

JOHN'S WORLDLY RAMBLINGS



4.6

I Sailed with Magellan

I sailed with Magellan. That drunken motherfucker. Womanizer: he stole my girlfriend, that cunt. Magellan, not her, she's just a bitch. He told me, "I'm going to be the first man to circumnavigate the world, son." I told him he could circumnavigate my sack. He threatened to throw me overboard and I said, "Try me, fruity pants." He backed down, as I knew he would.

I don't travel much. Well, I didn't. I mean, I've been to Minnesota several times. Enough times. More than enough. I've been to Chicago, which I have to say, I like more and more each time I go. I've been to New York. Michigan. I came down with the chicken pox in San Diego and enjoyed my quarantined time in the hotel room.

Just recently I've been to Iowa, Las Vegas, Phoenix and Indiana. I haven't been everywhere, I won't go everywhere, but I think I can say pretty conclusively, Las Vegas aside, people are pretty much the same. I mean, sure, in Iowa they say "lie-berry" instead of "library" and in Phoenix there are six foot cinder block walls around every home, but the people are exactly the same.

The thing that makes us all the same is that we're all biased against all the places we are not. I had my assumptions about Iowa, and the people there have their opinions about Wisconsin. Cedar Rapids reminded me of Racine quite a bit. They're similar sized cities (Cedar Rapids is a bit bigger), but driving to Cedar Rapids is like corn, corn, corn, corn, corn, corn, Cedar Rapids. And if you keep going, it's corn, corn, corn, corn. It freaked me out a little that there was no big city to the north and no lake to the east. It was like someone took my town and put it in the

middle of nothing. Cedar rapids is 91% white. Racine is 63% white. There's the difference, aside from that lie-berry thing.

Racine is strangely a diverse place. You'd think a city in Wisconsin would be straight up honkey, but there's a 20% black population, a 14% Latino population and within the group of crackers, large segments come from the "bad" parts of Europe: Czech, Slavs, Germans, etc. Lots of those fucking Danes, too. Racine claims to be the largest North American settlement of Danes outside of Greenland, and if that's not a claim to boast about... Danes are like Swedes, but not quite as hot.

We get strange weather here. No matter what's going on around us, we have our own special weather system. It can be ninety and sunny fifty miles west, but in Racine it'll be sixty with grey skies. It can snow twelve inches to the north and south, but we may only get four inches... then another four inches of lake-effect snow. There's the x-factor, the lake. People who've never seen it assume it's a pond. If you look at it on a map, it seems like nothing, a speck compared to the oceans. But it's a hundred miles across the narrowest part. You can't see Michigan, which you would totally assume you could. You stand there and the sky and lake come together somewhere out there in a place that you could never reach like the spot where a rainbow touches the ground.

The lake gives us the breeze that cools a day to eighty when it should be ninety-five, it makes snow storms last twice as long as they should, it humidifies the air way too much, it deflects some storms. It's like I'm in an alley where physics laws are bent. I think there's a gravity well here.

Living in Wisconsin is like having two homes. There's the one with the leaves on the trees and the green or brown grass, depending on what time of year and if you water, which I don't. Not because I don't care, because I'm lazy. Then there's the one when the ground is covered with snow, the trees are stripped to the bark and sound carries forever with the cold. The snow is beautiful and sad, just like the world. You have to watch your step lest you slip on ice and break something: a leg, a watch, a fitting metaphor.

A poster in the Las Vegas airport where they picked me and the New Zealander who was attending a security conference for special airport screening bragged that Las Vegas and Phoenix have 600 days of sunshine per year. And, yes,

they are both quite sunny. Take off your shoes. Take off your belt. Empty your pockets in this bin. Do you have a laptop or camera in your bag? Put your arms out. Is this your bag? "Tell me, security guy: do all the boys fall in love with you?"

The metal detector beeped when it passed over the center of my back. Looks like that new steel heart might cause as many problems as it solved.

Everything comedians say about flying is true. The boarding, the peanuts, the seats, the air, the pre-flight instructions. Of course you know that, you probably fly regularly. I hadn't flown in fifteen years.

When you look down from a plane, there's nothing, man. America is empty. We don't know this because we live in cities with houses two or twenty feet apart. Get five miles up and see how infrequently you see the glint of something manmade. Fly across five states (I'm talking the big western states, not the eastern minis), how could you possibly connect with someone across all that distance? I don't always pick things up right away (some people actually think naivete is a cute characteristic) but I've learned now: you don't.

What do we have in common? So much, yet so little. No one thinks like you. No one reasons like you. Yet, somehow, we all want the exact same thing. No one goes about getting it the same way. We were turned loose on the world with the goal in our heads but no plan to achieve. We all muddle through as best we can using whatever resources we were given, can gather, beg, borrow or steal.

In Indiana I learned how big a difference there is between twenty-six and twenty-one. Five only scratches the surface. In Indiana I was reminded of college life. In Indiana I sank the Biz. In Indiana I tasted Dante's Inferno. In Indiana things stopped mattering and I was me again: no pretenses, no compromises, no lies.

Almost every time I go away, I come back wanting to do nothing for three days other than watch "Heat" and drink Jack and Cokes... punch holes in the walls.

People are people everywhere. You got your good ones, you got your assholes. Mostly, you got your inbetweeners. That's not a bad thing, I would assume I'm an inbetweeners: sometimes good, sometimes an asshole. And if it's good enough for me, why isn't it good enough for you?

I read on the plane ride home, but I don't recall any of the stories I read. I remember the flight home being smooth, unlike the flight to Vegas or the one to

Phoenix, as if the skies were telling me to stay out of the West. How much do you have to pay to bribe the skies? I felt gigantic when I came home from New York. Coming home from Phoenix... wasn't that way. I felt...

What is it? I'd like to say it doesn't matter the color of soil, the dryness of the air, the topography, the severity of winters, the proximity to large bodies of water.

At least Magellan, for all his faults, didn't let anyone convince him not to sail around the world. Magellan, that undeserving bastard, never loved anyone or anything more than his desire to sail around the world. Respect him for that, but remember the people he hurt, the lives he crushed, the spirits he killed, the hearts he shattered. Even the great ones whose names ring soundly through the centuries can be assholes.

...Insignificant.

john

It doesn't mean much
 It doesn't mean anything at all
 The life I've left behind me
 Is a cold room
 I've crossed the last line
 From where I can't return
 Where every step I took in faith
 Betrayed me
 And led me from my home
 And sweet
 Sweet surrender
 Is all that I have to give

And I don't understand
 By the touch of your hand
 I would be the one to fall
 I miss the little things
 Oh I miss everything