerks.

So when I talk about keeping in touch, I am talking about maintaining a connection. Lucky for us, this has become much easier than it used to be.

First of all, I don't care how much of a Luddite you are, you need to have an email address. I recommend either Yahoo or Gmail since they are unlikely to go out of business or to start charging for their services.

If you are worried about security then don't use your email for anything you feel insecure about. Simple as that. The CIA may be monitoring Facebook in order to find potential terrorists, but does that affect you at all? Are you doing anything that might make them suspicious of you? And if you are, are you stupid enough to be using Facebook to do it?

When I was in my twenties, I was very concerned about the government invading my privacy. It wasn't that I was doing anything wrong, it was that I didn't like the idea of being monitored for any reason. I used email encryption to communicate about mundane things with friends, I was active in protesting government surveillance, and I wrote articles about the violation of the right to privacy.

My views on this turned around in an unlikely place. I was a participant at the North American Anarchist Conference in Los Angeles in 2000. It was happening at the same time as the Democratic National Convention, so there is no doubt that there was some heavy surveillance going on. The house I was staying at had a police car sitting across the street with uniformed cops watching us 24 and 7. At the conference, there was a lot of speculation about how many undercover agents were among us.

And then it hit me. Great! These were exactly the people that needed to be exposed to the information we were talking about. If the phone was tapped, why not have a conversation that would blow the mind of the egghead transcribing it. If someone wanted to read my email, why not let them read about how the erosion of civil liberties was going to make the lives of their children increasingly difficult?

The bottom line was that I realized I wasn't doing anything that was illegal or wrong. In fact, by trying to protect the privacy of my innocent information, I was actually drawing attention to it. Since then, I have given up on trying to protect my privacy. I have better things to do with my energy.

It's a modern world and while I think relying on technology too much can create problems, I am also certain that the benefits of technology can be incredible. Let's look at Facebook as an example.

Remember all those people I've lost contact with because I didn't send letters or call them? Well, they are finding me. The little girl who was my very first best friend when I was four years old recently contacted me and we have become friends again. I've reconnected with friends from high school, college, jobs, and the military. My personal networks are becoming bigger and bigger and the ability to stay in contact with everyone is becoming easier and easier.

I'm sure you've heard the old axiom "It's not what you know, it's who you know." While I'm still not completely convinced of this, I do think there is truth in it. In fact, in the process of writing this

book, I have decided to put it to the test.

Using Facebook, email, and my blog, I have put out a call to my personal networks to help supply me with what I need over the next four months. Where my networks fail, I will utilize everything that I am writing about here. I have very little money, no work lined up, and a lot of ground to cover.

Over the past few days, I sent out a request for assistance in finding food, shelter, and transportation. I also sent out a short biography so that people can introduce me to people they know. So far, I have received offers of accommodation, computer use, rides, meals, and more. At the moment, most of these are on the west coast of the USA where my personal networks are strongest, but I have also been offered couches and beds in Indiana, Michigan, New York, and Ohio from people that I have never met. How? By keeping in contact.

I've decided to try to make myself a bit of a human bridge. If I meet these people and like them, I will include their name in a listing of other people I know and like, as I meet other people and stay with, I will distribute this list. In effect, hosting me will act as a sort of commodity and verification system, which then allows my hosts to have access to one another. It will work. The hardest part is getting people to accept the fact that someone that owes them nothing is willing to provide them with something, be it hospitality, friendship, or advice.

A few years ago my friend Jordi gave me a solid piece of wisdom. She said "Sometimes you have to force be the first one to take hospitality so that others will know it is okay to accept yours." She was a huge fan of meeting someone briefly, and if she liked them, she would take a trip to where they lived and ask to stay at their house. After this, they would know that they were welcome to come and stay at her house and they would be more willing to do so since they had already provided her with hospitality.

I'm attempting to take Jordi's philosophy to a further degree of separation. Since my hosts will have provided me with hospitality, I am hoping that they will feel more secure in assisting one another with hospitality too.

And all of this has to do with keeping in touch. All of it has to do with communication. Now that I've given you the reasons why it is important, let's have a look at the ways that I like to keep in touch and how it affects me in my travel and activities.

I like to travel with my laptop computer. I realize that because of the nature of the way I travel there is a huge possibility of my computer getting ripped off. If I had a brand new, multi-thousand dollar machine, I wouldn't be traveling with it. I have a decent laptop that I got back in 2005. When it gets stolen or broken, it won't be devastating. Before I began traveling, I backed up all of my photos, movies, music, and writing. As I move around, I back up my data online or I burn CD's so that I have multiple copies. As I am writing this book I save the file and email it to myself and I am saving a copy on a USB drive. I have a Flickr.com account where I upload all of my digital photos.

I use my computer to write, I have about thirty digital books on it I want to read, I edit my photos and video on it, and since it has wireless capability, I use it to surf the internet when I am within range of a free WiFi connection. Wifi connections can be found in cafes, hostels, hotels, and apartments. Increasingly it is difficult to find unsecured networks, but you can still sometimes stumble upon one. If I were only using the computer for internet, it would make sense to travel without it since internet cafes are abundant and usually fairly cheap, libraries often provide free internet usage, and there are other resources.

A USB flash drive is a remarkably handy thing to have. They are small, you can save files from one machine and access them on another, and you can have backup copies of important files. At this point you can get a huge USB for a very reasonable amount of money and store movies, pictures, music, and documents on it.

The truth is, when my computer disappears from my life it will be a bit of a relief. It is fairly big. When it is gone, I will buy one of the small \$199 laptops that are becoming increasingly common. My load will lighten and I will have the same functionality.

Mobile/Cell phone. Phones are incredibly convenient and don't have to be expensive. You can get a decent quad band phone, charger, and universal adapter for \$10 to \$20. I recommend that you get a phone that uses a sim card and is unlocked or you are severely limiting yourself.

At the moment, I have a Motorola Razr V.3. It is quad band, unlocked, and has modified firmware so that the stock camera also functions as a video camera.

In the U.S. I have a pay as you go T-Mobile sim card. If you buy \$100 worth of credit your minutes stay valid for a full year. I usually use less than \$20 a month as opposed to paying \$40-\$100 per month for the cheapest contract with the same company.

In Spain, I bought a Lebara sim for 5 Euros and have put about 25 Euros of credit on it. I simply pulled my T-mobile sim out and put in my Lebara sim and voila, I had a Spanish phone number.

In Morocco, I bought a Maroc Telecom sim for about \$3 and end up sending about \$10 a month on minutes.

Why do you need a phone? First of all, it's nice to have a way that people can contact you. Second, it's nice for you to be able to contact people. Third, have you noticed that there are less and less public telephones? Recently I was in Holland and I had to look for nearly an hour to find a public telephone. Soon, I think they will be gone and if you don't have a cell phone, you won't be able to use a phone at all.

Text messaging is by far the cheapest way to communicate. If you want to meet up with friends or hosts, a text can give the time, place, and circumstance. It's fast and easy.

A nice trick that is useful outside of the United States is 'beeping'. In the United States, you have to pay for minutes whether you call or are called but in a lot of other places, only the caller pays. So if you don't have a lot of minutes or money and you want to contact someone, you can simply call and hang up before they answer. Then they can call you back or you can meet up at a prearranged location and it doesn't cost anyone anything.

In addition to my cellphone, I have my plug in charger. Since my phone is European, I need a 110 volt US adapter. Incidentally, since my computer is American, I also have 220 volt (European) adapter. Since sometimes I don't have access to a plug but I may still want to charge my phone, I also have a portable charger that uses two AA batteries. My camera uses the same size so I have a small battery charger that will charge two sets. The battery phone charger is also a LED flashlight. I like multi-functionality in my gear.

Another increasingly useful aspect of a cellphone is the ability to access the internet. I don't have this capability yet, but plan to get it in the future. I am able though to post messages to my blog through applications such as *Twitter.com*. Twitter is a micro-blogging site in which you can send a short text message to a Twitter number and it will post it on the internet. The most useful

application of this technology I have heard for the traveler was a guy who was arrested by Egyptian police and tweeted "I've been arrested in Egypt" and almost immediately was able to get assistance.

Snail mail. When was the last time you sent a letter or postcard? When was the last time you received one? It's a nice thing. We've lost a lot with the internet and perhaps one of the greatest tragedies is the exchange of letters. Somehow, the eloquence of John Adams and George Washington writing to one another wouldn't have been the same if they had been sending email. A postcard is a nice and easy way to let someone know you care about them. I know, you don't want to spend the 50 cents on a card and the dollar on the postage, neither do I, nor do I want to find the post office and stand in line, but think about the happiness it might bring to whomever you send it to and maybe you will find it worth it. It's a great way to say thank you for the hospitality.

In addition, the postal system is a way for you to avoid lugging around the treasures you have found in your travels whether they are souvenirs or presents. Maybe it will cost you \$30 to send it ahead of you, but would you pay someone \$30 to carry it when your bag starts to feel too heavy? If not, then you either need to carry it or buy lighter things along the way.

I admit it. I'm cheap and I don't spend a lot of money on souvenirs, gifts, or postage. I find free or cheap things that are light and I carry them with me. Sometimes if I see something I really like, I take a picture of it instead of buying it.

Another thing about keeping in touch is that it keeps the relationships alive. In Papua New Guinea, people have an interesting way of thinking about life, souls, and relationships. While there is no denying that you are alive, the soul is not exactly you. Instead, the soul is the sum of the relationships between you and other people. So it is the relationship that is really the living thing, not you or the person you are in the relationship with. An important person has a huge number of relationships spreading in all directions. People take massive trips and spend huge amounts of resources to keep these relationships healthy and alive. I picture this web of living relationships as exactly that, a giant spider web linking people and places. Those with the most threads have the most access to all areas of the web. Even though I've thought about this a lot and had it explained to me several times, I still have a hard time putting more importance on the relationship than on the individual because of the cultural blinders I wear as a person born and educated in the United States. Still, I am able to grok it enough to see that it is important.

As I travel within the web of my own relationships, I like to give gifts. I am also given gifts. At the risk of sounding ungrateful, I will point out that this isn't always convenient to me since I may not want to carry a six-pound ashtray made from a two-million year old fossil in my bags. None the less, I always accept the gifts. Often I will take a picture of them so that I can remember them and then I will give my gifts to someone who I meet later.

