Town Crier VI: Our comfort zones are overrated

By Meredith Metsker | Posted: Wednesday, May 6, 2015 12:00 am

It was a Sunday - Oct. 5, 2014, to be exact. I was sitting on a plane bound for Frankfurt, Germany. My stomach was a mess of butterflies.

"What have you gotten yourself into, Metsker?" I asked myself.

I was on my way to Europe for the first time, and I was traveling alone. My emotions were a veritable smoothie of excitement and nervousness, but mostly excitement. I turned my in-flight TV to the "Sound of Music" and settled in for a long plane ride across the pond.

For the next 10 days, I bummed around Germany, Austria, Luxembourg, France and Holland with nothing but a hiker's backpack. I drank a full liter of beer with two Japanese women at the Hofbraühaus in Munich - the most famous beer hall in the world. I went on a "Sound of Music" tour in Salzburg, toured the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site and drank champagne for the first time ever in Reims, France - the champagne capital of the world. I visited the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam and then accidentally wandered into the red light district (thanks, Google Maps).

For most of those 10 days, I stayed in youth hostels where I slept on a bunk bed in a room full of other travelers from all over the world. I visited a friend in Luxembourg for two days and my great aunt in Germany for one.

For the other seven days, I was alone. I knew no one. I had no plan. Half the time I didn't know where I was going to end up the next day. Everything was wide open and boundless. I loved every minute of it (even when I accidentally got on the wrong train).

You see, I firmly believe everyone should do something big by themselves. Test your limits. Find out what you're capable of.

Plus, this trip gave me a chance to learn to be alone. These days, people are always plugged in. Whether we're using smartphones, laptops or tablets, we are constantly in communication with other people and on call. We are so bound to one another I think we forget how to be alone. I'm one of the worst offenders.

As a young woman, there was also an element of fear in traveling abroad by myself. I've read all the horror stories. I knew what the possibilities were. But I wasn't going to let fear or "what ifs" stop me from fulfilling my dream of traveling to Europe. I'm far too stubborn and bull-headed for that.

Writer Neal Donald Walsch said, "Life begins at the end of your comfort zone."

There's a lot of truth to that. The experiences that make us stronger and more compassionate human beings are the ones that might scare us at first.

Whenever a new opportunity pops up, I ask myself "Why not?" If I don't have a legitimate reason not to, I go for it. Take last July, for example. I jumped out of a perfectly good airplane at 10,000 feet for my first skydiving adventure. It was terrifying and amazing.

Am I crazy? Yes, probably a little. But I don't regret any of it. I see so much value in traveling alone, doing new things and being a little nuts every now and then. It keeps me learning.

For more stories from my Europe trip, check out my blog at meredithmetsker.com. If you have any fun travel stories to share, I would love to hear them. You can reach me at mkmetsker@gmail.com.

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