

Ways We've Been Changed

- **What did you learn about your spouse?** (Catherine, with a very similar question from Steven, Angela, and Wilna)
 - Martin: I learned many things about Tara. I learned that water – proper hydration – is absolutely crucial to her overall “travelability” ... lack of water is definitely her Achilles heel. I learned that she is a [trooper](#), and will fight through the unremitting array of frustration that 3rd world travel constantly threw her way. She is more of a planner than I am, but did remarkably well to foster the balance required between planning and spur-of-the-moment decision making. She’s also incredibly sensitive to my needs, and has unparalleled powers of observation and/or intuition, often knowing things about me that I didn’t even know about myself (but I knew this before this trip).
 - Tara: call me up, let’s have a face-to-face chat! 😊
- **You two are familiar with the SWOT analysis, usually done by a new business and something which it includes in its business plan. If you regard your marriage as a business and you do a SWOT analysis after travelling together for a full year, what would you regard as your strengths and weaknesses, as a couple and maybe as individuals (if you care to share).** (Helene)
 - For those of you unsure of what a SWOT analysis is, it’s a tool used to evaluate the **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats** in a business venture or project. If we regard our marriage as a business, our strengths would form two main fronts: (1) we work tremendously well together, and (2) we have quite complimentary skills. In fact, it is for these reasons (though hashed through in more detail) that we are fairly sure that, one day, we’d like to own and operate our own business. Our weaknesses... hmmm... we didn’t face much internal strife or conflict while travelling (and indeed in our marriage in general), but what little we did come across was all borne of a lack of adequate communication. One of us wanted a, b, and c, while the other was expecting x, y, and z. Only if these needs / thoughts / desires weren’t communicated properly would trouble surface.
- **What was a particularly astounding insight about life/people/culture/travel that shook you up and changed you forever?** (Angela)
 - The answer to this will probably change and develop as time marches forward, but for us – at the moment – it has been the realization that people, fundamentally, are just *people*. Before we left, many of our friends/family were, understandably, nervous about our plans to travel through Africa using nothing more than public transportation. On hindsight, we’ve rarely felt as safe travelling as we did there, surrounded by the good-hearted people of Africa who want nothing more than for you to be happy and safe as you visit their land. Trust in *people* can go a long way.
- **If any, what experience changed your outlook on life or yourself, the most?** (Matt)
 - Refer to the previous question; it’s not precisely the same question, but our answer to each is the same.
- **One huge thing I've learned about myself traveling is a change in my values, especially seeing the important of the family in the Balkan countries and how much fun and how tight the German families are here for Christmas in this little village. How have your values changed from your travels?** (Doug)
 - Without intending to take the easy road, but we can’t think of any change in our value systems greater than our above-mentioned understanding of the cross-cultural uniformity of “human-ness.”

- **How will all you've experienced (a great deal of travel especially in Third World countries) shape/change/influence how you live your lives?** (Wilna)
 - Our lives will definitely be lived a little differently from now on. The struggle will be to remember what we saw and experienced on this trip and continue to translate those experiences into life-changing patterns as the months and years continue to roll by. We've realized that most of what we considered "problems" before we left (the car has a broken tail-light, that road has a pot-hole in it, Vancouver drivers are terrible, the Dollar Store has no more Canadian flags, Martin's squash performance was disappointing, and so on) are terribly insignificant in comparison to some of the needs that we saw while travelling. We need to keep things in perspective and not sweat the small stuff. We've also seen our planet ripped and torn apart by people that don't understand or don't care about the consequences. Vancouver is a pretty "green" city, but there's a lot more that we can do: we'll definitely be recycling everything and trying to pollute less, take public transportation (contrary to popular belief, we actually have a very good system), and drive a bio-diesel car when our lease is up... for starters.
- **How do you plan to put what you have learned and experienced to good use?** (Helene)
 - Well, this of course is the challenge that faces each and every traveller (assuming that they actually learn from their experiences). For now, our answer to this question is summarized in the previous question, so we'll direct you there. As the weeks and months and years roll by, perhaps this will change... but there's no way to know for sure. At the moment, however, our objective is to *not forget* what we've experienced.
- **Given that you had decided upon a start date and a return date and had your trip planned out (in some ways), but knowing that after a year abroad you were returning, did you feel, or do you feel, that you have had "time off" from life, in a way? That this year abroad was a one time adventure that will soon be "over?" Or did you ever feel that and did it change? Do you think you will continue traveling? I guess my real question is....Since you had a start and end date to your travels, did or does it STILL FEEL like there was a start date and an end date to this part of your lives as travelers or will it feel like a part of your life in general and who you are? I'm sure you understand my question better than I've posed it. ☺** (Erin)
 - This is a (another) tough question. This was always going to be a trip with definite start and end dates. We were always going to leave our jobs for a year and return to something when we got back. When we started travelling, we did our best to live in and for the moment, not constantly thinking of what life at home is like, though without ever trying to forget or ignore our lives at home. In this way, the live-for-the-here-and-now way, we did take "time off" from life. And, in this same way, we were always going to have to come back to life, close the chapter on our travels, and move on. The real task, as it is with everyone who travels, is to remember the sights, sounds, smells, experiences, sensations, and lessons of overseas travel, and apply them to our day-to-day lives as we move forward. It's easy to get caught up in the rigours of Western city living, but we'll be making every effort to keep our experiences close to our hearts, applying them to life here. So, in this way, while there is a definite start date to our travels, we are hoping to postpone the end date for as long as possible.

- **I spoke with a guy the other day who became so overwhelmed with Christmas a few years back that he and his partner took a year off celebrating and completely didn't do Christmas. No presents, no special food, nothing. At the end of the season he wrote down all the things he missed. Since then, they have celebrated in only the ways that really matter to them. They don't do presents but they do family dinners. They have candles around the house etc etc etc. Anyways, what things or experiences or values or whatever have you missed and come to realize you don't want to live without? Big or small, what have become the things you will cherish all the more when you're home?** (Catherine)
 - We love life in Vancouver. We are surrounded by amazing families, incredible friends, and superb work colleagues. We live in a spectacular natural setting, even if it rains a lot (perhaps *especially because* it rains a lot). There is [law and order](#), and while there's always room to improve in this field, we'll take it any day over some of the complexities developing nations are facing at the moment. Our fearless leader, Stephen Harper, is not cut out for exciting politics. In fact, he's about as boring as they come... but we'll take boring politics *any day* over the confuddled messes of [political systems](#) that we lived under while away. We have sidewalks, car horns that aren't used, cars that stop for people, and a belief system that doesn't keep anyone in society pinned down and inherently suppressed. Most of us have an understanding that we need to help those less fortunate than ourselves. We have cows, but they're behind fences. There's lots of things that we love about Vancouver, and we're still walking around – after being back here for over two months – and finding ourselves surprised by the little things in life (“this has a price tag on it!” or “they speak, and I can actually understand what they're saying!”). To answer your question, we've come to cherish life in this place. Life is good here, and if some things about it aren't perfect, then we know what we should work towards fixing.
- **Has your opinion / perspective of Vancouver changed?** (Steven)
 - For this one, too, we need to refer you to the previous question. In short, we LOVE Vancouver... we'd be fools not to!