

TRIP OF A LIFETIME

AN ANTHOLOGY

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TRIP OF A LIFETIME

AN ANTHOLOGY

EDITED BY SARAH E. HOLROYD



TRIP OF A LIFETIME: AN ANTHOLOGY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Note From the Editor</i>	1
Navy Blues.	2
<i>James Olivieri</i>	
Seven Mile Beach.	10
<i>Ann Howells</i>	
Rainbow's End.	12
<i>Dianne Bown-Wilson</i>	
The Journey.	23
<i>Krikor Der Hohannesian</i>	
That's How Life Is	26
<i>Michelle Hartman</i>	
Memoir: Don't Drink the Water	28
<i>Carole Bellacera</i>	
The Democracy of Sidewalks.	37
<i>Jon Wesick</i>	
The Ride	41
<i>Carl Palmer</i>	
A Fairy Tale Ending	43
<i>Tony Wayne Brown</i>	
The Bicyclist	58
<i>Carol Alexander</i>	
Memoir: You Fickle, Fickle Travel Gods	60
<i>Michael G. McLaughlin</i>	
To Stillhome	66
<i>Eileen Dawson Peterson</i>	
Head Trip	68
<i>Ken Goldman</i>	
En Pointe.	82
<i>Jay Faulkner</i>	
Roundabout Roads: UK.	86
<i>Susan Vespoli</i>	
Memoir: No Matter What	88
<i>Priscilla Kipp</i>	

So Much Water, So Much Sky	91
<i>Jen White</i>	
Snow Angel	98
<i>T.A. Branom</i>	
bildungsrussian	106
<i>JeFF Stumpo</i>	
Walking to the Otherworld with the Blind Fox	113
<i>T. Fox Dunham</i>	
Memoir: From Bangalore To Tiruchirappalli	125
<i>Bruce Louis Dodson</i>	
San Salvador, El Salvador	133
<i>Dawn Anderson Severt</i>	
Changing Rooms.	135
<i>Bruce Turnbull</i>	
Box of Prayers and Wishes	151
<i>Mary Sexson</i>	
The Field of Reeds	153
<i>Joshua J. Mark</i>	
Come Away	163
<i>Gill Shutt</i>	
Memoir: Acceptance	166
<i>Susan L. Kaminga</i>	
The Child Within	170
<i>Ann Carter</i>	
Permissions	172

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

I thought I was making my “trip of a lifetime” when my husband got a job that took us from the United States to Germany for three years. While the experience was immensely rewarding, I also found living in a foreign country, where I did not speak the language or know all the nuances of social interaction, more distressing than I’d imagined while planning for the move. When the three years were over, I found myself relieved that we would be leaving, even though I knew there were many things I would miss—the easy opportunity to travel high among them.

Since we knew we may never get the chance to travel Europe again after returning to the US, we decided to take an extended holiday in Paris before flying back. So while sorting through our belongings, scheduling the movers, and dropping the car off for shipping back home, we booked a temporary apartment that would allow our cat and bought one-way train tickets.

This is, truly, the trip of my lifetime. As I sit here in a tiny Paris studio apartment (smaller than one of the three storeys of our German house) writing these words, I know that I never want to leave this city. What began as a simple vacation destination has turned into a newfound home.

This personal revelation about my own trip prompted me to create a collection describing other trips. So now, pack your bags, grab your keys, don’t forget your ticket, and join us for a sampling of our authors’ ideas of the “Trip of a Lifetime.”

Sarah E. Holroyd

NAVY BLUES

JAMES OLIVIERI

James Olivieri was born in Brooklyn, New York. After twelve years in the Catholic education system, he enlisted in the United States Navy. Upon completion of his two-year service obligation he received an honorable discharge. He took his discharge papers and travel journals and immediately entered a Roman Catholic religious order in Pennsylvania. Though he has since left the religious order, James continues to write fiction in which he draws upon both his navy and monastic experiences, as well as his experiences as an insurance fraud investigator following his departure from the monastery. He currently lives in New York with his wife.

