

Walk Around the World

"Thinking back, that was the best time of my life. I was free."

By, Sienna Ritter

My father, Stefan Ritter, is originally from Germany. The European tradition where a young man or woman goes off to travel the world with only the knowledge they have to guide them, My dad decided to go on the at least three year expedition around the world. When I asked him about how he ended up in America, he had to think for a second. Calling the memory back into his train of thought, he said his last stop before my home country was Mexico, near the border of Tehuana.

"I went on a journey that took me through lots of places, Europe, Africa, South America, and I worked in lots of different countries but in South America my money was starting to run out, I had almost no money, I wasn't making money in South America, or not a lot. I never actually wanted to go to America, There was nothing for me, and I thought the USA was full of bullies. Why should I go to America? I had already met lots of Americans on my journey and they were often arrogant. Nothing really led me to America except I got an email from a companion that there was a gig for me. Because I was so low on money I decided to go."

My Dad went all over the world with no plane at all. He even managed to live in the place he promised himself he wouldn't even visit. When he received that email from his companion it was 2007, and the only reason why he took the job was because he was running so low on money in South America. My father had also formed a stereotype that all Americans are snobs, and arrogant. If you had only met a certain type of person for years, you'd grow to think that everyone was like that. My dad also mentioned how he was wrong about all the stereotypes he had made up in his head about many different cultures.

"20 years old. Is that correct? Let me think, no I need to calculate. 21, I was 21 years old when I went on my journey. It was 2004 when I left home. The traditional journey as a journeyman." He said. When I asked him the question he took a moment. My father has been living in America for over a decade. But why would he want to go on this journey? "Why? Because I wanted to honor this tradition, that is in Germany, as a tradesman." In this tradition you must learn a trait before going on your journey, my dad chose to be a carpenter, although there are so many skills that can be learned.

"This tradition dates back to the middle ages. To become a master at your trait you needed to go on the journey. You do an apprenticeship, and afterward you can go on the journey and add to your knowledge of your trait. No one forced me to do anything, it was completely free will."

The tradition that my father took part in dates all the way back to the middle ages. Back then, it was mandatory to go on this journey around the globe to become a master at whatever

you have chosen to do. Nowadays, this tradition isn't as popular and you do not have to go on the journey. When my dad, Stefan, left home it was completely his decision.

“ Thinking back, it was the best time in my life. I was free. I could travel where I wanted too, could stay as long as I wanted too, I could work anyway I wanted, and do as little as I wanted too. I was free. Were there hard days? Oh of course. When you don't have a car and it rains, then you're going to get wet. If you don't know where you can sleep, you sleep outside. Outside isn't always nice. There are dangerous animals, but wherever you go the most dangerous thing is not the animals, but it's the people. They will rob you, so you have to be careful. In one year in Africa I probably aged 3.”

Being free is such an amazing feeling and my dad absolutely loved it. He talks about how even though this experience was so wonderful for him, there were its dangers. “One year in Africa I probably aged 3.” He says this to symbolize the fact that he was so stressed by the fear of being robbed or shot at, that he physically aged much faster than normal. My dad, although being stressed and careful, almost ended up in prison TWICE.

“In Africa , two times I almost went to jail. I was with my travel companion in South Africa. We were in the middle of the county but we wanted to go to the coast. The hitchhiking wasn't really too big, but then I remembered there was a train. So we looked for a train, and we asked the train driver where he was going and the train was going to the coast. It would have been at least an 8 hour ride, if not longer. We asked the driver when the train was leaving, and then we hid. I think we waited until 1 am or so until the train came by and we jumped onto the train. It was empty, it was to transport stuff, so we could sleep in it. And at some point the train stopped, and the security came through and found us. Then wanted to lock us away but I sweet talked them into letting us out.”

When my dad told me that he had waited until 1 am, jumped onto a train and almost went to jail, all in one night, all I could do was laugh and be shocked. The way he spoke was so calm as if this was a normal occurrence in anyone's day to day life. This was the first time my dad was almost locked away and I would say it was pretty eventful. It is so amazing that my dad can tell me about these insane stories of his past, all it can make me do is wonder about the future.

“The second time it was also in South Africa, it was actually the day we were planning to leave. We celebrated a bit and hung out with the people we had met, and we went out. In South Africa you aren't allowed to go out into the street with alcohol and I completely forgot this. I walked out of the bar with a beer still in my hand and the police came and told me I wasn't allowed too. Then they wanted to lock us away, but I talked about how great South Africa is and I sweet talked them into letting us out.”

My dad forgot one of the rules and was almost put in jail, all while being completely drunk, he managed to sweet talk his way out of the situation and make his way back to the ship, where he would be leaving to another country. When my dad told me about this story he said that the police car wasn't a normal police car, it was bigger.

These magnificent adventures led my father to the place he is now. Sometimes I like to sit and think how it could be if he decided not to go. Would he have met my mother? Would I ever be alive? The possibilities are endless. And just like them, so are my father's adventures around the globe.