

From whence your *Wanderlust*?

by Dr. Ettie Zilber

What or who might have been the catalyst for the complicated decision to travel, work and live abroad? Was it something or someone from our past who opened our minds and horizons?

I am captivated, listening to people reflect and articulate the roots of their interest in the world. I recently heard a colleague recount the tale of his hippy aunt who traveled and traversed the globe with a backpack in the 60's. He mentioned her name with reverence as he told the story. He recalled collecting the postcards that became special mementos for him. He also mentioned being influenced by Kerouac's travel books. He believes that both of these factors became the catalysts for his fascination with the world and his desire to work abroad.

Most expatriates who live and work in foreign lands are typically transferred and relocated by their sponsoring group. Categories of such groups include military, missionary, corporate, Foreign Service, NGO, communication, media or sports organizations. When the sponsoring group needs the services of the employee, they seek him or her out, present the opportunity, and become the catalyst for the relocation. Sometimes the employee is not even free to decide if, when or where.

However, educators who work at an international school are a very different breed from these other expatriates. International educators relocate themselves; they make the decision on their career path and direction; they research the hundreds of independent schools for profiles and possibilities; they register with agencies; they submit the applications; they take the initiative; the travel, interview and land the job; and they make the move, (with or without help from the school).

How much self-motivation, perseverance, desire and energy are needed, when each move brings with it a new employer, a different work environment, and varying conditions? Observations and comments from envious non-educator

expatriates indicate the perception that international school educators are in charge of their own destiny; they can choose if, when and where.

My colleagues' recollections caused me to reflect upon the influences in my own life. I was amazed at how many catalysts I conjured up from my own childhood. I recall sitting in my father's Ham radio "shack" with the hundreds of QSL cards pasted all over the walls. These cards were the evidence of every contact he made throughout the world. As a child, I would sit next to him, sometimes with earphones, as he called "CQ, CQ, calling CQ20, this is K2HOI, come in please," searching for the next contact. I remember being fascinated as I listened through the static-filled airwaves to their foreign accents in English; I was also impressed to hear my father speak without an immigrant accent. I proudly helped him record the contact names and QSL numbers in a log, especially during the marathon round-the-clock international competitions, and I quickly learned the codes for each country. His hobby was helpful when I had to do a 5th grade project on Scandinavia; Dad immediately called a "ham" friend in Stockholm and two weeks later I received a package in the mail filled with information about the Scandinavian countries. In addition, my father's hobby was the original source of my international stamp collection, as I recall first collecting and categorizing it alphabetically by country and later re-classifying the entire collection by integrated cross-national themes. My imagination was piqued and I developed a desire to see these countries for myself.

I also recall a neighbor, and close friend of my parents, who lived seven houses down the block in Brooklyn. He was a flight navigator for the U.S. Navy and traveled to numerous countries. During my adolescent years I recall my awe at the fascinating Asian and Latin American art and furniture he collected and displayed in his home. I

had never seen such artifacts before and, once again, my imagination and curiosity about the world were stimulated.

Another recollection was from my time in graduate school, when one of my classmates decided to quit her studies, pack her bags and set out to travel, work and ski, starting in Chilean Andes. That was the beginning of her 39-year odyssey throughout the world, working just

PAGE 15

enough to finance the next leg of her journey. I believe she reached every country. I, too, looked forward to her postcards and her annual Christmas greeting, where, in miniscule handwriting in a blue aerogram, she logged her adventures of the year. She was the one who motivated and encouraged me to embark on my first solo trip through Europe. It changed my life and set the stage for future journeys.

I am sure that readers of this essay have at least one story about one person or one event, which

stimulated their interest in the wonders of the world.

Please send me your story. I would like to compile and publish a collection of reflections. I look forward to learning "from whence your *Wanderlust*." My next collection will focus on "Why you chose to become, and remain, an international educator. More later... Write to me at ettie.zilber@gmail.com

Ettie was head of schools in Spain and Guatemala, and an educator at others in Singapore and Israel.