Wait a second? You mean I don't keep and cherish them? I <gasp!> REGIFT!

Yes. This is a good chance to set something straight that a lot of people don't seem to understand. If you give me something, it is mine to do with as I please. Certainly, I will love and value it. In fact, I will value it so much that when I meet someone else who I want to show my gratitude to or make happy, I will sometimes give the gift to them. In the process, I will explain to them how I got it, who gave it to me, and why it is important for me to give it to them. What I keep and cherish is the memory of the gift and more importantly of the relationship. This is the same way that the trade networks in Papua New Guinea work. The most valuable things are those that have been given many many times. In a sense, your energy has gone into the gift to me and then my energy has gone into the gift to someone else.

A gift is not an obligation and if you give me something so that you can come to my house and see it on the wall, you might regret that you didn't give it to someone else.

Another thing with gifts. I hate gift giving holidays. Christmas and birthdays are the absolute worst. If you want to give me something, give it to me when it isn't expected and it will have more meaning. For those people whom I love who have wondered why I don't give Christmas or Birthday gifts, it's because I don't believe in obligatory gift giving. Even if I have something to give you, I will probably wait until another time to give it to you.

A gift should be given with no conditions, with no obligation, and under no duress. It is a way to show someone that you consider them to be important. Would you feel more important if you got a gift on your birthday or on a completely unexpected and random day?

Let's forget about giving gifts on certain holidays.

TOURISM ON THE LIMINAL SIDE

So you want to take a trip and you don't want to do it as a yuppie, a retiree, a backpacker, or a family, right? You want to experience the journey more than the destination. You want the surprises to be greater in number than the expectations.

You, my friends, are ready for liminal tourism.

Of course, now the big question is, how do you go about getting started, right? The answer is...that depends.

If you are committing yourself to an unknown future with no turning back, you probably should take care of a few things before you head out the door. Here is a partial list based on my own experience, you will have to figure out the particulars of your own situation.

- 1) Getting rid of your stuff. I either gave away or sold nearly everything I owned. The few things that I decided to keep were safeguarded in good hands.
- 2) Crossing your T's and dotting your I's. Arrange for a permanent address with someone you trust who isn't going to be moving any time soon. If you plan on using bank/debit/credit cards find out the policy on card use in foreign places. If you have checks that will need to be deposited or bills that will need to be paid, be sure that you arrange for that before you leave. I know, you want to start your journey, but in this world, you have to take care of the paperwork.
- 3) Your travel kit. My recommendation is that you bring as little as possible. 15 kilos or less plus whatever you are wearing. Personally, I opted to skip the big hippie backpack these days and I haven't regretted it. I started out with two bags. One of them is a carry on size wheelee bag that has backpack straps that can be latched on if necessary. The second is a decently sized leather shoulder bag. Recently, I decided that the shoulder bag is enough and got rid of about 2/3 of what I have been carrying.

Right now I carry (including what I am wearing)

- 1) my laptop and all the cables and cords and adapters
- 2) a water bottle
- 3) my journal
- 3) digital camera
- 4) sunglasses
- 5) 4 pens
- 6) 3-shirts
- 7) 1-jeans and 1-slacks
- 8) swim trunks
- 9) 5-underwear
- 10) 5-pairs of socks
- 11) a hat
- 12) one pair of shoes \

- 13) slippers
- 14) a sarong
- 15) belt
- 16) tie
- 17) toothbrush, floss, and paste
- 18) a razor and soap
- 19) a tiny first aid kit
- 20) quad band cellphone and charger
- 21) passport and important papers, cards, etc.
- 22) 23) fleece pullover
- 24) a light jacket
- 25) something to read

I usually have some cash stashed on me too. As I write I have \$220 U.S. and 20 Euros stashed in various parts of my kit. Just in case.

And now it's time to say your goodbyes. Let's face it, you will probably be back, but just in case you aren't...make sure that you say goodbye to the people you care about. Besides, even if you do come back, it might be a long time or they might have left. And even more importantly, it's fun to get together with your friends before you set out on an adventure into the unknown.

And now you are ready to go.

But wait? What about making reservations, planning your destination, picking up a guidebook, and all of the other stuff that you are supposed to do? Shouldn't you have an itinerary of all your destinations and where you will be staying so that people can contact you if necessary along the way? Aren't you supposed to have a folder with detailed lists of where you will go, what time you will arrive, who will meet you, and how long you will stay?

By this point, I'm sure you are smiling and know the answer. Nope. If you want to travel that way, you can do so easily but it's not liminal travel in any sense of the word. It's commercial tourism.

So how do you get started on this trip. Simple, you either log on to the computer and find the cheapest flight to get to where you want to start or you open the door, walk out, and close it behind you.

Getting Rid of the Guidebook

I have mixed feelings about guide books.

On the positive side, they often let you know about interesting places you might otherwise miss, customs you should be aware of, and the locations of essentials such as transport stations or post offices.

On the negative side they can take a lot of the fun out of discovering things on your own and in the worst case scenario you can become one of those awful travelers that carry the book around and constantly refer to it. In this case you are seeing nothing new, discovering nothing new, and you might as well have stayed at home and looked at pictures of your destination on the internet while reading about them in your guide bible.

I no longer travel with a guide book. First, I don't want to carry a heavy book around with me and second I feel like it is one more way that the mystery has been taken out of travel. Guidebooks spoil

the surprises.

That's not to say I don't refer to them from time to time, do a little bit of reading up on my destination before I go, or sometimes even own a guide book. My *modus operandi* is to figure out where I want to go (preferably the night before I head there or the morning of my departure from wherever I am), look at the *Wikipedia* entry for it on the internet so I can discover any interesting history, literary connections, or notable sights. Do a quick search at *hostelworld.com* and then write down the name and address of one cheap, central, well rated hostel in my journal (even if I have a couch or bed already lined up, this is my backup plan), and then head for the destination.

Sometimes I head to the destination, find an internet café, and then do my research. Sometimes there is no internet available and I have to go in with no information at all. I like this as long as I'm not arriving in the middle of the night or very late in the afternoon. Walking around in a strange place in the dark looking for a place to sleep and set down your bags is a serious bummer.

If I know well in advance where I am going, I usually try to line up a couch or bed and make sure I have the phone number and address of my host written in my journal too.

When I come across someone who has a guidebook or see one in a bookstore, I like to thumb through it and see if I am missing anything really cool. Usually, I find that I have already found what the guidebook is talking about and often, because I am not on the guidebooks tour, I have found things that aren't listed. This is one of the coolest things that happens in travel. Discovering a beautiful building, a cool museum, a happening night spot, a hidden park, or a bustling market place on your own is the ultimate reward. Finding an unmarked trail with scenic vistas, wandering into an unmapped village, or watching the sunset from a riverside café that no one else has already written about is a big part of why I travel. These are the surprises, this is the music, and the feeling is like falling in love when you least expect it.

ACTIVITIES FOR THE LIMINAL TRAVELER

There's a whole hell of a lot to do in the world that doesn't involve spending your hard-earned cash. Here are a few examples.

The Travel Book

As things stand today, I wouldn't think of traveling without a travel book. I'm not talking about a guidebook. I'm talking about a logbook, a journal, a place to write down thoughts, destinations, email addresses, phone numbers, descriptions, and draw things you see if you have a mind to.

Some people like to tape in their tickets and make it a bit of a scrapbook. Some people like to keep a couple of different books for different things.

I prefer to keep just one book and put everything from my journeys into it. It's a book of scrawled notes, scrapped plans, deep thoughts, and things I may want to see that someone in a random conversation just told me about.

My current travel book I wrote in blue ink on one side of the pages and then when that was full, I started to use black ink as I worked my way back through. This is particularly nice as it gives me a chance to see what I was doing on a particular page when I was using a different colored ink and probably in a different place.

I've used big sketch pads, leather bound journals, moleskin books, and spiral notebooks. At the moment, I am a big fan of a fat spiral notebook with a hard plastic cover that is just the right size to fit in the back pocket of a pair of bluejeans. I've tied a piece of string to the spiral binding that I use as a bookmark and use a fat rubber band to keep it held shut.

Since I don't carry a wallet. Receipts, tickets, and business cards find their way into it too. As to a pen, pick your favorite.

A quick note on the wallet. I also use a fat rubber band wrapped around my debit cards, driving license, and cash. I carry it in my front pocket and it would be considerably harder for someone to lift from me than a big leather wallet or one of those ugly things people wear on cords, since the cords can easily be cut and snatched. I replace the rubber band every few months and it never costs me anything.

Photography

I think it would be silly not to practice photography while traveling. While it is impossible to completely capture everything about a moment in time, you can capture a lot. I use photos later when I am writing about my experiences. I also use them when I blog.

The level of photography is up to you. Right now I have a digital camera that uses 2-AA batteries. I have a charger for the batteries and I bought a bigger memory card so that I can take about 1000 high resolution pictures before the card is full. My camera is simple and cheap and small enough to fit in my pocket. If it gets stolen, I'll be more upset about the pictures I haven't had a chance to upload than about the camera.

At that point, I will probably start to see what I can do with the camera on my cellphone. Both the camera and the cellphone take decent but not great video.

Since I don't want to spend a lot of money doing touristy things, I usually walk around wherever I am looking for photos that someone else might never have considered taking. When I am in tourist areas, I do the same thing. Can you snap a picture of the Eiffel Tower that no one else has thought of?

At the end of the day, I like to upload the pictures onto my computer and if I have a wifi connection, I like to upload them to my Flickr.com account. I end up paying about \$2.50 a month for flickr and will probably change to a free service in the future if possible but at the moment I have about 3000 high resolution images saved there, so \$2.50 doesn't seem too expensive. Many of my friends upload their images to Facebook.com instead.

Another great thing about a camera is that you can take pictures of things that you like instead of buying them. Or take pictures of things before you give them away or sell them. I've found that the image of that little statue my grandfather gave me is just as warming to me as holding it in my hand and much lighter to carry around.

