

A Lesson in Self

By Cam Bradley

Where were you when you were the best person you have ever been? For me, it has always been in half-cut in a bar somewhere, far away from home.

Well, that sounds rather lackluster, doesn't it? Allow me to elaborate. There is an openness which runs in tandem with the desultory and decadent revelry of travelling, an ease of heart and soul which leads strangers to friends faster than any other means I have yet seen. I stood my soul before this discovery and breathed deep. Through travelling, I discovered strength and a way to better myself by bringing joy and empowerment to others.

Something important I thought about while I wandered is that we often don't realize what we leave in our wake. Take, for example, the old glass-paned transit stops sprinkled around town. On a chilly day, delicate silhouettes remain on the glass where someone waited, a lingering impression they left behind. The same idea extends person to person; a seemingly tiny gesture can ignite sparks of recognition that leave someone remembering a past kindness: a door held open, a smile flashed to a stranger, or even just a simple "thank you." We have the power to change anybody's day, to leave warmth swirling in the wake of our passage rather than an indifferent shadow. Keeping this in mind as I travelled, laughter and compliments became the tools of my trade, and friendships, no matter how brief, my art.

I capered across the globe like some kind of good-times-vigilante. I waxed poetic through those nether hours in which the sunrise seemed so distant, and radiated genuine compliments as often as I was able to. Genuine: what an important term. For me, it meant to lose any form of ulterior motive, any tie that would rein me into the realm of someone who sought to gain from others. And yet I gained so much. A vast wealth of something utterly irreplaceable,

and I cannot help but smile at the thought. Countless experiences kindled, the company royal like kings and queens of myth, and I stood emboldened, empowered by their presence in the woven tapestry of my mind.

I mentioned that the other half of this experience was inebriation, so that leaves liquor; liquor was the vessel. It was the *S.S. Enterprise* or *Millennium Falcon*, a rocket straight into the stars of emotion, invincibility, and discovery. I found it empowering, listening close and sharing in the hurts, woes, and aspirations of others. I believe many people consider themselves broken or shattered in some way. I know I did. It was these precious moments away from home, spent in close company with perfect strangers, that made me realize something. All it takes is being one step removed from everyday life to recognize that our little individual broken shards of self can be seen as a beautiful whole. A kaleidoscope of what it means to be human.

I remember the bittersweet goodbye of friendships weeks in the making, a farewell initiated by one of the most beautiful sunsets I've ever seen. There were seven of us on a hillside on Koh Phi Phi. I'd snuck a bottle of bubbly to the overlook and wordlessly produced paper cups. As the sun sank beneath the ocean, we had a surprise toast, a champagne cheers of gratitude for all who were present.

I remember running around a Laotian city awash with celebration. Water splashed and sprayed from hoses, guns, and balloons. It blended with colored powders and ran from our skin as we spent our time bonding with a local family. The words we understood were few, but our shared language was elation.

While the facts of time or place are important, what I truly remember most is the solace of memories and aspirations laid bare. The feeling of connection I achieved from digging into the depths of other's souls and sharing in the burden of their hurts and aspirations was truly meaningful.

I once wrote "Do what and all you can for others and whether you

see them again or not, know they'll remember you for your genuine gesture." That is immortality to me. Until all the perfect little broken shards of my human kaleidoscope wink out and all that remains is a handful of faded photographs bearing smiling faces whose names are lost to time. Memories may not last forever, but for me it is enough.

My journey has wound so many unexpected courses and left me so much more than who I once was. So, I ask you this: Where were you when you felt most empowered as a human being? Where were you when you were the best person you have ever been?