IT HAD BEEN RAINING SINCE BEFORE THE SUN HAD risen. James had seen the first droplets of rain as they landed on the window. He couldn't sleep, and doubted he would be able to until he arrived at his final destination the following day. He stood looking through the window of his hotel room. His view was skewed by the running water. But he enjoyed the sound of the falling rain and periodic rolls of thunder. It was soothing.

Just a day ago, he had been home on leave, his first since completing Recruit Training in Great Lakes, Illinois. He had left home nearly six months prior with nothing but the clothes on his back and an envelope containing his high school diploma and his birth certificate. It was the first time James had traveled from home on his own.

That trip ended with nine weeks of yelling and push-ups. It was nine weeks of lost liberty. James was confident he could count the number of times he actually spoke during that time. He didn't count the recitations or the canned replies. For nine weeks, he was a body stored in a room, stacked to the ceiling with bodies just like him.

But that had ended and he had regained some of his freedom—as much as a member of the military could hope to regain, of course. And then the orders were issued. He knew another trip was in store. He would have to report to the fleet. He had trained to become a sailor, and now he had to go and be one. He expected to be sent to Virginia, just a few hours from his family home in New Jersey. But when his orders came down, he was filled with inexplicable joy and nearly crippling fear. He was going to Europe to be stationed in Italy. And he was going there alone.

He'd had two weeks of leave in between receiving those orders and having to board the plane. That leave expired in just four hours. He would be on a military flight in three. During his time home, he had lived a life he would have killed for while he was in high school. He had met a girl and they had kissed. He'd seen his friends, and they had laughed together.

He'd shared a beer with his father, who had told him he was proud. James hated that it had to end. But he was glad for such pristine memories.

The last time he'd gotten on a plane and traveled into the unknown, he'd been challenged to his limits and pushed to the point of nearly breaking. So the thought of getting on another plane put a knot in his stomach. From his hotel room in Norfolk, he could see the masts of ships in the distance. The sky was grey. James knew that above the clouds the sun was shining. But it was hard to imagine a sunny day anywhere in the world as he stood there. And even if there was sunshine somewhere else, it may as well be on a distant planet. There in Norfolk, colored in shades of grey, was the only world James could fathom.

Her name was Sandra and she was the first girl James had ever kissed. His shyness was crippling in high school. But there, at his best friend's house, he'd flirted with a confidence he could only credit to boot camp. And on a Friday night, he'd kissed her, despite not knowing what he was doing. Sandra was beautiful. She was also worlds away.

She'd said she'd keep in touch. She told him she would wait for him. They were together for only a week and a half, but they wanted to make it work. She was in college, but wanted to see the world. James was on his way to the world, and all he wanted was the option to stay. James's emotions led him to believe that she was the one, the only one. He wanted to believe that she would be there when he returned, or even join him across the Atlantic. But his reason ruined his fantasy, as reason tends to do. He was eighteen years old, and she was living on a college campus. She freely gave her heart to a sailor who was merely passing through. He knew there was a great chance that she would not be waiting and he would never see her again.

He continued to stare at the rain as it rushed down the windows of his hotel room. The weather said it best. Ahead of him lay hope and many sunny days. But for now, there was only cold, wet darkness as far as the eye could see.

The shrill beep of the alarm clock caused James to jump slightly. He walked to the end table and shut off the alarm. It was 7:30 a.m., the time he had appointed to wake up when he'd still thought he might go to sleep. A brief notion of going back to the airport and flying home passed through his mind. He dismissed it quickly, feeling guilty at having let such a thought invade his head. He missed Sandra, but he had signed up to serve, and that's what he was going to do.

James set the clock back down on the end table. He looked around his room. The room was simple, but clean. It was convenient to the base and cheap. He didn't know what awaited him, but he knew he had to get the hell out of that room before he lost his mind.

His orders stated that his flight was through a civilian contract that would take him from base to base. He wasn't required to wear a uniform to travel. He was grateful, because he had neither slept nor shaved, and would do the uniform no great service by wearing it in his present condition.

