

The Journey

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Photo - Balcony

Honorable Mention - Short Story

Hi, my name is Anthem. and this is my story about how I reached one of the “tiniest” islands in the world. I had just graduated college two weeks before I left to go on this amazing journey. Now, it may sound crazy, but I didn’t decide to leave until the day I actually left. I am very spontaneous, that’s just my personality. Even when I was as young as five-years-old, I would quickly tell my mom to change my ice cream order as she is saying it. Being like this may sound dangerous, but it has never let me down, and as such, one week before college started I changed my college of choice from Saint Leo University to Florida State University, and it was the best decision of my life.

Now, enough about that, let's talk about why I decided to go on a two month adventure with only a hiking backpack and my camera. I woke up that morning, and I was bored, bored of life, bored of the people, and even bored of my bedroom. I wanted to mix things up a bit and change my environment, so I just packed in a backpack and booked the cheapest flight that I could find. To me it didn’t matter where I was going, I just wanted to get out of my house.

My family was fine with me leaving. My mom has always had a free spirit and raised my brother and I that way. My older brother Dustin is two years older than me, and he is off in New York pursuing his dream of running his own clothing brand. My father is more uptight and strict, but my mom helps him relax and understand that everything will be alright. I said my goodbyes to my parents and sent an email to Dustin explaining my plan, or at least the start of a plan. I took a flight from Key West to San Fernando, Venezuela that lasted for several hours. When I landed I knew I made the right decision, I could feel it in my bones, literally; I got off the plane and instantly felt free. I felt unstoppable, like a cloud from heaven just gone through me. I left the airport and was overwhelmed with the beauty of this busy city. San Fernando was like a whole new world; it was unreal.

That night I slept on a bench in front of a small local cafe because I had no time to book a place to stay. When they opened, I woke up, packed my stuff up, and went in. I met the owner of the shop, Nicolas, and later found out he ran the shop with his family. Anyone in the family aged ten years or older could start working there. He said they didn’t get too many customers, but they had enough to pay the bills. Unfortunately, Nicolas’ wife had died two years ago from Alzheimer’s Disease, and he started the cafe because it was always his wife's dream. The cafe kept him busy, and his mind away from the painful loss, but he wished he could get more customers. I left after a few hours of talking with him, but I knew I would be returning.

I found a small, cheap motel to stay in only a few miles away from the coffee shop. The motel was said to fit two, but it barely fit one. I thought to myself everything was going to be okay because at least I have shelter. The shower was very small, and I never went in there without shoes; I could start to see the rust in the water from the showerhead the last few days I was there. As I was walking to get my motel I found a blue bike with a basket and pulled it out, thinking it would do for the time I was in San Fernando.

The day after I met Nicolas I visited back and said I wanted to help him. I asked him if I might take a few pictures of him and the shop and from there I would do the rest. He was hesitant at first but shortly after some talking, I took some pictures. That afternoon I biked back to my crummy motel and made myself a sandwich with bread and turkey I picked up from the market. With my photos, I made twenty flyers showing images of the shop, the location of it, and a short backstory on it. I put them around the motel, near crowded walkways, and even taped one to the basket of my bike. My plan was to make people more aware of the coffee shop so maybe Nicolas could get more customers.

After a week went by I went back to the cafe to see how business was going. Nicolas had a bright, wide smile on his face once he saw me. I looked around and the little cafe was packed with people. I couldn't believe it, the flyers actually helped! Nicolas thanked me and he offered me a job. He asked if I wanted to make more flyers and to help fix up the place. He felt the interior needed work and that I'd be the best to help. In only a week I got more familiar with the area, met a few new people, and got a job. This new lifestyle was great and was exactly what I wanted, but I knew I wouldn't be able to stay in San Fernando forever.

About a month passed and I was finished with helping Nicolas. His cafe was very vibrant and welcoming, it reflected his personality well. I decided to pack up my things, receive my last check, and take a boat through the San Fernando River. I ended up in Puerto Carreno, Colombia. The vibe wasn't as welcoming as San Fernando. I found a small apartment, conveniently near water routes where I could kayak. It took some time to reach the water but I was in no hurry. The peace of the water was so calming. I would constantly find myself closing my eyes, breathing in, then out, and feeling the flow of the water. The free spirit my mom always taught me really showed through. There were no worries in my world and my whole body felt calm.

After a week of kayaking in Puerto Carreno I made the decision to fly all the way to Rio Gallegos, Argentina. My flight was supposed to leave that Monday, June 12th. It got delayed though because of several rainstorms passing by. I had a week of waiting for the storm to pass where I organized all of my photos on my camera. I put in a new memory card and my first photo was of my apartment, although this wasn't a huge moment in my journey, I still wanted to remember it.

Finally, after a few days, my flight was able to leave. I hopped onto the plane to find only five other passengers. I had a layover that landed in Cordoba and then from there we flew all the way to Rio Gallegos. The weather there changed dramatically because we had gotten so far away from the equator. This was the kind of change that I liked, something different. The town was too busy, so I decided to fly to the Falkland Islands. I was the only passenger on the plane; it was strange going to such an unpopulated area. There were only ten others in my area and the rest were about 100 miles away.

The pilot dropped me off at a house with only one piece of information. He said that the house was mine and a man has offered to share it with me until I get settled. I ran my eyes from the short, cut grass under my feet, all the way up to the roof before I walked in. My eyes caught something, a boy sitting out of the window of the house. That isn't a man I thought, he looked my age. Finally, he noticed me and welcomed me in. From there my whole mindset took a turn. I started my journey thinking I would find a place for myself, somewhere to just focus on me, but the moment I saw Josh on that balcony I knew things would change. He took me into his home and showed me around. Now, here I am two years later with the love of my life, in the most beautiful place, just because I was okay with a little change.