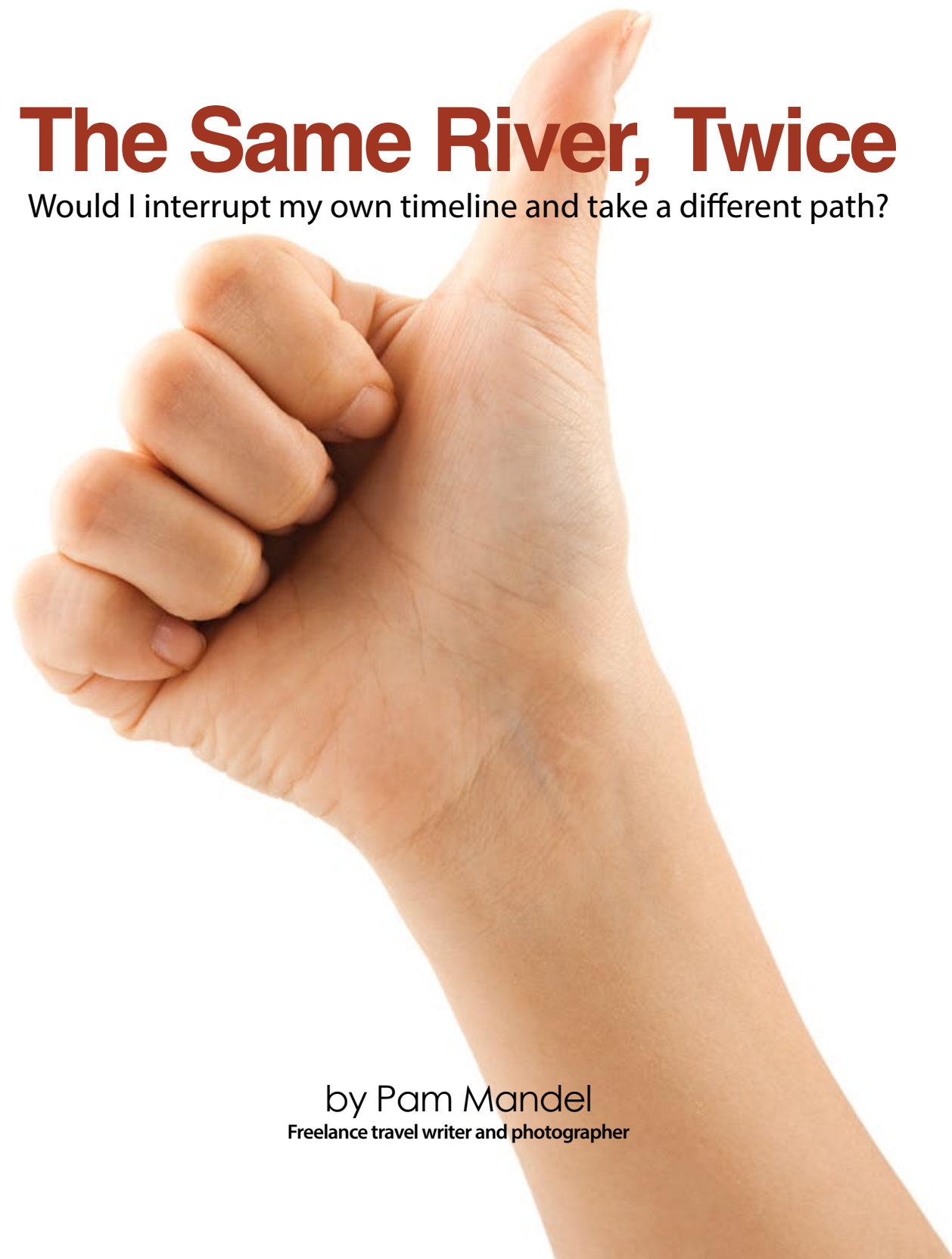


# The Same River, Twice

Would I interrupt my own timeline and take a different path?



by Pam Mandel  
Freelance travel writer and photographer

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He was tall, good looking, and had attended an expensive prep school where he learned to talk pretty. He liked dancing to pop music, drinking beer and traveling. His father wanted him to be a real estate agent; he was not interested in a desk job. He was sarcastic and smart — a reader. I sometimes imagine going back in time to talk to my former self. “He’s attractive, but he’s bad news. Run for it.”