He grabbed the handle of the green sea bag on the floor. It contained everything he would be bringing to Italy. Lifting it up, he dropped it on the bed before picking up the phone and dialing the number on the bottom of his orders.

"I'm going to need a duty driver; I need to get to the air terminal, please," he said. He gave them the hotel information, thanked them, and hung up.

They would be there in fifteen minutes.

In fifteen minutes, James's journey would continue. He would go to a foreign country and would come back in two years. All of that would begin in the next fifteen minutes. James picked up his sea bag and carried it down to the lobby. He exited through the front doors and set his bag on a wooden bench under the overhang. He looked at his watch and sighed, noting that barely a minute had passed.

His stomach was twisting. He wanted to call Sandra. She would still be sleeping; Mondays were her late class days. He couldn't help but think back to her as he stood out in the cold.

He imagined her sleeping in her warm dorm room, and that it was sunny where she was. In the two weeks he was home, it was never even cloudy. He couldn't imagine Sandra and rain in the same thought. Even if she came to Norfolk by some miracle, she would surely bring clear skies with her. James knew it was foolish to think that, but it made the twisting in his stomach stop and so he refused to let his reason ruin it for him.

He sighed and noticed his exhale take the form of steam. It was so cold and wet. He was so alone.

He perked up as the blue van approached. It pulled up alongside the overhang, and the driver's window rolled down. A young African-American woman wearing the light blue uniform shirt typical of the navy was driving. She wore the embroidered eagle, or "crow," and chevrons of a Petty Officer Second Class.

"Air Terminal?" she asked as she looked to James.

"That's me." He walked into the rain to enter the van.

As he sat in the back of the van, he found there was another young woman in the front passenger seat. She and the driver resumed their conversation. They were happy. They talked of a life of shopping and dates, of apartment living and after-work drinks. James wished he could see beyond the world of grey. Their happiness seemed so distant; it was as if he were observing them through a telescope.

He turned his attention through the rain-streaked windows as they drove. There was no one on the sidewalk. There were plenty of cars and there were shopping centers filled with businesses, which were clearly open. The entire area was alive, yet seemed completely devoid of any humanity. James knew that the cars and stores were filled with people. Real people just like him. But that didn't seem to touch his melancholy mood. He knew where he wanted to be, and it was not here.

Eventually, the van drove onto the naval base. The old, decrepit buildings hardly helped to improve his mood. They drove past the Transient Personnel Unit, the barracks for

sailors moving in between duty stations. He'd had the option of spending the prior night there, but as he was still on leave, he'd opted to stay in the hotel. That knot returned at the sight of so many uniforms milling about the streets of the base. It tightened as the van pulled over at 8:00 a.m. with the sounding of the national anthem and the call to "colors," when all pedestrians stopped to salute the nearest flag and all vehicles paused until being permitted to "carry on."

James's stomach twisting turned to queasiness as he recalled the rigors of basic training. He had quickly adjusted back to civilian life during his leave, and his body and mind were having a hard time coming back on duty.

The van pulled up in front of the air terminal and James thanked his escorts. He carried his sea bag inside. Despite it being a naval base, and he a United States sailor, there was still a security checkpoint through which he had to pass. He never thought he would feel so grateful for artificial lighting and a person scanning his belongings.

"Good morning, empty your pockets please," the man in the uniform said.

"You got it." James found himself replying almost a bit too eagerly.

He walked through the metal detector and reclaimed his wallet and keys. He considered the absurdity of the fact that he even had keys. They were to his house in New Jersey, and he wouldn't need them for a long time. He proceeded to the check-in to confirm his seat on the flight and check the sea bag, eliminating the need to tote it around the terminal.

He walked up and looked through the large windows onto the tarmac. The airplane was there; it was waiting for them despite still being two hours from departure. James found that the buzz of people made him feel less sad.

As he stood at the windows, he felt as if he were standing on the edge of a diving board. There he stood, on the edge of the United States, ready to leap into the pool and emerge on the other side. The rain persisted.