Learning Languages

If you aren't learning languages that are spoken in the places you travel, you are missing out on more than just new ways to say 'Cheers!' Learning the language of a place can give you insight into the way the people in that place think. It can open up doors for you. You can make friends much more easily than if you simply insist on speaking English like some Cro-Magnon colonialist.

Opening up a language book on a train, in a park, or in a café is a way of opening yourself up to those who are trying to learn your language. I've sat on planes learning Tagalog, in trains learning Mandarin, in cafes learning Moroccan Arabic, and in truck taxis learning Lao and in all three cases, I have been approached by local people that were as enthusiastic about helping me learn as I was about learning. In some cases they were more enthusiastic.

Knowing even a little bit of the local language goes a long way towards earning some respect. The French have a bad rap for not wanting to hear foreigners speaking bad French, but all of my French friends say they secretly have more respect for those who try than for those who don't.

At the minimum learn how to say hello, goodbye, thank you, excuse me, where is the toilet, and numbers up to twenty. That's only twenty-five things and you will never be sorry you did it. There are books, tapes, cd's, videos, free online courses, podcasts, and free language exchanges in most major cities.

Amateur Anthropology

Anthropology is the study of human beings. The keystone of anthropology is field work; getting out into the world and observing what is going on. Why not do some field work since you are already out in the world? Find out how the people where you are cook, eat, drink, and form relationships. Ask about who is the most important in the family, in other words who has what responsibilities. Observe how people work, play, and sleep. Ask about folk stories, superstitions, history, and anything else you can think of. Chances are that people will be more than happy to share things about their culture with you.

On a cautionary note, it's a good idea to know something about the culture before you start talking. For example, in Thailand it's offensive to point the bottom of your feet at someone or to touch their heads and in Morocco it's generally frowned on to talk about sex or love lives.

Grocery Shopping

If you think grocery stores are all the same, you are in for a big surprise. Walk into a Japanese grocery store and you might find free booze on Fridays. The reason for this is Friday is payday and some free samples of saki might just loosen up your purse strings.

In Spain, it's not uncommon to buy the entire leg of a pig, complete with the hoof. Most households have a special tool for holding the leg while carving the meat off.

In Morocco, it's rare that you go into the store. Hanuts are little stores full of inventory with a counter at the doorway. You tell the shopkeeper what it is that you want and he gets it for you.

And then there are the products that you find! The packaging can be incredibly exotic and sometimes very funny. The products themselves can range from cream to bleach your skin whiter to pizza flavored candy.

People Watching

This is a little different from amateur anthropology in that you are actually not trying to figure anything out about the culture, just the individuals. If you have never people watched, you are missing out on one of life's great pleasures.

It's easy to do. Just find a comfortable place to sit whether it is in a café, at a park, in a mall, a public market, a balcony, or a beach. The key is that you have to be somewhere where there is no shortage of people. Set yourself up with something to drink, perhaps have a notebook or your camera handy and you are in business.

Now watch.

Soul Searching

This might just be the reason you are traveling in the first place. One of the best things about travel is having the opportunity to really figure out what it is that you want out of life. I've had some of my best insights as a result of being somewhere where I don't speak the language, understand the culture, or have any friends.

Soul searching can take place on a beach as you watch a beautiful sunset, hidden away in a mountain camp, sitting on a crowded bus, standing along a stretch of road where no one wants to pick you up, or eating a burger in a dirty restaurant. In other words, anywhere.

Sure, it's nice to have solitude and time to think, but it's not necessary. I don't have the answers to all of life's questions but one thing I know is that we are here and we should take the time to get to know who it is we really are.

Reading

Reading is a way to take a vacation from wherever it is you might be, dig into a place deeper, or learn something. If you aren't a person who enjoys reading, I offer my sympathy.

As I travel, there are several kinds of reading I like to do. First, I like to dig into the history and culture of where I am. If you are heading to Seville, why not read *The Barber of Seville* or *Don Juan*. Literature can add color to a place that you find dull and colorless. Non fiction can increase your understanding of a place and definitely ups the wow factor.

Second, I like to read escapist fiction. For me, this is sci-fi. If I am tired, sick, hungry, or unhappy; it usually helps to dive into a science fiction novel and begin exploring some strange planet or alternate reality. I like to give my consciousness a bit of a break.

Third, educational reading. If you have the time, why not learn something? I have read about architecture, gardening, psychology, and about a zillion other interesting things while on the road. Some of it has improved my journey; some of it has improved my life.

One note, don't forget to pull your nose out of the book and look around at where you are once in a while!

The Art of Walking

What's the best way to see the world? On foot. No doubt about it. I'm amazed at the number of people who don't like to walk. Seriously, there are people that will actually say "I don't like to walk!" I'm sure you know some of them and I hope that you are not one of them. If you are, snap out of it.

Walking is healthy, free, enjoyable, eye opening, thought provoking, and profound. I don't care where you are, if you want to do something that will have positive results on your mind, body, and spirit; then take a walk.

How do you take a walk? Just get up, go out the door, and walk.

Some people like to power walk, some like to stroll, and still others like to go with a specific destination. Here is how I like to walk:

- 1) Put on some comfortable clothes and shoes.
- 2) Stash a little bit of money in my pocket.
- 3) Fill a light pack with the following (depending on circumstances): Water, a book, travel book, pen, and maybe a knife.
- 4) Open the door, pick a direction, and start walking.

- 5) If I get tired, take a break.
- 6) If I see someplace interesting, check it out.
- 7) If I come to a crossroads, follow my gut.
- 8) If I make a turn, keep in mind what direction I go.
- 9) Find myself somewhere and then find my way back to where I began...or don't.
- 10) Follow crowds.

I could go on and on. I like random walks. I also like to keep an eye on landmarks, pay attention to how long I have been gone, and sometimes get myself incredibly lost and then figure out where I am and how to get back to where I started.

When I arrive in a city, if I have somewhere to stash my bag, I do that, whether it is in a locker, at a friend's, in a hostel, or somewhere else. If I can't stash my bag, I carry it with me. And then I walk. Walking gives you the chance to learn your environment, find interesting places, see the sights, and get some exercise. Personally, I like to walk without the aid of a map, at least at first. I like to find the sights by myself first. Later, I might take a recommended walking tour or follow a tourist map.

The best thing about walking? It's free. Always has been.

Temporary Art

Tibetan monks make incredible geometric patterns from colored sand called mandalas. Then they allow them to disappear. It is an exercise in non-attachment and the impermanence of all things. They spend hundreds of hours making them and then, they let them go.

I like to do the same thing, but on a much smaller scale. If I am at the beach I might create a village made of sticks or a pattern made of alternating black and white stones. If I am in the city, I might think "That can't look pretty funny sitting on that box. The colors seem to go together pretty well." And then I put it there. And then there is graffiti. No doubt someone is going to paint over whatever it is that I draw on that white washed wall, but for the moment, it is my canvas.

Put your energy into it, make it beautiful and interesting, and then walk away.

A note on graffiti: if you can't make it good, don't do it. If you want to see great graffiti, check out some of the work done by Banksy. Tags might make you feel like you are really cool, but if it is an ugly scrawl, you certainly are not. Try an interesting stencil instead.

Listening and Talking

I've put these in a very specific order. First you should listen and then you should talk. This is especially true if you are a stranger in a strange land. The art of conversation has been mangled until it is almost not recognizable. I know far too many people who see themselves as lecturer and everyone else as the audience. If it is a lecture, fine, otherwise, you need to learn to listen.

Listening should be active. Pay attention to the words they are using, try to find the theme behind all of the sentences they have strung together, and see if you can get the other person to tell you something they have never told anyone else. Ask questions and then let silence hang in the air. Refuse to speak and the other person will. Let's say you ask "What is your favorite color?" (and you are sure they heard you.) Now let them answer, don't say a word. They answer "Blue." Still say nothing, let it become uncomfortable. Look at them in expectation. They will tell you more. "Well,

actually not just any blue but this really dark cobalt blue that I first saw on my grandmother's China when I was just a little guy. I remember..."

And suddenly you are having a conversation with some substance. If you think that you have to carry the conversation, then let that uncomfortable silence hang and if it doesn't get filled, get out of there. If I tell a story and everyone enjoys it, I sometimes get a real rush from their energy and like an addict, I am tempted to keep talking.

Instead, I like to finish what I am saying and then let it get silent. Someone will start talking. The truth is that I already know my stories, it is the stories of others that really interest me.

Figuring out how to fit in

There are a million little travel games that I like to play. Sometimes I count the number of times I hear a particular word, try to figure out the meaning of a foreign word that comes up a lot, or watch the way that people walk.

I suppose this is a little like amateur anthropology, but one of the games I am constantly playing is figuring out how to fit into wherever it is that I might be at any given moment. I like to watch the fashion, the way people walk, the way they hold their cups, and the way they eat.

Part of this is picking out the people that don't fit in and why they stick out. If you are in a foreign place, chances are you stand out like a sore thumb without even knowing it. See if you can get locals to talk to you in their language as if you are one of them.

GETTING FROM HERE TO THERE

It seems a little silly to explain about transportation, but I'm going to do it anyway – the reason is because I keep meeting people who have some really crazy ideas about movement and transport and I want to clear up a few things.

Planes

I'd love to tell you that flying isn't necessary for liminal tourism, but the sad reality is that it probably is. For instance, if you want to travel from Hawaii to Asia or North America, flying is probably your best option. If you want to travel from North America to another continent, flying is probably your best option too. However, if you want to really dive into the adventure of the unknown, you don't have to fly. Here are a few examples from people that I have met in my journeys:

- 1) Roz is rowing a rowboat across the Pacific Ocean
- 2) Two scientists built a raft out of garbage and sailed it from California to Hawaii.
- 3) My friend John sailed on a Chinese junk from Hawaii to China but then got caught in a storm and survived a shipwreck
- 4) Sebastian is riding his bicycle from Switzerland to South Africa
- 5) Julio is walking down the east coast of Africa and juggling along the way for food and supplies
- 6) Paul dressed up as a monk and hitchhiked across the United States
- 7) Gal Friday rides a portable bicycle and has taken it all over the world

These people earn great respect from me. I find that for me though, flying is a necessary evil. Here are the negatives of flying: Security hassles, I can't carry my pocket knife and I usually have only a carry on bag, You don't get to see the most interesting things between here and there, sitting in airports and on airplanes blows, and airlines have taken all the glamour and luxury out of flying. No freebies, no in flight entertainment, no snacks, and no gorgeous flight attendants.

