

Of Bookworms and Wanderlust  
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I would not call myself adventurous. As a child, I was not a Dora the Explorer type with a tiny backpack and whimsical sense of discovery. Due in part to an unstable childhood, I was more of a careful kid, methodical and attached to routine. The youngest of three daughters, I watched my sisters with big eyes as they broke new ground and with my cautious little heart learned from their mistakes.

Despite all of that, a small pond of adventure could be found in my heart, under the name of "travel." This, I suppose, could be attributed to my parents and grandparents. My mother's parents traveled the world as my grandfather was offered teaching opportunities on six continents. My father's parents had met as immigrants/refugees in Israel in the forties, my grandfather a Moroccan Jew who at one point jumped off a ship and tried to swim past the British blockade to the shores of *Eretz Israel*. I loved hearing my grandparents' travel stories, and my parents' too, like the time they all rented a house in Israel for the summer, or how my grandmother once celebrated her July birthday in the middle of a New Zealand winter. My mother's parents often had international guests, friends they had made all over the world. One time, as a very small girl, I delighted everyone by playing "This little piggy went to market," but changing the rhyme to, "This little piggy went to Sri Lanka, this little piggy stayed home..." Travel was treasured, encouraged, and even expected for my sisters and me.

But what really fed the pond of adventure and made it into a flowing current that would eventually sweep me away to dozens of countries were the books I read as a child. C.S. Lewis and Roald Dahl, my two favorite authors at the time, wove stories of far-off places, real and imagined, including Tanzania, Norway, and Narnia. I read their books so often I could call them up in my imagination and walk around inside them any time I wished. Some scenes were burned in my brain and marked me as a traveler before I'd set foot out of the United States: a young Dahl and his siblings in Norway traveling by ancient motorboat to unknown islands off the fjords and returning to their hotel for craggy mountains of homemade ice cream filled with burnt toffee bits; or Lucy in the *Chronicles of Narnia* standing on the deck of the ship *Dawn Treader*, her face filled with wonder as she took in strange new constellations in the sky while they sailed further from all that was familiar. But imagination wasn't quite enough for me, and I longed to see the rocky islands of Norway, the hustle and bustle of London, to feel as alive in real life as I did when reading these books.

And so, like the ineffable magic that pulled Lewis's Pevensie children into Narnia time after time, these stories along with the travelers' blood that ran in my veins drew me over the sea and to Israel, Norway, Ireland, Australia, and a dozen other countries. Some fantasies were capable of coming true, I learned. I found myself one

autumn day in a rickety boat speeding over blue waters toward an ancient Norwegian island where I would sit by a fire with new friends and savor homemade apple cake and coffee, hot and strong. I wandered through the market in the Old City of Jerusalem on a Friday afternoon as hectic Sabbath preparations and hot dust swirled around me. I pressed my face against the cool stones of the Western Wall in Jerusalem as I pressed my prayers into the cracks. On a warm New Year's Eve in Australia, just after midnight, I stood like Lucy looking up at the summer night sky, my face filled with wonder, as I viewed for the first time the Southern Cross, a sparkling sign in the heavens of a dream come true.

After my somewhat cliché post-college years of travel, I settled down once more in my homeplace of Southern California, ready for the “adventure” of grad school, and more specifically, seminary, where I planned to dive into a world of theological exploration and discovery. But the current of wanderlust in me still flowed, and despite a study trip to Italy with another jaunt up to Norway tacked on, I still felt restless. In an effort to help, friends and family tried to minimize my desires, explaining that now is the time to truly enter adulthood and be thankful for the travel experiences I've had. I have to admit, now done with grad school and in my late twenties, it is impossible to ignore that this season of life is less conducive to travel. While I used to swap travel stories with friends, it's now birth stories that are swapped, and the merits of different brands of baby gear are discussed or recommended, rather than suggested cities to visit or airlines to fly with.

I've tried the old mental trick of adjusting the way I frame the experiences I'm now going through. For instance, when I married my husband a little over a year ago, our hand drawn invitations bore the quote from J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*, “To love would be an awfully big adventure.” And surely it is, but I'm kidding myself if I compare it to my first afternoon in Sydney, sitting on the dock at Darling Harbour and wondering over the way the light shone in such an unfamiliar way that I had no doubts I was on the other side of the world. Apples and oranges, as they say.

In my early twenties, travel experiences seemed to come with the regularity of trains at the station—surely, they were costly and took a bit of planning, but they were offered, and I took them. These days, the only things that seem to be coming down the tracks for my friends and me are more “grown-up” experiences (says the almost-30-year-old): job promotions, marriage, babies, home ownership, caring for aging and ailing parents. Travel now looks like a rickety old mining car that one would be crazy to climb into—the risk of leaving stability, career, the perfect apartment! Lately, as I've waited for something fabulous to come along and break up the mundane, I find myself wondering if the next “adventure” to come my way will be a baby—and let's be honest, worrying that this is so.

I fear, now, that I am at a time when I can either let the spirited river of adventure in my life dry up, or I can do whatever it takes to conserve it. My travels are some of my most treasured and sacred memories, the ones I always want to write about, the ones I wish I could go back to and live all over again, the ones I want to share with

my future children and grandchildren. But as I make certain decisions—“grown-up” decisions, mind you—like choosing to pay off more of my student loans rather than take an international trip this summer, I increase the chances that those days will remain a static pile of memories, rather than the dynamic story of my life. I find myself wondering if there’s a way to build dams and ditches in my life so my love of travel can still flow, albeit through different routes than I’ve imagined. If I learned anything from the beloved stories of my childhood, it’s not to hunt adventure down like a rare species, but to keep your eyes wide and your ears open so you can jump into an adventure whenever it opens itself up for you.