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Bitten by wanderlust

Randolph native chucks it all to travel the world for a year

BY JULIE LANGE
SPECIAL TO THE DAILY RECORD
Sunday, August 26, 2007

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It wasn't long ago that life was orderly and well defined for Lisa Lubin. These days, when she asks someone for directions to the beach, she is content with a reply like "Go down this road and turn left at the goats."

That's because the Randolph native has left behind her safe, predictable world with her dream career as an Emmy award-winning Chicago network TV producer and all the perks that go with it. Last October she quit her job, sold her condo and most of her belongings, put the rest in storage, and embarked on a year-long adventure to the far corners of the world.

So far the 1990 graduate of Randolph High School has lived with a family in Costa Rica while studying Spanish; took a boat trip through the Galapagos Islands; lived on a ferry boat for a few days in Chile while cruising through the fjords; worked in a café in Melbourne, Australia; cycled through Vietnam for two weeks; and also managed to visit Argentina, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Cambodia, Bangkok, Thailand, Singapore and Dubai.

She has created a Web site to document her travel experiences at www.LLworldtour.com.

One of her most recent stops was a three month stay in Turkey -- the longest time she's spent in



COURTESY OF LISA LUBIN

Lisa Lubin hangs out with sea lions in the Galapagos Islands of Ecuador, another stop on her year-long world tour. The Randolph native quit her job as a TV producer to make the trip.



COURTESY OF LISA LUBIN

Lisa Lubin keeps cool on the Perito Merino Glacier in Argentina.



COURTESY OF LISA LUBIN

Lisa Lubin she visits with children in Kon Tum. in the

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one place to date -- soaking up the local culture while earning her keep teaching English and cat sitting for a couple of felines named Oscar and Wilde. It was there in Turkey that one of the locals matter of factly directed her to the Aegean Sea using farm animals as a landmark.

"We, of course, passed several groups of goats on the way, not knowing which ones were 'our' goats," Lubin remembers. But she and some friends did manage to find that beach in time to "watch the giant red sun melt into the sea."

Lubin says she's always loved to travel, but the wanderlust bug bit her in a major way a few years after college when she went backpacking for a month across Europe. That's when she made a pact with herself to take at least one major trip every year.

She managed to keep that promise, but says she always came back from her travels feeling "a bit sad and always wanting more."

Then last year circumstances conspired to offer the perfect opportunity for Lubin to fulfill the fantasy of a lifetime. She'd been mulling the possibility of a career change when her cat, Sneakers, died and she broke up with her boyfriend of five years. A set of events that might have fermented into an immobilizing depression for some people became a galvanizing realization for Lubin that suddenly there was nothing to keep her in Chicago anymore.

"Then I read a book called 'One Year Off' by David Cohen," Lubin recalls. "He and his wife took their three kids around the world for a year. Suddenly I realized if they could do it, I could do it."

Although Lubin's mother, Cheryl Meadows, who now lives in Silverton, Colo., recalls that her daughter was shy as a child, Lubin has embraced life on the road with a kind of unflappable enthusiasm that seems to attract friends wherever she goes. She says she's also had some romantic experiences, but adds, "You'll have to read the book for those juicy details."

Lubin says she's amazed at all the friends she's made around the world and finds it easier to meet people while traveling alone than when she's with someone. But she admits that life as the perpetual traveler sometimes has its melancholy moments.

"Sometimes, when I unfortunately have too much time to overthink things, I'm a bit perplexed about what I am REALLY doing with my life after all this," she muses in her online journal. "While I'm traveling and taking a year off, it really isn't exactly a year off as life keeps chugging forward like a high speed bullet train. Things are happening to me here and I'm meeting people and at the same time things are happening back home to my friends and loved ones.

"My ex-boyfriend has moved on (to someone 20 years his junior in classic rebound/midlife form. I guess he's no longer pining away for me and waiting for my return with outstretched arms); I now miss someone I've met along the way whom I developed a bit of a relationship with; I was stressed out because my storage unit in my Chicago condo was broken into and I really have no idea what was stolen; and I am sad about one of my very best friends not being in Chicago when I return (she's recently moved back to Germany)."

But most of the time Lubin is drinking in her global adventure in big gulps while strategizing how to make a living by traveling. She plans to write a book about her trip and has already had some of her articles published on travel Web sites.

In the eight months she's been on the road so far, Lubin estimates that she's spent roughly \$25,000, including airfare and other transportation, food, lodging, and other expenses.

Central Highlands of Vietnam.

To learn more

Lisa Lubin has created a Web site to document her travel experiences at www.LLworldtour.com.

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"I have been in some countries in Southeast Asia and South America that allowed me to stretch my budget," she explains. "On the flip side, places like Australia, Dubai and Europe have been rather expensive and made it harder to cut corners."

But the brief jobs she held in Australia and Istanbul have helped her manage expenses, and she calculates that she would have spent more than \$25,000 on her mortgage, condo upkeep, car, bills, food, entertainment and general shopping if she had spent those eight months in Chicago, where the overall cost of living is relatively high.

Like most of her friends, both of Lubin's parents were very supportive when they learned about her travel plans. Her dad, Jamie Lubin, who still lives in Randolph, says his first reaction was "concern for her safety and giving up a good job with unknown prospects upon her return." But his misgivings were mitigated by the knowledge that she was an experienced traveler and that friends would be meeting her at certain points in the journey.

"I'm proud for her, her courage and accomplishments," he says.

While Lubin's mom admits, "She's still my baby and I want her to always be safe and free from harm," she accepts her daughter's love of travel. "I have a feeling this is just the tip of the iceberg, and the yearning to go back out into the world will tug at her again in the future."

Lubin has now moved on to Bucharest, Romania, which some call the Paris of Eastern Europe, she says.

"I think practically all countries I've been in seem to claim their city as some sort of Paris: Buenos Aires, the Paris of South America; Dalat, Vietnam, the Paris of Vietnam; Montreal, the Paris of Canada; Dubai, the Paris ... no, I'm just kidding about that last one."

After Romania, she plans to visit Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, and possibly Morocco and the Olympics in Beijing before ending her whirlwind tour.

"I am hoping to extend this trip to make it longer than first planned. Now that I'm out here in the world, it just seems so much easier to keep going than to come home and try to get away again. I'm not sure what I will do when I get to the Atlantic Ocean -- fly back to the U.S. or turn around and start going east again."

Julie Lange is a freelance writer.