

# The One Who's Left Behind

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## Adjusting to a partner's wanderlust

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By BETTE-JANE RAPHAEL

**A**fter my father's parents made the trip to America from Eastern Europe, they decided they had traveled enough for one lifetime. In the 60-odd years they had left to live together, they made sure they never strayed very far beyond the borders of New York City. This resolve must have passed into their gene pool, because five out of their six children inherited their skeptical view of travel.

The third generation, of which I am a member, is more diverse in its attitudes toward travel, as well as toward everything else. I, however, am from the old school. In fact, I seem to have inherited from my father a reluctance ever to venture more than 100 miles in any direction from the spot where I was

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## For a homebody, it's a chance to be single again for a little while

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born. While in my youth I was able to overcome this prejudice successfully enough to attend college in another state, it has solidified with age and the onset of maternal ties.

Oh, I can still be bullied into spending two weeks in the Dordogne Valley, or dragged by the heels through Umbria and Tuscany, but that's as exotic as I get.

Count me out for those treks into Nepal, or

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those explorations of the less developed provinces of India. (Even if my attitude did not preclude such forays, my physical shape, which suggests downward rather than upward motion, is spectacularly unsuited to strenuous travel.)

With such a genetic background and temperamental bent, I expected to choose a life partner who never traveled on anything faster than a city bus. But I surprised myself and everybody else acquainted with my sedentary nature.

I fell in love with a man who has a gypsy in his soul, an itch in his feet and an urge to explore second only to that of Columbus. He regularly goes to places that are thousands of feet above sea level or thousands of years behind the modern age, crosses the international date line with the same ease he crosses his t's, and visits places virtually unknown to those who were not actually born there.

That we have managed to bridge this gap in our attitudes toward travel and go on comfortably together is a testament to both our love and the efficacy of timely separations.

Our coming to terms with this difference didn't occur overnight, however. For a long time I was convinced that his urge to travel was actually a poorly disguised urge to get away from me. Why, I reasoned, would he want to leave a perfectly comfortable apartment with a view of Central Park to eat yak jerky on a mountain in the middle of nowhere, if it were not because he couldn't stand the sight of me? It took him awhile to convince me that if he wanted to leave me he did not have to go to another hemisphere, that he could do it a lot more cheaply and permanently simply by going to another neighborhood.

Once I understood that travel and abandonment were not necessarily synonymous, and that planes returned to the New York area as regularly as they left it, I began to relax. And once I began to relax, I began to see the pleasures that his travel could afford me.

Why, I didn't have to spend the two or three weeks of his absence biting my nails and wondering, even as I opened a can of tuna for my lunch, if he were being attacked by Kashmirian bandits in the hills above Katmandu





Gary Zamchick

or hijacked by Parisian terrorists demanding Michelin return a third star to Lasserre.

I didn't have to spend my nights worrying that there would be a beautiful woman on the camel ahead of his in the desert. In fact, I could, if I wished, look upon his vacation as a chance to take one of my own. Once that thought took hold, everything fell into place.

Now, instead of mumbling grudging farewells as he leaves for parts vaguely known, I can see him off with all the good will of Queen Isabella, knowing that he takes, along with his baggage, a good number of my own responsibilities. Although his three weeks of travel mean a lot of missed pleasure and companionship, they also mean approximately 15 fewer dinners for me to worry about. (He cooks on the weekends.) It means at least 12 fewer errands to be run, several fewer disagreements of varying degrees of unimportance to be engaged in and a great deal less laundry to be attended to. It means,

in effect, a chance to be single again for a while, without the fear of extended loneliness.

The essence of living singly is having to consult nobody's inclinations but one's own. As I assume this state of grace after my mate departs, our home is gradually transformed in minor but telling ways, until it becomes a reasonable facsimile of my disreputable old Village pad. With none to be offended, chairs, almost of their own free will, fill up with clothing. On the kitchen shelf, white bread replaces the high-fiber varieties my partner insists upon. Instead of the smell of early-morning coffee, the 7 o'clock passer-by might notice, wafting from our apartment, the unmistakable whiff of popcorn. And a burglar passing our bedroom door at 4 A.M. might hear, instead of steady breathing, the sound of Garbo laughing.

I reclaim the entire surface of our bed, which assumes the multiple duties of desk; library and snack bar, and where I soon sleep

under newspapers as well as covers. I see the movies my partner would attend only if he were bound and gagged, and the friends he would not see in any state of consciousness. And, eating for reasons of hunger rather than sociability, I shed several pounds in his absence that I would otherwise never be rid of, making his yearly absences the only reason why I do not weigh more than our sofa.

I wouldn't want to live this way indefinitely, however, and by the time my partner comes back from his travels — grimy, tired, happy to have been away and to be home — I've had enough. I'm ready to clear the newspapers off the bed and curl up beside him for my favorite form of travel — by ear. He tells me about his adventures then, about all the exotic and breathtaking spots around the globe he has had the lunatic notion to visit. And afterward I tell him about my travel adventures, about how I went shopping in the Bronx and got lost on the IRT. ■