There are some positives too: It's still the fastest way to get from someplace you don't want to be to someplace you do want to be, budget flights can be cheaper than any other means besides walking, sometimes the views out of the plane are absolutely mind blowing, I like the sense of culture shock and jet lag that comes with flying. Suddenly you are someplace completely different. No real transition time at all.

Trains

Without a doubt, I like to travel long distance by train better than any other way. It used to be that trains were cheap, but these days, that has started to change. It's a shame. Trains to me are the epitome of liminal travel. If you want to get a taste of what I am talking about watch some of the classic train movies like *Murder on the Orient Express* or *The Darjeeling Limited*.

When you are on a train, you are on a journey. Not only do you get to see everything between here and there pass by, but usually you get to see it without the disgusting clutter of signs and billboards that you have to look at when you are in a car or bus. Sit and listen to some Woody Guthrie while you stare out the window at the world going by.

There is more though. Take a walk through the other cars. Look at your fellow passengers. Strike up a conversation with a stranger who looks interesting. Pull out that bottle of wine you brought with you, share your baguette with the pretty woman sitting across the aisle, step off the train in a town you've never heard of at 2AM to smoke a cigarette while the conductor does the same. Go to sleep to the sound of the engine and hear that lonesome whistle as you drift from a waking dream world to a sleeping one.

Train travel is incredible. So far, I've ridden trains on four continents and never been sorry about it. I've drank homemade whiskey with Chinese farmers between Beijing and Kunming, sat up all night eating Halls menthol with a crazy woman in France, gone on flights of fancy with beautiful girls as we wound our way through the snow covered Rockies, and watched donkey filled shantytowns pass by out the windows of the second class car between Marrakesh and Rabat.

I've made merry, made friends, and made love on trains and even though it has gotten more expensive in recent years, it is still worth every penny.

One note on hopping freight trains. I've still never done it. I'm not sure I ever will. Sad to say but with security, violent crime, and the number of unpleasant crazies that are living in the shadows of society, I've lost my desire to share a freezing cold freight car with an uncertain future. For me, the age of the romantic freight hopping hobo is something that exists only in the writings of the past. I hope that I am wrong. There are plenty of books and websites that talk about the ins and outs of this kind of travel. If you have done it or are doing it, I'd love to share your experiences about it and invite you to be a guest blogger at vagobond.com.

Buses

I'm not a huge fan of bus travel. Essentially, bus travel is as uncomfortable as flying, gives you views of highways and urban shitholes, doesn't allow you to move around, and on top of that is slow. The one saving grace of buses is that at least you see something and it has always been fairly cheap. These days you can find flights cheaper than you can find buses. In actuality, you can rent a car for less or maybe even buy a real junker that you can sell at the end of the trip.

Cars

First of all let's talk about taxis. I like taxi's a lot. If you want to learn something about a place or the people who live in a place, you should definitely take a taxi and spend some energy to make conversation with the cabbie. Taxi travel is rarely the cheapest way to get somewhere, sometimes slower than walking, and often difficult because of language barriers. Still, I recommend taking a taxi if you can afford it and you are in a new place. Here are three memorable taxi rides that I have taken:

1. Salt Lake City
2. Honolulu
3. Chicago

4. Valencia
5. Beijing

Aside from taxis there are other ways to travel by car. In the Philippines, hiring a private car and driver is cheap enough that it makes good sense. Maybe you have enough money to hire a car and driver in other places too, if so, remember to treat your driver like a human being. Bringing them some lunch while they wait for you at the car is a gesture that goes a long way and don't forget to tip!

Car shares and ride shares are a good way to get from place to place. Have a look at *Craigslist.com*, *couchsurfing.com*, or *triphopping.com* to see what kind of opportunities might get you to where you want to go from where you want to leave.

Hitchhiking still works. It's harder today than it was in the past because people are freaked out by the media. Truth is, hitching has always been dangerous and probably isn't any more dangerous today than it has ever been. Another thing making it hard to hitch hike are more and more prohibitive laws that are designed to 'keep you safe'. I've hitched all over the United States, in Great Britain, Thailand, France, and Germany with great results. I tried to hitch hike in Spain and ended up taking a bus after an hour of people driving by, smiling, and waving at me. Spaniards are friendly but they don't pick up hitch hikers. I've had this confirmed by other friends who have tried to hitch rides in Spain.

The most important part of hitching is safety. When you hitch hike, you are taking your life in your own hands. I don't recommend it unless you are willing to face some very difficult situations and you have enough know how to judge whether a ride is good and can be accepted or bad and should be turned down ASAP.

You have to trust your vibes. If anything tells you not to take a ride, don't take it. Make up a reason the ride doesn't work, say no, or if you have to run (but stay on the road and run the opposite direction the car is pointing), scream for help if necessary or pretend to be totally insane...do whatever you have to do to get away from the bad vibe ride!

Here are a few things I do to help me judge a ride and stay safe when I accept one:

- 1) When the car pulls over or drives by try to make contact with the drivers eyes, observe the condition of the car, watch the behavior of the driver
- 2) If the window isn't down open the door. Either way don't get in yet and be the first to speak. Say something like "Hi, where are you headed to?" This gives you an immediate advantage in that if you don't like their vibe you can say, "Gee, thanks but I really want to wait for a ride to (fill in the blank) instead."
- 3) Take a good sniff. Does the car smell like booze? Are there empties on the seat or floor? Taking a ride from an unknown drunk is like playing Russian roulette.
- 4) Watch the eyes of whomever is speaking with you. Are they shifty? Do they make you nervous?

Again, when you hitch, you are taking a big risk and only you are responsible for the consequences. In particular, women traveling alone are in danger. Think ahead, be ready, have an escape plan, and by all means don't start hitching without your eyes wide open to the dangers of it.

Walking, Biking, and other human powered movement

Yes. By all means. It is the best for you, the best for the planet, and by far the most interesting way to get from here to there.

It takes time, you need to have plenty of water and appropriate gear, and you have to have the proper mind set.

Last May I walked the perimeter of the island of Oahu. It was about 132 miles and took me eight days. It was beautiful, inspiring, filled with adventure, and totally exhausting.

Boats

I haven't done much boat travel but I've really enjoyed that I have done. I've taken lots of ferries in the Pacific Northwest, Alaska, Hawaii, the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, and in between Spain and Morocco. I've been on a few multi-day trips. I've day sailed with friends and gotten certified in basic sailing skills. I've kayaked on day trips.

I want to do more. Maybe you would like to invite me?

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

A question that I ask myself again and again is why I travel at all.

Not long ago I was couch surfing with friends in Hawaii and they introduced me to *Google Street View*. My friends and I spent a couple of hours looking at our childhood homes and navigating through the streets of different cities. It was amazing. It was shocking. I was able to show my friends the trees that my family had planted when I was just a little guy and able to see just how big they had gotten at the same time.

In essence, I was there and so were my friends. I know, it was virtual travel, not real travel in that our bodies weren't there at all, but in a way, we were there on that street looking at those peach and apple trees in the front yard of the house my father built all those years ago.

It scared the crap out of me. It got me to thinking about why I should go anywhere at all when I could simply log on to the computer and see the same things. If you want to see the Eiffel Tower, you can pull up millions of pictures from every angle possible by doing a simple image search on the net. You can read about everything that ever happened there. You can read the travel accounts that describe the restaurants, the lines, the smell, and the masses of people.

But the truth is that there really is something about really being there that can never be replicated. Unless you stand under it looking up, you can never really appreciate the largeness of the thing. Unless you feel the coldness of the metal and smell the exhaust from the nearby roads you aren't really having the experience. I can tell you about the police with massive machine guns posted under it or even show you a picture, but there really is something about suddenly coming upon a guy wielding a weapon that is capable of killing hundreds of people in a very short time standing amidst a huge crowd of overweight tourists and screaming kids that defies any sort of description. Being there is really a totally different experience than I or anyone else can describe. The reason why is that I can't describe what it is like for YOU to be there just as no one else can describe what it is like for ME to be there. WE are the variable that changes infinitely. Even the experience of being in the same place at different times is totally different.

I suppose that is true even if you stand still. There is a great line from Lao Tzu's *Tao te Ching* that says something like "Without opening your door you can experience the world." I know that it is almost the opposite of what I have been saying, but at the same time it is absolutely true.

People say they travel to find themselves. Are you ever actually away from yourself? Isn't it just as likely that you could stay put in one place and find yourself? I think it is.

The beautiful thing about traveling though is it takes us out of our normal environment and puts us in places and situations where it becomes very clear what is implicit in us and what is not. In a sense, by shedding our environment, our possessions, our careers, our roles in the lives of others, and all of the things that we take for granted; suddenly we come face to face with what we really have and who we really are.

So the question really becomes, how can I discover who I am? How can I learn about myself? How can I make use of the things that I have been given and determine what I want to keep and nourish and what I want to throw into a big pile of rubbish that contains all the things I used to think I was. For me, this is one of the main reasons why travel. It is a growth experience.

I can attempt to guess what it is that you are looking for in your travels, but it would only be a guess. Instead, I encourage you to pay attention to your thoughts, your fears, your feelings. Listen to those voices in your head that tell you what to do, criticize you, encourage you, and say a million other things and try to figure out who those voices really belong to. Is that voice that tells you that you are weak your voice? Or is it that horrible coach you had in junior high? Is that voice that says you deserve a break your voice? Or are you letting an advertising jingle set your future for you?

Travel is a chance to break free of all these things. Liminal travel is an even better chance because you really have to be turned on and tuned in to be willing to put yourself directly in the path of the unknown.

I've come across many things in my life that have provided me with insights. In writing, I like to share those in the hope that you who read this might be able to gain something from it too.