I did not run for it. I was so young, unconstrained by gravity or common sense. I went to London, his home, and together we went to Paris, Tel Aviv, Karachi, and finally New Delhi, where I wasted with giardia and salmonella, I blew what was left of my money on a plane ticket back to the U.S.

wanted to see him. It is possible I had written those words in a letter a year back, but it was no longer true. After an awkward half hour, I told him to go away. Seeing him reminded me that he had made me feel small and stupid. The woman standing in this sunny California backyard was not the one he’d last seen at the airport in New Delhi. The me I had turned into told him to go, and he did. I closed the front door behind him and sat outside smoking cigarettes until the rattled feeling was gone.

Decades later, I received an email from him — he’d found my writing online and got in touch. “People don’t change, do they?” he wrote.

*I’ll always think you were a jerk, if that’s what you mean,* I thought and deleted his email. People do change; they become more and more them-

a few pictures of me in India, stick skinny and serious.

We were ill prepared for this journey. The travel was hard, made harder by the fact the local people seemed disinclined to help my boyfriend. Memory says that I did all the talking — if I made the deal, the prices were better, the drivers were nicer, the hotel desk clerks more willing to attend to a broken swamp cooler. In retrospect, it makes sense; we were in India and he was English, but it could also have been that he was not very nice.

This had an upside. One of my most dreamlike memories of this trip is of wandering into a Himalayan village to ask a local Ladakhi family if I could use their kitchen fire. They invited me into their dark, smoky house and gave me a glass of tea. I was there long

*“People don’t change, do they?”*



Now: Pam Mandel, recalling tales of ponies.



Then: Pam (3rd from L) ponytailed.

I returned to the U.S. a different person. After my travels in India, I would encounter other people who had done the same and we would have a *moment*. We had seen things, we had taken very long walks, we had earned the same badges. It was not country-counting snobbery, or a competition, it was a nod, an acknowledgement that we had shifted. Nothing bad happened to me in India beyond a difficult-to-treat but typical case of traveler’s gut. But I had walked the markets of Old Delhi without a guide and stumbled over the rocky high passes of the Himalayas, and I was changed for the experience.

Two years later, the Englishman showed up at my home in California. A mutual travel friend had told him I

selfes as time goes by, though doing something like going to India when you are young and in the company of a mean boyfriend will accelerate certain parts of that change.

I recently sliced open the tape on a box I had not opened since two or three addresses back. There was my past in all its Kodachrome four-by-six print glory. I found a picture of myself as an exchange student in Sweden surrounded by pale-complexioned blondes; I look shockingly exotic. There is a picture of me in the Negev Desert in Israel. There are no distinguishing landmarks, but I know exactly when it was by how strong I look. There are pictures of the nameless English boyfriend. There are just

enough for my dinner to cook. We did not speak, we just looked at each other with open faces.

Our adventure was staggering — we traveled by train from Karachi to Central Pakistan and by pickup truck to Islamabad. We took a train from Islamabad to Srinigar, traveled first by bus and then, hitchhiking with truck drivers, went up into the foothills of the Himalayas into Ladakh. From Leh we walked to Manali over swinging rope bridges, through rushing glacier streams cold as ice, and along ribbons of catwalk trails where with each step gravel went sliding into valleys miles below. We had the wrong

**Out & About:** *Continued on page 41*



**Italian for Beginners** (2000)

Before she transitioned to English-language films such as *An Education*, Danish director Lone Scherfig made this beguiling film about a night class in Copenhagen. A group of adults are studying Italian, a rather exotic choice given the otherwise drab circumstances of their neighborhood. At first these folks are at odds with each other, but the mood shifts as the story unfolds, and a series of running gags eases the transition — you might not believe a joke about a man repeatedly trying to get a haircut would be comedy gold, but it is. Scherfig's use of the so-called "Dogme" style (real locations, handheld camera) pays off in a charming way: We feel as though we've casually stumbled across this group, whose humble lives grow in significance the more we get to know them.

**MUSIC REVIEWS**

In this issue, we tackle our theme of transformation with our own mix tape of great songs about change from within and change from without.

by Joe Rodriguez / Freelance music writer



**Track 1. "Everybody Ought to Make a Change"** (Single) — Eric Clapton, *Money and Cigarettes*, 1983

This sleepy John Estes cover reflects a transformation for Eric Clapton. After finally facing the music and admitting he had a drinking problem, Clapton gave up alcohol cold turkey. *Money and Cigarettes* was his debut as a new man, and this opening track reflects not only the changes in his personal life but a fresh start professionally with a new band.



