



**Wanderlost and Found**

**By Ryan Tannenbaum**



### From the Edge of the World to the Great Mostly White North

Conceived as a have, surrounded by have nots.

The place is Johannesburg and the one thing my father knows, there is somewhere else his new family must go.

'I was raised in privilege on the backs of others, my children might not know of servants and nannies, but equality, they will.'

'But where....'

'Where?'

Australia? No.

America? Can't go.

He decided, indeed, at the sixth birthday of his niece.

Her and her friends were gathered outside, while him and my aunt handed out cake with a smile.

The children all gathered, munched and played – when my cousin came up, at the cake she now gazed.

'Tiffany wants more,' an empty plate she held high.

'But which one is Tiffany?' wondered my aunt with her eyes.

'Oh, she's in the green jacket,' but that wasn't all, she was the only girl of color in the crowd of white faces.

This was a fact my cousin hadn't noticed ...

... but my father certainly had.

6 months later, we landed in Toronto, June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1987.

My dad had found his land of equality. My family had arrived in our new home.

```
root@ryandt-web: ~# █
```

### **A Blank Screen – A Bare Palette**

I grew with the world around. But instead of going out, I went in, spelunking the growing depths of the world wide web – Pandora’s box of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

I learned all about this, and whatever I cared about that – the days of my middle and high school careers were lost to that glow – but for all that I found, there was very little I could claim to know.

The words that I read held very little depth – a superficial puddle was where my mind seemed to rest.

Uneasy I grew, looking for something deeper and more, then at my first year of university, through Borges I saw. A library. Ancient and mythic. Forever unbound. It was Borges’ Babel, with the librarians within, walls upon walls of knowledge in which the world’s secrets had hid.

I would find them I decided...

... I knew ...

... surely ...

... I thought ...

... I hoped ...

... as I read, voraciously through books, essays and what haves. Anything I could find, with each new idea I played. Borges was a wonder, as was Freud and Lacan. De Quincey was fun, so too Lem, France and Barnes.

In literature, I peered at the soul deep and strong, of humans and feelings, of thoughts free flowing form.

But there’s nothing quite like reading the longings of others, to kindle the fire within.

... no more wasting time

... now is the time

... I’ve graduated

... let’s go

... away, away, and let adventures come as they may.



### **Lost Past the Frontier of my Comfort**

And then on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2009 – 22 years to the day of my arrival in Toronto, I left to discover the unknown ... a distant and magical place called ‘Vancouver’ ...

... which, and within days, was clearly  
just more of the same.

To the mountains I went, then back by bike to the coast (about 1300 kms if you’re curious).

I, the digital nomad, turned just nomad, was on a journey, to find something ...

... me.

Away from the books and away from the screens, from the forests and mountains, hostels and kitchens of BC to the beaches and lakes of Central America, I searched.

Yet, as go the words of the late Harry Chapin – ‘you can travel on ten thousand miles and still stay where you are.’

From the volcanoes of Quetzaltenango, to the small villages of Nebaj – the prior trembled with magma, the latter with the aftershocks of civil war, I knew less and less. As what I knew faded and new thoughts took form, the journey became stranger ... the path, more muddled.

And then I was in Jiquilillo, Nicaragua, and Tina Sungoddess (the owner of my ho(s)tel) came and asked – ‘How about teaching a class of young locals English?’

‘Well why not? It’s something to do.’



### Something to Do

'I've studied English,' thought me to myself, 'surely I can teach it.'

'Sounds great, I can do it!'

But actually, I could not.

And yet the kids still came, trying their best every day.

'Hmm... I know what we can do, we could always make games.'

So I went into town, to buy some supplies – paper, crayons, scissors and glue, to some amount of cordobas it came to.

My young guide (a boy of the streets but not of the road – he could not leave the shacks he called home), said 'hey Gringo, too much!'

'But it's for the kids, and she needs it more than I.'

I handed her the money, and then, well her eyes watered. She said thanks (or gracias) and let a few tears fall. This really struck me. I'd been travelling for a year, more bum than wanderer at this point. I was trying to fumble my way as a teacher and actually ended up doing something that meant a lot ... to someone.

But this is not all that I remember, there are the students as well.

One girl, in a different situation would have dreamed of being a doctor or scientist – instead, her goal was to become an American hairdresser, because that meant freedom to her.

And for her, and her poor Nicaraguan family, it did mean freedom.