I see one of the most horrid aspects of our homogenized world culture as the attachment to material things in order to try to fill an existential or spiritual void. We value possessions as if they are all we have. In fact, we don't really have them at all. Every last one of us is going to die unless some scientific miracle happens (and maybe it would actually be an atrocity). Face it. Your body is going to die. The bodies of everyone you know and love are going to die. It is probably inevitable.

Some people are convinced that when the body dies, you are dead. They are certain that bodily death is the end, kaput, finis.

I'm not so sure. It's possible, but I don't think it is very likely.

Either way, think about those things you are hanging on to. You can't take them with you. The pharaohs and the Chinese emperors tried and now those possessions are sitting in museums.

So in terms of putting psychic importance on these things, are you sure you really want to?

A few years ago I read a document called *The Dirtbag Manifesto*. The reason I mention it right now is because there was one suggestion in it that I really liked in regards to your possessions.

The advice was to take 10% of what you think you need, 10% completely unnecessary luxury, and leave the other 80% behind. The question is though, how do you figure out what you need? Like figuring out most things, it is a process.

If you don't use something over the course of a few days, get rid of it."Brilliant!

I've utilized this philosophy ever since in varying degrees to pare my possessions down to the 25 or so things I am carrying with me right now. My time line is usually about two weeks if I am on the road or longer if I am in a place where I can accumulate things without having to carry them.

I have a friend that had a huge closet full of clothes she never wore and she did the same thing. She turned all of the clothes she had backwards on the hangar and if she wore something she would hang it forward. At the end of a month, she knew what she didn't use. Then she got rid of almost all

of the things she didn't. A bonus to this system is you figure out what things are worth keeping even if you don't use them.

It's an incredibly utilitarian philosophy and it allows you to create some psychic space where all those attachments were before. In science they say nature loves a vacuum and I think that the brain/consciousness does too. As soon as you have jettisoned all that junk watch how quickly something even more beautiful, useful, or cool comes into your life.

So, maybe that's why you are traveling. To figure out who you really are.

In *Nine Chains to the Moon*, R.Buckminster Fuller talked about an invisible pilot that our body/minds aren't aware of. The invisible pilot is the consciousness that is behind all the things you think are really you. All of your experience, education, and bodily needs are obscuring the invisible pilot.

I like this exercise that I learned at a mind/body workshop from a guy named Wally Mento when I was around 17 years old. My grandmother paid for my sister and I to go to this thing and I think it profoundly changed the way I live my life. I can't vouch for anything else about Wally Mento, but I like this exercise a lot:

Close your eyes and imagine yourself holding a giant black sack. Now imagine putting everything that is you into the bag. Really visualize it. Put your fears, your education, your memories, your loves, your dreams, your thoughts, your emotions...all of it. Now imagine stuffing your body into the bag. Stuff your eyes, nose, head, face, torso, arms, and legs into the sack. Everything that is you. If you need to; put in your possessions, your family, and all the external things. Now imagine cinching the bag up tight and lift it up into the air. Do you have everything in the bag? Even your body? Good. Now the question is: Who or what is holding the bag up in the air?

If you did this exercise the way that most people (including me) do it, something is holding the bag up in the air and I would posit that it is your invisible pilot.

Consider that for a second. Maybe you are traveling at the bequest of that invisible pilot. Maybe every decision that you have ever made has been a result of that invisible pilot. It's more than probable that the real you knows more about you than you do.

A great story that illustrates just how little we actually know comes from Dan Millman's *Way of the Peaceful Warrior*. In the story a spiritual teacher has a student who thinks he knows it all. The teacher says that if the student can answer one simple question, he will have demonstrated his mastery of the teachings. The question? Where are you? The student confidently answers the name of the town. The teacher asks where the town is, then where the country is, then where the planet is, then where the solar system is, then where the galaxy is; until finally, the student is forced to admit that he doesn't really know where in the universe he is. The point is that if you don't really know where you are, can you be certain that you know anything else?

A nice question for all travelers to ask themselves, I think.

LIMINAL ROMANCE

Travel can be lonely. Life can be lonely too. In fact, travel is no more lonely than the rest of life, but sometimes when you are faced with nothing but yourself and all the exterior distractions of a sedentary life have been stripped away, you can start to feel insignificant in this great big world. In those times, it sure feels good to have someone to hold, someone to confirm that you really are who you think you are, and someone to make you feel as if there is more than just the material world to consider when looking at the equation of life itself.

Romance is a liminal activity as much as travel is. There is probably a reason why the classic example of liminality has to do with marriage and the state of being in between it and the single life. Consider all the uncertainties associated with a new romantic relationship. At what point does she/he become your girlfriend/boyfriend? Are you really in love? What does it mean to be in love? For that matter, what is love in the first place?

A lot of people have spent a lot of time trying to figure that one out and put it into words. Maybe all of them are right, maybe none of them. I don't know. I tend to think that love is something that is different every time for every person or every two people that agree to love one another. Escaping from the necessity to try to pen another hit or miss definition of love, I propose that love is when two of R. Buckminster Fuller's invisible pilots see past all the consciousness/body clutter and recognize that they have some innate compatibility. I would contend that the mind/body/chemical reactions are simply a way of our material/conscious selves reconciling themselves to the fact that something beyond their comprehension is taking place.

What could be more liminal than that?

Romance on the road can be good, it can be bad, and it can be ugly. (Insert theme from Sergio Leone's *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly* into your mind here.)

While there is a temptation stirring in me to overlay my own morality into this section, I am going to try to resist that. If some of it slips through, I offer my apologies and encourage you to pay attention if you agree with it or toss it out if you don't. The reason for this is that each of us has unique experiences in this world, each of us suffers in a unique way, each of us has our own views on what is good and what is bad, and each of us make our own decisions (hopefully). I am fairly certain that I know the difference between good and bad, but not so certain that I am willing to tell you that 'this is good' and 'this is bad'. I've learned enough to know that what tastes good to me may taste like shit to you. This is probably as true in the realm of morality as it is in the realm of food.

Certainly, every relationship I've had with another person has been unique. In my own circumstances, half of the equation was always the same and still each relationship was different, so in your relationships where both halves are unknown to me, I am going to profess complete ignorance. I'll leave it to people like Dr. Phil to tell you what the answers are, though I should warn you that they probably don't know the answers either.

Now that the issue of morality is out of the way, we can start to talk a little bit about the liminal romance. I would posit that there are a few different kinds of romance you will encounter while you travel on the liminal side:

- 1) The committed long distance romance. This is where you have someone who is not with you who is your one and only. There is no one else.
- 2) The uncommitted long distance romance. This is where you have someone who may or may not be committed to you and who you may or may not be committed to who is not with you. There may be someone else but one or both sides of this relationship may not know it.
- 3) The open long distance relationship. Someone who is not with you is still involved with you. You are both committed to not being committed but also committed to be in this state together. You may or may not discuss encounters with one another.
- 4) Committed and traveling together. This is fairly straight forward.
- 5) Uncommitted and traveling together. One or both people may have something on the side while the other doesn't know.
- 6) Open and traveling together. These couples give one another the go ahead to become involved with others.
- 7) Single and looking to not be. These are travelers who are single but don't want to be. They may not know they are looking for a relationship , but they are looking.
- 8) Single and looking for no strings attached fun. These are travelers who are looking for sex, a romantic evening, a few days, or what have you but are not interested in anything long term.

Imagine a room with sixteen people in it. There are two of each kind listed above. Six of the people are the couples from numbers 4, 5, and 6. Let's look at the combinations that may result.

First, we can take #4 and put them in their room together. They are out of the picture. Now we can take the two #1's and put them in their rooms sending emails off to their one and only. So now there are 12 people in the room. If my math is correct, this creates 144 different interpersonal relationship possibilities. Every possibility is valid because we have to assume that not everyone will be honest about their status. For instance the man in the uncommitted long distance relationship may not tell the woman who is single and looking for a long term relationship that he has someone he doesn't intend to leave or the woman in the open relationship may not tell the man who is single and looking for no strings attached fun that she has a boyfriend and he may not tell her he isn't interested in anything long term, even though it would be fine if they did. Perhaps they both pretend to be falling deeply in love, or as sometimes happens, they actually do and end up changing the dynamic completely.

The only thing you can know for sure is who you are and where you fit. Maybe you can be sure of your significant other too, but then again, maybe you can't.

I've had liminal romance while on the road. If you've traveled you probably have too. It can be beautiful and it can be tragic. It can make your soul fly and it can make you want to simply fly home.

The thing about the liminal romance is that it is never permanent. Even if you go home to your one and only, that feeling that you have when you are looking at dresses for her in Milan is completely unique.

I would point out too, that not all romance is sexual. As an example, one of the most romantic days I've ever spent was with a woman that I've never even made out with. We booked into a four star Chinese hotel in Bangkok with two double beds, then we set out to explore the city, we took water

taxis through the canals, took motorcycle taxis from two Lao guys who raced their bikes with us on the back of them, even though we had no money, we decided that since we were Westerners we would go shopping for luxury cars we didn't intend to buy, we visited free art galleries, and finally we went up into the tallest building in the city and drank whiskeys while listening to Thai Diana Ross impersonators. Then we walked back through the crowded streets while stooping sometimes to shop in interesting places and finally went back to our hotel room and climbed into our own beds. Even as I write this, I'm not sure how we knew not to sleep together, but I'm fairly certain if we had, it would have taken away some of the magic of this day.

Liminal romance can be fast and intense or slow and simmering. It can last minutes or a lifetime.

Imagine walking through a foreign city as the rain pours down. You duck under an overhanging awning with others trying to escape the deluge. As you all crowd under the too small awning, you are forced against a beautiful woman in a wet business suit. She is so close against you that you can feel her shiver. Without really intending to you put your arm around her. She looks at you with gratitude and when your eyes meet, something incredible passes between you. When the rain stops, she holds onto your hand and leads you to an apartment where she falls into your arms and you begin to kiss her. Later, you put on your still wet clothes and lean over the crisp white sheets of her bed to kiss her goodbye. As you tiptoe out the door you hear her voice call out "Ciao!"

Ah yes, liminal romance.

As to the particulars, it is really up to you. Sometimes you may want to keep in touch with a person you have a romantic encounter or romance with and sometimes you may not. In the age of *Facebook*, *Google* search, and email if you tell someone your name, you may be creating a lifetime connection with them. Sometimes that is a good thing. Sometimes it is not.

