



**NOAA Teacher at Sea
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Onboard NOAA Ship OSCAR ELTON SETTE
June 5 – July 4, 2006**

Date: June 7, 2006

Time: 10:10 AM Hawaii

Entry

Necker Island came into view about an hour ago. But alas! I was enthralled in Kurt Vonnegut's latest (last?) masterpiece, "A Man Without a Country." It was rather hard to put down. Having the same critical side to me as Vonnegut, I have become a fan of his recently. In this novel he comments on the times, and on the times ahead from a socialist/humanist standpoint. I enjoyed most of it, though some parts struck a nerve. It is strange to think that as a writer, some people think the same thoughts as I and are able to express them so much more eloquently. We have stopped now to bottom fish in about 120 fathoms of water. Good for us! For those of you who skipped Pirating 101, or Sailing Across the Atlantic 101, a fathom is 6 feet. So you do the math! I have a feeling I am spending a lot more time writing than it is intended. But as the proverbial "they" say, practice makes perfect. Or rather, as my high school basketball coach stressed, *perfect* practice makes perfect!

If you cannot tell, I have taken a peculiar fascination with Ameer. I have become a scientist of sorts on board this ship. And she is a rather strange creature to study. So I spend much time dissecting her horrible English accent, and injecting as much sarcasm as possible when we communicate. Recently she commented on how nice my boots looked. I thanked her and told them that they were called "Euro trekkers," and that they were good for trekking Euro. They don't really match my board shorts and t-shirt, but this is no fashion show!

By the way, on a semi-serious note: Ameer is a police officer back in England, so we have had many stories to swap about our less-than-ideal work conditions. I think that is why we get along so well. The other researchers onboard are just "kids," as I have explained before. They are all undergraduate students with slightly less life experience than either of us. So I truly enjoy having a friend who can relate to my experience, especially one with a diverse perspective. We have debated the solution to all of the world's problems from various angles, and I am continuing to see why perspective is so important to solutions. (By the way, the solution to all of the world's problems is Ahu, a little red snapper that dwells around Hawaii. It is a pretty little thing, with big eyes and a fat belly. Well, the solution is either Ahu, or Peanut Butter and Jelly. You can never go wrong with that!)

I am often viewed as a complainer, because I tend to see the world through very critical eyes. But I also do my best to gain as much perspective in a situation as possible before opening my mouth. This is something that I have learned through traveling time and time

again. I remember very clearly the first time I spoke without perspective on my first journey. I was sitting in a lounge in a hostel in Dublin, Ireland having a conversation with a Canadian, a Kiwi (New Zealand), a Welshman, and a Pole (is that what someone from Poland is called?) about the politics of the war in Iraq. It had first broken out just days before my travel, and I was anxious about the reception that I would have in Europe. In some cities there were riots and American exchange students were being spit on and beaten up in public. And here we were, a bad joke waiting to be told, trying to figure out the ethics, reasons for, and solution to the war in Iraq, each of us from a different standpoint. I started to open my mouth to say what I truly felt as an American who survived the 911 attacks and grew up under the protection of and respect for the military, which would have been brutally honest, when the Welshman cut me off and began ranting and raving about how terrible US politics were. I was growing furious inside and if it weren't for the good-natured Kiwi who spoke up before me, I would have said something rude and most likely provocative of a fight. The Kiwi asked the Welshman if he had ever lived in the United States. The Welshman said no. "Have you ever *visited* the United States?" Again the answer was no. "Then what right have you to speak of the politics of the United States if you have never been there?" Silence filled the room and suddenly I was aware of what perspective truly meant.

Had I opened my mouth to defend my country, I would have most likely ended up looking just as angry and ignorant as the Welshman for his point of view. Instead, through patience and persevering through another person's point of view, I was able to objectively understand the arguments from another person's side of things. I had NEVER been able to do this before. And at this particular moment, my life was forever changed.

Would we all take the time to get to know our neighbors and those people who we don't seem to get along with, I am sure things would be much better in the world. While I can only promote this notion on a small scale, I hope that others can see how important perspective truly is. EVERY time I travel I learn something new about myself. Every time I stop and listen to the complaints of someone else about myself, I am able to see things in myself that I need to change. Again, can I save the world? Most definitely not. But can I learn enough to change a small part of the world through conversations with people such as Ameer? Certainly. Should it be my purpose in life to listen and extend my perspective on various ideas and notions? I believe so. And not to sound preachy, or "teacher-ish," as I like to refer to these moments, but do you ever wonder how much confrontation, stress, anxiety, and negativity we could avoid if we only took the time to stop and listen to another person's point of view?

As Ameer knows, I am ALWAYS right! She has affectionately dubbed me the American Redneck. And to make the name stick, I have intentionally earned myself a farmer's tan over the last day and a half. I am officially an American Redneck, and Ameer is officially a Bloody Brit, but we are officially *friends*, and that makes a day for me...