Another got lost in my dog-eared and Spanish copy of 'Alice in Wonderland.'

While with others we learned chess.

Then each evening the really young ones and I played mancala in the sand.

All the while, learning the odd snippet of English, and sharing our own different worlds.

Perhaps they've forgotten me by now, but I'll never forget them.





### **Back Home and Far Away**

This was my reason, my purpose to be – to teach.

But where?

But how?

So, stopping over back home, I, like plenty of other young graduates - sick of school and full of dreams, left.

Korea had a classroom waiting, a small class, but a class regardless.

I had finished school not long before – and I was by no means ready to be a student again...

... but a teacher?

Well I could learn.

And slowly I did, during long days and late nights. I learned, not just about teaching, but positive reflection. To build a class that brightens moods and builds a language. Creating a shared, global world.

After two years I had taught a lot, but learned even more. I made head teacher and this was about as far as I could climb.

When I think of teaching in Korea – I'm happy for the memories and the lessons. But what really occupies my mind's eye is a kaleidoscope of faces – students, co-workers, parents. Each of whom I've talked, and taught – maybe a little, maybe a lot. Yet from them I've learned so much as well. More than these words could ever tell.

The next journey was Canada, certification and a degree, so that the word 'teacher' would finally refer to me.



### **Now, Now, and Beyond**

I came to China as a teacher, I'm living in Nanning, a quiet little city of about 7 million.

My school is CISGG and my students know me as Mr. T.

I teach English.

I taught Social Studies.

And this year I'm dabbling in IT.

I'm not sure how long I'll stay here, but so far it's been a great opportunity.

With the PME I made my first web page from scratch, with time's passage it's grown, in fact now it's where you are at.

I've changed a lot over the years – grown, wandered and wed. My family's most important, but I'm hoping to give this writing a more 'professional edge.'

There is little more important to me than learning everyday – and to teach is to learn – to have new thoughts, to nurture ambition, and grow dreams.

As this world grows and change spreads, and the 'cyber' becomes more and more – I'm curious to take education to places not thought of before.

Living in China, I spend more time in front of a screen, but I don't see tech as a replacement for anything. It's something different and new. I don't believe we understand its potential to bring both good and bad. But this is something I want to explore, and begin to understand.

I'm not sure where I'll be at the end of this year or next, but I know my days will be in a class – sowing dreams, while I spend my nights with my kin, because my dreams have already bloomed. Though I may still be a wanderer, at life, I've found a way to win.

### About Me:

I've worked as a teacher in various capacities since 2010 when I got my start in Nicaragua. I started my first paid teaching job in 2011 – in Seogwipo, South Korea.

Teaching in Korea was a transformative time for me. Ever since high school, I saw myself living in Asia. That had finally become a reality.

While there, I found a career that was engaging, meaningful and well suited for me.

Most importantly, I met my wife there. We got married on August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2016, just in time to move back for our second year in China.

China has been a great experience, and my time at CISGG has been meaningful. The opportunity to develop my curriculum-grounded teaching has been wonderful, and all in all I've found it to be a very worthwhile experience.

I chose the title "Wanderlost and Found" as a play on the word "Wanderlust," and also a way to symbolize how I've only truly found the "real me" while on this adventure.

As well as teaching, I have spent a lot of time writing, reading and tinkering with computers.

I am most interested in the incorporation of technology in education, especially with regards to language development (having spent my entire career as an ESL teacher).

While I still am only at the beginning of my exploration (an exciting time, with a lot of opportunities), I have started some exciting projects that you can find pasted around my site – including setting up an OwnCloud server at the school to allow for easy cloud access to materials in China (which can be difficult at times). As well, I created a prototype grammar developer/RPG game in RPG Maker last year. You can play the prototype on my website [www.ryandt.com](http://www.ryandt.com) under the tinkerer tag.

I'm a published short story writer, though I was published all the way back in 2009. Sadly, writing has taken something of a back seat in my life, what with work commitments and the distractions of day to day life.

When I first started this assignment, I was a bit overwhelmed by the amount we had to produce, given the time constraints. That said, I actually ended up enjoying this project a lot. I know that the prose is uneven, and the lapses into rhyme are perhaps a bit distracting, but I look forward to improving it over time.

I wrote this with the intention of adding it as an extended about me page on my website. It will take some time for it to be fully ready, but I look forward to when it is. I'll be sure to update you all.

Thanks so much for reading, I hope it wasn't too long and boring!