Again, I'm not here to give you morality, but I will say that sometimes a person may just want to enjoy the romance and not want to have any sort of long term connection. In the example above, much of the romance is lost if more of a tangible line of communication is created between the two.

REACHING A DESTINATION

Although it may seem counter-intuitive, the place you are going is not the end of your journey. The destination is just as much a place and time to be experienced as the in-between parts.

A journey is typically made up of check points. Places to stop, grab your bearings, collect your thoughts, fill your water bottle, replenish your supplies (physical, emotional, and spiritual), and figure out what you have experienced, where you have been, and where you are going next. On top of that, the place where you end up is definitely not fixed in time or space.

What I mean by this is that there are new things to be experienced, learned, and absorbed even in the same place that you have been to a hundred times. Let's consider a very simple sort of trip that most people have made numerous times; a trip to the local grocery store.

Even though you have been to the store many times and you know where to find all the things you are looking for, the store is different each time you visit. So far we have been looking at the in between parts, the trip from your house to the store. Now we are going to have a good look at your destination.

The store is filled with all the things you think you want. That is the reason you are going there. You think there is something there that you want. Let's say in this example that you are going to the store specifically for lemon yogurt. Maybe a few days before, you went to the store and bought a lemon yogurt and you liked it so much that now you are going back, or maybe someone you know told you about the lemon yogurt they bought at this store and you have decided that you too want to experience it.

You travel to the store having many adventures and observations along the way because you are tuned into the journey, not just your destination. You arrive at the store. You know where the lemon yogurt is and you make a direct line to this area. Along the way you pass by a special that the management has just put up on chocolate brownies, you pass by a stock boy who just started working at the store this day, you may or may not notice that there are a completely different cast of characters in the store than were in it the last time you were there, there is a wet floor sign that an old woman in front of you doesn't notice and you watch her almost slip but instead she gracefully catches herself with a smooth movement you wouldn't expect from someone so old and you think to yourself that perhaps when she was younger she was a very accomplished dancer, and finally you reach the refrigerated case where the lemon yogurt is...and find that it is all gone. There is no more lemon yogurt to be found in this store.

At this point, you have a few options. You can curse your luck, complain to the management, and walk out of the store unhappy and swearing that you will never go back and it is the worst store in the world. A lot of people make this choice.

Or, alternatively, you can think about what you have seen in the store, walk around, possibly buy something else, and continue to enjoy all of the interesting things that exist in even the most

mundane of places.

Or, maybe you get there, you buy the lemon yogurt and eat it and it tastes awful. Or maybe you find it and it is just as good as you expected it to be. In every scenario, there is one thing that is constant: you are now at the place that you decided to go. Your job now is to decide what to do about it.

I've always liked the ridiculous line from *The Brady Bunch* where Mike says "Wherever you go, there you are."

It's true in the grocery store, Katmandu, Istanbul, Cape Town, Madrid, and Cincinnati. If you are there, you are there. Now what are you going to do about it? Imagine substituting India for the grocery store and a profound spiritual experience for lemon yogurt. Is anything different about this story? Not really. You might find it, you might not, or you might find something else.

Personally, I try to keep as few expectations about my destinations as possible. I'm not always successful at this, but I try. Buddha said that expectations lead to disappointment and truer words have never been said. You might be heading to this place for lemon yogurt or a profound spiritual experience, but try to keep in mind that what you find might not be that which you were looking for or expecting.

When I came to Morocco, I expected to find cheap prices, intolerant religious people, hostility towards Americans, and a country filled with deserts. All of those things are here, but they aren't anywhere near as widespread as I had expected. The prices of some things in Morocco are more than in Europe or America, for example cigarettes cost more than in Spain. Morocco has a long history of religious tolerance and while it is a Muslim country, it is a place where Muslims, Jews, Christians, and Pagan people have lived relatively peacefully side by side for centuries. While there is some hostility towards Americans, for the most part, Moroccans all would love to go to America and short of that would love to have a friend from there. Morocco was actually the first country to officially recognize the United States as being sovereign from Great Britain after the Declaration of Independence in 1776. As for deserts, Morocco has beautiful parts of the Sahara but it also has the largest mountain range in Africa, cool mountain towns, breezy seaside villages, and lush Mediterranean gardens.

My expectations were actually pretty far off the mark. In fact what I actually found here was much better than anything I might have expected. The key is that I was open to the unknown. I spent time wandering without an agenda and when an experience occurred, I let it.

The destination is definitely not the end of your liminal travels. It is just a place where you place a tick mark on the map. It is a place where you hopefully take the time to breathe in the finer details of reality. It is a place where you not only absorb the essence of where you are, but also take the time to contemplate and learn about where you have been.

LIMINAL SUFFERING

As I write this I've been sitting in the Frankfurt Hahn Airport for nearly 24 hours because I used up all the overdraft on my bank cards as a result of Paypal shutting down my account because I accessed it in Morocco. I slept terribly, I'm on my way to a job that disappeared as soon as I spent all my money buying tickets to get to North America, and I am constantly asking myself whether I am making the right decision to go on or if I should just head back to Morocco and farm rabbits. I can't even get to the boarding area for another forty minutes and the ladies in the café seem ready for me to get up and vacate this table. On top of that I have diarrhea, I don't think I have a place to stay in Dublin where I will be in just a few hours, I'm out of money, and once I arrive in Quebec City, I don't know where I will go, how I will get there, or what I will do.

Sometimes things go wrong when you are between places. At the moment I am pretty miserable, but the beautiful thing is that I know that it could all turn around in a moment.

And of course it did and a whole new series of joys and pleasures came about.

I found places to stay in Ireland and Canada. I hitchhiked across Canada with \$4 Canadian. I made new friends. I found work with my father and then a whole new realm of suffering opened up as our relationship fell apart, I was left without the resources I needed to marry my Moroccan fiance, and I found myself in a different liminal state as I waited to return to Morocco with just about the same amount of money I had when I left in the first place.

And now, six months later, I am sitting in a small apartment I've rented in the Casbah of Sefrou where I am trying to build a life. The suffering of the past is gone and I am now dealing with new things I never dreamed of, some of them good, some not so good.

The moral of all of this is that life goes on as long as you let it. Like the manic depressive king who sought a cure for his sadness and his happiness without success until a wandering wise man gave him the simple solution.

THIS TOO SHALL PASS.

And so it shall. You simply need to weather the storm so that you can find what lies around the next bend of your liminal existensis. In sickness, in health, in poverty, in wealth, and in all the states in between there are lessons to be learned, joys to be found, and sorrows to learn to deal with. And the one thing you can be sure of, this too shall pass for change is the only constant in the universe.

LIMINAL SPIRITUALITY

This section might have everything to do with travel or it might have nothing to do with it. The decision is up to you. I'm not trying to force anyone to think anything or to make something spiritual for you that you don't want to be.

The truth for me is every bit of this life is spiritual. Sometimes I forget, but when I am tuned in and the metaphorical meter is turned on, there is nothing that doesn't have to do with the greater questions. This includes travel, philosophy, religion, nature, and science. All of it.

In my life, I've spent a lot of time reading in order to try to find the answers to some of these questions. I've read the *Bible*, the *Qur'an*, the *Tao te Ching*, the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*, the *Book of Mormon*, *Confucious*, the *Mayan Prophecy*, the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, sections of the *Torah* and the *Hadith*, the *Upanishads*, *Constructing the Universe*, the *Tao of Quantum Physics*, *Guru Granth Sahib*, and hundreds more books that attempt to give answers to these questions.

You know the questions I mean, right? Why am I here? What is the meaning of my life? What is the meaning of life in general? Why are we here? What is love? What is the source of the universe? Who or what is God? What does God want? Does God want anything? What is real? Is life an illusion? Is consciousness an illusion? And on and on and on. BIG questions. The type of questions that can't be answered definitively but that must be answered with faith.

I've come to a few conclusions and I'd like to share them with you.

First of all this. Everyone is saying the same thing. Maybe this sounds impossible or unlikely to you, but I'm convinced of it.

We spend countless resources and lives fighting with each other to prove that what we are saying is right and what the other person is saying is wrong. It's a tragic irony that everyone is saying the same thing. This is what I think we are all saying:

I am. I'm not sure why I am, but I am. I have a feeling that I am for some reason, but I'm not sure exactly what that reason is, but someone or something knows that reason (even if that reason might just be because the universe happened by itself and you are a consequence of that process.) I am.

Because you are and because I am, We are. And because we are and it is essentially intellectually impossible to deny that there is a shared reality that lies between us, It is.

Or to simplify that to the essence of two letters and one sound, IS.

Our arguments generally revolve around IS.

Is not.

Is so.

Is not.

Is so so.

Is not not.

We are all trying to tell each other what IS is. And since we are all experiencing IS from within a different body/consciousness, it is probably impossible that any of us actually do agree on what IS is. You might be thinking, but I am a Muslim and all Muslims believe exactly the things I believe. Bullshit. Same goes for Christians, Catholics, Hindus, Sikhs, and everyone else. Each person has a very unique view of exactly what IS is that is different from each other persons.

Shariff Baba, a Sufi teacher whom I once had the pleasure of learning a few things from told a great story about this that I think makes it pretty clear:

Imagine that every person on the planet is standing on the shores of a giant lake shoulder to shoulder with each other. Everyone is facing inward and in the middle there is an island that everyone can see. The island is not symmetrical or regular, it is complex and has many different features. If you are standing next to me, perhaps we both see a coconut tree with three coconuts on it. We agree that this is the islands main feature and so we name it 3-Coconut Island. Clear on the other side of the lake there are several people that can see a cliff with many birds in it, they decide to call it Birdcliff Island. At another portion a tower is seen, these people call it Tower Island. And so on. We all start to talk about the island and soon arguments erupt over what is on the island and what the island should be named. The truth is that none of us are wrong. We are simply standing in different spots. Furthermore, even though you and I think we see the same thing because we are standing near each other, in actuality, because we are not on the exact same spot, we are not seeing the same thing. The Island is God, Allah, Christ, Buddha, Krishna, Ba'el, or whatever name you want to call it from where you are standing. The Island has not changed a bit because of our naming it something or seeing it as something from where we stand. The island simply IS.

