

True Tales of a Traveller Series

05: A Career in Travel

However, I hadn't even started looking for work. I had been expecting a landlord curious to know exactly what I did for a living, as all my previous landlords in the UK had. But instead I had met Anton, an amiable middle-aged Polish immigrant with a slight accent who lived with his elderly mother on the ground floor. He didn't even bother asking what my job was. He had seemed happy enough to receive two months rent in advance and a deposit, and I had the feeling he hadn't really expected that.

This made me wonder if I really needed to seek employment so desperately? I still had plenty of money and didn't really need to find work immediately. Perhaps a slight change of plan was in order; a delay of sorts while I slipped into this new lifestyle of a London-based, part-time traveller, in the process of beginning to settle down. I had noticed an advertisement at Brixton underground station on my way to Streatham (which lies further south) for something called a 'Eurorail Pass' (later known as a Eurail Pass). I decided to return immediately to check it out, and took along my passport and a couple of passport photos, just in case.

It turned out to be an offer I couldn't refuse. For although I wanted to cure my travel bug by first bringing it under control, I was a little like an alcoholic in therapy, given the choice of talking about his drinking problem over a cup of tea or over a bottle of whisky. When faced with an offer like this, I simply didn't have the solidity to refuse; my resolve crumbled into dust. The Eurorail advertisement had just such a power of persuasion. Apart from some restrictions, such as sleepers and some first-class services, the Eurorail pass would qualify me for heavily discounted tickets all across western Europe. The only restriction on eligibility was that I had to be under 26 years of age. How could I let an opportunity like this slip by, I asked myself? Maybe it wouldn't be available next year, and if I delayed too long, I would no longer be eligible for such a pass anyway.

That evening I called Willeke from the pay phone Anton had installed for his tenants in the ground-floor hallway of his house: "Wiki", I told her excitedly, using the familiar name all her friends called her by, "I'm coming back! I've just bought the train and ferry ticket his afternoon, I'll be back in Rotterdam tomorrow afternoon!"

"Oh," she responded noticeably less thrilled. "I thought you were looking for work in London...?"

"I've got work lined up," I lied, sensing her need for assurance that I wasn't going to stay another six or seven weeks, "but it doesn't start for two weeks, so I've decided to do a little travel in the meantime. Don't worry, I'll only be in Rotterdam for one night, then I'm off to Scandinavia!"

Far North-east

I decided to visit, in turn, Jeanette, the Swedish girl I had travelled to Egypt with earlier in the year, at her parent's home in Karlskrona, southern Sweden; then her Kibbutz Magen volunteer friend and roommate Maddie, further north in Uppsala; and finally Mikael, a Finnish volunteer worker from my first kibbutz, Kibbutz Bar'am, who lived in Helsinki. I didn't have the phone numbers for the first two people and Mikael's phone remained unanswered, but I hurriedly wrote out letters to all three of them late that night in my Streatham bedsit. I didn't have the time the following morning to seek out post offices, but fortunately my messages had been written out on pre-paid aerogrammes, and I did find a post box at Liverpool Street railway station. I only hoped the messages of my impending visits arrived before I did! I was on the road again, in high spirits, and pleased as punch with my new semi-settled lifestyle as a London-based, part-time traveller.

I only decided a few minutes before arriving at Willeke's house that the job I had ostensibly found in London which was due to start in two weeks time was at a travel agency. The fiction just seemed to fit so well; working in the travel industry was perfect for me, Willeke pointed out, as did her sister Hennie, tenant Willem, and Willeke's friends Bob and Linda, who all congratulated me for securing the position. We all celebrated my imaginary new job at a local bar that evening.