The *Tao te Ching* sums this up neatly with :The name that cannot be said is the eternal name. *al-Quran* sums it up by saying that Allah is incomprehensible. The old testament of the *Bible* says that God cannot be seen by man. Quantum physics state that the source of everything in the universe is unknown.

We are all saying the same thing. The problem is that some people don't want to admit that they don't know. These people want you and everyone else to agree with them that what they see is the only thing that can be seen.

In *The Sufis*, Idries Shah tells the tale of a people who face a horrible sickness and so have to forget everything they know and vacate their land to a distant island. They figure out that they can retain the skills of boat building and swimming and by the time they reach their land again from the distant island, the sickness will be gone. It will take many generations of moving from one island to the next to get back to the source. After a few generations, many boat builders and swimmers have left and not returned. A few people start to grumble about the loss of resources and manpower that those who leave are responsible for. They start to tell others that the boats go nowhere and the swimmers drown and it is an unnecessary drain on the island and the people. In a few more generations they convince the people to make boat building and swimming illegal and the boat builders and swimmers are forced underground to continue their work. Since the necessary knowledge is now hidden from the public view but being secretly transmitted, a few generations later most people believe that swimming and boat building are only a myth that never existed, and a few generations later, people have completely forgotten that this path back to the source and the source itself exist at all. And yet, beneath their noses, the essential teaching is still being handed from teacher to student. And those who choose to see it and utilize it are able to make their way back to the source and recover all that had been lost.

I am convinced that this story is more than a story. It is happening all around us. When I look at the essential teachings of all the world's religions, I see the knowledge of how to swim and how to build boats being passed over by the majority of people. I see false teachers telling their followers the parts that benefit the teachers most and the students least. I see people blinded by materialism and walking through this life as if there is nothing more than a big house, a new car, and a wife with perfect titties.

When I talk about Liminal Spirituality what I am talking about is the shared areas that exist between all of the teachings of all of the religions and philosophies of the world. The space that bridges between Christianity and the Animism of Papua New Guinea or Sulawesi. The bridge between Islam and Buddhism. The bridge between Hinduism and Hopi religion. The bridge between Shinto and Scientology.

Yes, Scientology. Don't throw out the baby with the bath water. The reason why L. Ron Hubbard was able to create a religion wasn't because he was a science fiction writer who accepted a bet from Robert A. Heinlein, instead maybe he was a science fiction writer because he had an awareness and openness to IS and he was able to put a fair amount of truth into *Dianetics* and Scientology that other people recognized.

Scientology is just as ridiculous as every other religion that purports to tell us exactly what the island in the middle of the lake looks like. That doesn't mean that the view from that particular spot is wrong.

If you want to see the complete picture, you have to look at every viewpoint and construct a composite. A police sketch never looks exactly like the criminal, but we can get a pretty good idea of the person from it. How much more complex is it to construct the face of God? Infinitely more complex.

I've used drugs to try to discover God and I've read Timothy Leary and Terrence McKenna. I remember eating way too many magic mushrooms one time and then going to a big concert at the Columbia River Gorge. My trip took me to a lot of interesting places, but the best part was as the sun began to go down. The sky became about a thousand different colors and the light spilled over onto the cliffs ahead of me and the river below. I watched birds wheeling in the light and the music somehow went perfectly with everything that was surrounding me. Suddenly I realized that there was a great pattern and that I was an integral part of it and so were all of the people around me.

"We ARE!" I shouted into the air and into the crowd. I felt the unity, I understood in those moments that the molecules of air that were touching me were touching other molecules of air that were touching those birds, those people, and the waves created by those sounds. There is no such thing as empty space. There is no such thing as separate.

The mushrooms wore off, but the realization never did. Sometimes I forget, but I always come back to it.

A truck just drove by outside. I heard the sound. The sound of that motor traveled as waves between that truck and my ears. By the time the sound reached me the truck had already made the sound in the past. I was listening to something that existed before in the present. In fact, there is no empty space between where that truck was and where I am. We like to think that someone owns everything in this world. We talk about owning airspace, owning land, owning outer space, owning our skin. Tell me this? Who owns the sound of that truck? Who owns the color blue? If someone owns everything who is it that owns these things?

IS that's who.

I don't even own my skin. It is constantly shedding and changing, falling on the ground.

In 2008, I started to experiment with Salvia Divinorum. I've taken a lot of drugs in my life, but there is nothing else like Salvia. I smoked Salvia perhaps thirty-five times and I would say that what Salvia does is erase the empty space we imagine between things. It shows us that the space is not empty at all. I've read a lot of accounts of people smoking Salvia and one near universal is the sense that there is someone there. In some cases, people actually see, meet, and discuss things with a person that is often seen as a sort of white goddess. I never saw such a person. I did, however, sense a presence. I asked this presence who it was. The answer did not come in words. Instead, it showed me. Everything began to pull apart. The molecular forces that hold the universe together disappeared. Gravity, electro-magnetism, and atomic force all disappeared. The presence was what holds it all together and makes it real to us. The presence was God.

Wait a minute? Am I saying that God is gravity, electro-magnetic force, and atomic force? Am I saying that God revealed him/her/it self to me without showing me a face or saying a word?

Yes. That is what I am saying.

The truth is that while we are able to use these forces and even define them, no one can really tell you where they come from, what they are, or how they work. Dig around on the internet, talk to people who have spent their lives studying them, and you will find that once you get past the definitions; if you dig and dig, the answer is 'We don't know.'

Salvia lasts about 15 minutes and then it is gone. It is the most intense psychedelic I have ever used. After that experience, I didn't feel like I needed to use it again.

Since then, I see what I call the hand print of God everywhere. I've looked at a sky filled with clouds and seen that the formation of the clouds in a certain spot is identical to the view of the horizon in another. I've pointed this out to friends and blown their minds with it. It is not imagination. It is not chance.

Watch water ripple on a lake or pond and let your mind relax. Watch the patterns that form as you stop thinking for a moment. First they seem to go one direction, then they go another, then they become geometric, then they start to form pictures. Watch the waves on the ocean or the wind blowing through tall grasses and you will see the same thing. Maybe these aren't pictures that mean anything to you or to me, maybe the patterns are just patterns, but I don't think so.

I think they are the hand prints of God. There is order in the Universe, there is a controlling force, there is something. The proof is all around us. IS.

Brion Gysin invented something called the dream machine. The dream machine uses light and a cylinder with squares cut from it that rotates at a certain speed. If you sit in front of a dream machine and close your eyes, you start to see the same patterns and colors that you find if you contemplate the grass, the water, or the sky in the right way. No drugs necessary. You will see pictures. You will see the hand prints of God.

These patterns are the same patterns that you find in religious art all over the world. They are the same patterns you find in geometry. They are the same patterns you find in a spiral, the growth of a pattern, the human ear, and the structure of atoms. The builder has left a signature.

With everything we know about the universe, science, and reality. Only a small portion of it is visible to us. What fills the rest of it? Are you sure that the decisions you think you are making are actually a result of your decision making skills? Are you sure that there aren't giant people made of marshmallows in the fourth dimension who are made up of multiple invisible pilots in this dimension and who push us around with hockey sticks while we think we are going of our own free will?

Okay, we can probably be pretty sure that isn't happening, but there could be something just as outrageous and incomprehensible going on.

Are you sure that you know where you are?

A FEW SPECIFIC TRAVEL SUGGESTIONS

I've been a lot of places and I thought you might want some specific suggestions. Here ya go...

Alaska – Drink an Alaskan Amber in the Alaskan Bar in Juneau with an Alaskan while other Alaskans perform for open mike at midnight while it is still daylight outside.

California – Eat tacos from a cart in East L.A. and be sure to ask for the super hot sauce. It's gonna hurt, but you have to do it once. Try to enjoy their laughter. They are definitely laughing at you.

Oregon – Go to Florence and try to find Frying Pan Creek. If you prefer the city go to Portland and check out The Clinton Street Theatre, one of the oldest movie houses in the USA. Have a craft microbrew from the same establishment while you watch the film.

Hawaii- Hands down best thing in Hawaii is the Kalalau Valley on Kauai. You have to hike or paddle to get there, but do it. Also make sure you go up the valley to the Ginger Pools and the natural waterslides.

Washington- Scenic Hot Springs off Highway 2. Make sure you go when there is plenty of snow. In Seattle, visit the Troll in Fremont.

Utah – Spend a day hanging out with the weeded out bums in Ogden.

New York – Go to my cousin Chris' bar in Queens and hang out with the locals. Then head to the Chelsea Hotel and have cocktails in the creepy Spanish restaurant next to it.

Boston – Chowda' and pastries from Mike's.

Rhode Island – Get some fresh Lobsters and check out the mansions.

North Carolina- Take a road trip along the Blue Ridge Parkway. Definitely camp.

Virginia – Check out where George Washington did some graffiti on Natural Bridge.

New Jersey – Go to a cheesy Italian restaurant and enjoy watching the heavy looking guidos and their heavily made up wives. Don't forget to dress like you are made.

Philippines- Go to the island of Siquihor and meet Don Juan, the famous witch. Watch out for his potions.

Thailand – Skip the tourist islands and head to Ko Lipe just before it is evacuated for typhoon.

Indonesia – Go to Lake Toba and drink coconut wine in a riverside bar filled with Bataks. Make sure you bring your guitar skills. You'll need them.

China – Take a spiritual journey to Mt. Taishan. Climb it and you are promised to live until 101. Climbed by every Emperor, Mao, Lao Tzu, and Confucius.

Laos – Buy a huge bag of weed for the equivalent of a dollar and then wander around in your boxer shorts.

Tahiti – Take a drive and enjoy how every sign has been made illegible by graffiti.

Spain – All of Spain is wonderful. If you only want to do one thing, go to Grenada and visit Alhambra. Then take a hike in the Sierra Nevada, it's magnificent.

Morocco – The best things in Morocco are the people. Hike somewhere where there aren't a lot of tourists, bring presents, and make new friends.

France – Wine and graveyards. Make friends with someone in a village and see why people dream of French country life.

Gibraltar – Take the tram to the top of the rock. Meet the apes. Hike back down. Skip the food.

Belgium – Brussels. All the food, all the beer, all the comic book art as graffiti, all the statues of things peeing. Piss on a church, it's legal.

Netherlands – Hands down it's the Buttplug Dwarf in Rotterdam. Where else can you see families strolling by a giant black dwarf holding a huge buttplug?

Portugal – Sit in the grass next to the river in Oporto and drink port. Admire the urban decay. Go to Lisboa and stay in some of the fanciest hostels in the world.

Scotland – Watch what happens when you tell a Scottish joke in a Scottish pub.

England – The British Museum. It's free and magnificent. The booksellers nearby are worthy of a multi day visit.

Germany – Eat some sausages and drink lots of beer.

Canada – Visit the Punjabi district of Vancouver and then head to the world's best anthropology museum at the University of British Columbia.

Mexico – See if you can get across the border into the United States with no papers. Give it a try.

ABOUT VAGO DAMITIO

That's pretty much all I have to say right now. You may want to check out [Rough Living: Tips and Tales of a Vagabond](#) or [Smooth Living: Beyond the Life of a Vagabond](#) – you can find them both at <http://www.vagodamitio.com> along with more books, stories, articles, and more. You can email me at vago@vagodamitio.com – I look forward to hearing from you! ~Vago



The Early Years

Vago Damitio was born on a crunchy snow white morning in Tacoma, Washington to a waitress and a musician on December 27, 1971.

He is the fifth generation of Damitio's born in the Puget Sound Region and descended from the Walkers, Boones, and Mcleods on his mother's side. There is some talk of royals and Cherokees in his family but one thing is certain, he was born of a family of pioneers. His ancestors were some of the first Americans in the Pacific Northwest, the first Europeans in the Americas, and the first oil men in the Gulf States. Both of his grandfathers worked in the Middle East during the 30's, 40's, and 50's. Their far ranging tales and his grandmother's collection of National Geographic Magazines led him to a thirst for travel and adventures.

His given name was Christopher and he was variously known as Chris, Christ (rhymes with Twist), and finally Vago. His childhood was spent exploring old ghost towns of the West, hiking in the mountains, and camping in the great National Parks of America. Significant time was spent digging underground forts and building treehouses in the mountains and forests of California and Oregon. An early love of books led to all of these forts being well stocked with books about travel and adventures.

From about the age of ten, Vago set about discovering how to survive in the wilds and create everything he needed. From solar stills to trapping, tanning skins to building bows and arrows from raw materials, to knapping stone tools surviving in the wilds with minimal tools or equipment. He would set out on solo camping trips in which he tested himself in the wilds from about the age of twelve onward. He became an expert with firearms and upon graduating high school opted to join the US Marines because it seemed like the most challenging thing he could put before himself.

Sergeant of Marines

His decision to join the Marines was also based on a sense of patriotism since the US was about to engage in the first significant war since Vietnam. Stories of the mighty Iraqi army and how difficult it would be to defeat the terrible Republican Guard laid his duty before him clearly. The war was over before he'd completed the three months of boot camp in San Diego. Over the next four years, he served honorably, became an expert with rifle, pistol, and knife, and achieved the rank of Sergeant before completing his obligation and earning an Honorable Discharge. He was never required to kill anyone in the service of his country, which was a huge blessing.

Radical and Dropout

In 1995 he returned to the Pacific Northwest where he worked in radio, film, and print journalism while achieving a minor degree in journalism. His explorations of Alaska, the UK, the USA, and Canada brought him into contact with new ideas and new people and in 1996 he decided that firearms were too dangerous to be in the hands of individuals and responsibly sold all of his guns. In hindsight, he wishes he would have simply melted them down so there would be that many fewer guns in the world. From 1998 to 2000 he published and edited *Conchsense*, a magazine dedicated to finding the meeting point between creativity and community.

By the end of 1999, *Conchsense* had become too radical for its advertising base after a year spent organizing for the World Trade Organization Protests in November of 1999. The protests were a success in that they shut down the WTO meeting in Seattle, but a failure in that they didn't change the general idea and caused the global governing body to rethink how it would deal with protest and dissent. In 2000, Vago laid *Conchsense* to rest and joined a Silicon Valley dotcom startup called *TechPlanet* as a partner in Seattle.

Techplanet was typical of greedy venture capital startups and operated more on hype than substance. Seeing the writing on the wall, Damitio retired from corporate life with no money or stock options. His final act at *TechPlanet* was to send out an email to all the employees that they should leave before the company told them it wouldn't be able to pay them. Two months later, the company sent a notice asking employees to work without pay while they secured financing. Two weeks after that, the headquarters in Silicon Valley closed without notifying the other 52 offices around the US and that was the end of that. No one got any stock options.

Vago's next gig (late 2000) was working as a community organizer for ACORN (the Association of Communities Organizing for Reform Now) where he helped organize tenants to fight for better conditions from slumlords and worked on bringing about awareness of predatory lending. When he suggested to his union members that they go throw bricks through the Countrywide Mortgage windows, his superiors decided it was time for him to move on. Too radical for ACORN.

At this point, Vago decided to lead by example. He would move out of his house, live in his VW van (which he'd bought for \$100), and demonstrate how those who would soon be evicted from their homes could not only survive, but thrive. Over the next twenty weeks he lived the life of a road warrior while discovering how to live in America with no home, no job, no money, and plenty of ingenuity.

The universe told him to quit in 2001 when he won more than \$2000 on a slot machine at an Indian casino. With that money he bought a ticket to China, secured a visa and left everything he'd known behind for the next four months while he climbed sacred peaks in China, met with the hill tribes in Laos, explored deserted islands in Thailand, and finally took a job teaching English in the tiny town of Parapat in Sumatra, Indonesia.

He left Parapat when the parents of his students told him that it was no longer safe to stay. Muslim vs.

Christian violence was becoming terrible in Aceh, Medan, and other regions. While he would have loved to stay, it seemed wise to leave when the locals said it was no longer safe.

Returning to the USA was a shock after living among people who were quite happy with very little. The USA by contrast seemed to be a country where people were unhappy no matter how much they super-sized their lives. After the tragic events of September 11, 2001 – Vago was a vocal opponent of revenge killing and making war to feel better but watched as flag waving American zealots ripped up his signs which read “Drop bread, not bombs. Enough have died already.”

Seeing that flag waving had replaced intelligent thought, Vago wanted to get away from the USA again. By selling everything he owned he was able to buy a one way ticket to Hawaii. He arrived with \$100 was relieved to see that in Hawaii at least, people weren't screaming for blood. From then until 2008, Vago lived in Hawaii and traveled in the Pacific exploring the Hawaiian Islands, French Polynesia, Guam, and the Philippines. In 2003 he published his first book *Rough Living: Tips and Tales of a Vagabond*. It was from this book that he earned the name Vago. A friendly bartender named Random at the bar where he would think, drink, and peddle his books (Le Chat Noir in Fairhaven, Washington) began to call him ‘the Vagabond’, then ‘Vagobond’, then ‘Vago’. (RIP Random!)

During his time in Hawaii he worked in Tourism. He worked as a kayak guide on the island of Kauai, a rain forest hiking guide on the island of Oahu, and developed luxury tours on the islands of Oahu, Kauai, and Maui for a high end limousine company. By the end of 2008, he had also earned a degree in Cultural Anthropology from the University of Hawaii at Manoa. During his time at UHM, Vago was the President of the Honor Student Society, Managing Editor of the student newspaper Ka Leo, and president of the UH chapter of the Sierra Club.

He graduated with highest honors (just like the crazy he met on the road between Bellingham and Seattle!) in the top .1% of his class. Along the way, he worked towards a minor in film making at UH's Academy of Creative Media. His anthropological focus was on the anthropology of tourism, and the anthropology of the internet with his thesis looking at the formation of real world friendships through online interaction. It specifically used the fan boards for the TV show *LOST* which was filmed entirely in Hawaii. His ground breaking work was presented at the annual gathering of the American Anthropological Association.

Leaving Hawaii and Finding the World

At the end of 2008 he left Hawaii to see if he could find his place in the world. At this time, he changed the focus of his blog from writing and cultural oddities to travel. *Vagobond.com* was born. He met his future wife in Morocco in February of 2009. In April of 2010 they were married. In August of 2011 they welcomed their daughter Sophia into the world. During the four years since he's left Hawaii, he's been to more than 40 countries but still not found anywhere quite as wonderful as the land of Aloha.

Currently, Vago and his family live in Sefrou, Morocco where they are waiting to hear back from the US Visa and Immigration Service so that they can all return to the USA and perhaps eventually to Hawaii.

Vago is the author numerous articles, pamphlets, and stories.

He blogs at www.vagodamitio.com

Books by Vago Damitio (available at <http://www.vagodamitio.com>)

[Rough Living: Tips and Tales of a Vagabond](#)

[Liminal Travel: Finding the Spaces In Between](#)

[Not My Morocco – A Vagabond in Muslimland](#)

[Smooth Living: Beyond the Life of a Vagabond](#)

[Slackville Road: Two Lazy Guys, a Dummy, and an Armored Car](#)

[The Princess and the Vagabond](#)

[Meliptimous Taggle and Other Tales of Ill Repute](#)

[Douchebags, Fags, and Hags: History, Culture, and Customs of the Sultanate of Baboob](#)

[Finding Your Passion Income](#)

[Spiritual Fasting](#)

[25 Travel Blogger Secrets](#)

[Gillnetting in the Puget Sound](#)

[The Hu Factor](#)

The Hu Man – Coming in 2014

The Hu Muse - TBA

The Keys to the Riad – Coming in 2013

Blue Eyed Bastards – Coming Soon

The Expat Guide to Morocco – Out of Print

Right now is the perfect time to go to [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) or [GoodReads.com](https://www.goodreads.com) (or your own website) and Write a Review of this book. In fact, if you write one and send me the link, I'll send you an e-copy of both *Slackville Road: Two Dudes, A Dummy, and an Armored Car* as a way of saying thanks.

Send me the link to your review at vago@vagodamitio.com

Mahalo!