**Track 2. "See the Changes"** (Single) — Crosby, Stills & Nash, *CSN*, 1977

After the departure of Neil Young and a long hiatus from recording and performing, Crosby, Stills & Nash resurfaced with *CSN*. Stephen Stills penned this song while he was having problems in his marriage. The lyrics speak to witnessing how a partner handles seeing you change and transform from the super star that you were to this older, distant companion.



**Track 3. "You're Gonna Change (Or I'm Gonna Leave)"** (Single) — Hank Williams, *The Ultimate Collection*, 2002

Hank provides a heartfelt plea from a man to his spouse, begging her to change her ways. He is tired of it all: the nagging, their arguing, and her running home to daddy when she gets mad. His ultimatum? Change, baby, change, or I'm out the door.



**Track 4. "100 Years"** (Single) — Five for Fighting, *The Battle for Everything*, 2004

This wistful and slightly haunting song follows the story of one man's journey from age 15 to 99, with each era in between referenced as just "a moment." From a young buck and young lover to father then grandfather, the singer paints a picture of times that were simpler, full of unknown possibility, and so very fleeting.



**Track 5. "Changes (Live)"** (Single) — Ozzy Osbourne, *Live & Loud*, 1993

This is not your typical Ozzy track; it was the first time that Black Sabbath ventured out of the heavy metal genre and offered up a melodic and deeply sensitive ballad. The song was inspired by then-drummer Bill Ward's ongoing divorce but could have easily been about all of the other changes that Black Sabbath members were going through after their move to L.A., including their subsequent drug and alcohol addictions and the eventual end of the original band. Ozzy would later re-record the song in 2003 as a duet with daughter Kelly, reworking the lyrics to reflect their lives together and how that too was destined to change.

gear; it was too heavy, and I got altitude sickness and had to ride one of the trekking guide's ponies for a day because I ached too much to move. We descended into Manali, where we ate and ate and ate, and everyone we encountered said, "You've come over the pass from Leh, haven't you?" Finally, we went down to Delhi and I flew back to California via England and did not look back.

Part of me wonders what it would be like to do that trip again. Heraclitus, the Greek philosopher, said you cannot stand in the same river twice. I wouldn't mind the river, but I don't want to be that same person again. Now, you can take the route I traveled by road in one quarter of the time. While I would trade my angry right knee and slowing metabolism for the kind of energy it takes to drag a duf-

fel bag over a Himalayan pass, I'll stick with my current world view and being the kind of person who is more selective about her travel companions.

I take it all back; I would not interfere with my former self. Were I to interrupt my own timeline, I'd only do so to say, "Don't worry. You're going to come to your senses. This seems stupid right now, but you know better. Cross the mountains and go home. This is nowhere near your last adventure. You cannot imagine the adventures you're going to have."

I would not give back the memories I have of that wide-eyed family in their smoke-blackened home. Of the barefoot river crossings. Brushing my teeth with the gritty water of glaciers. The monks in their saffron robes in remote monasteries, handing us little cups of yak butter tea as we crossed the thresh-

olds to rooms painted with hundreds of tiny manifestations of the Buddha.

I am less serious now, but still driven by adventure. I'm better prepared; my gear is appropriate, and my companions superior in uncountable ways. I won't suffer fools or bullies anymore, but I like to think that I am still the kind of person who would knock on a door in a faraway place where I do not speak a word of the language and know barely enough of the culture to get by. On that trip I learned that it is possible to share a fire in silence and to find a way to say thank you. I am not the same person that I was at 19, but I liked being reminded that even then, a traveling fool in the truest meaning of that phrase, I fearlessly believed in the kindness of strangers.

That, I hope, has not and will never change. ♦

**Healthy U:**  
Continued from page 17

We are complex organisms with intricate mechanisms at play in our health. We are also more than a collection of genes. Whether science or common sense, eating a diet low in sugar and carbs and high in fresh, organic produce, along with limiting toxic exposure, seems to positively affect a healthy genetic expression. ♦



Carlene Cross

**Quick and Easy Juicing for Good Health - Original Recipe**  
by Carlene Cross  
New to juicing? Try this recipe; it's loaded with antioxidants and immune boosters

for great health and good taste.

**In juicer (or powerful blender), combine:**

- 1 stalk of broccolli
- Handful of spinach or kale
- 2 stalks of celery
- 1 carrot
- Handful of watercress or parsley
- After juice is made add 1 scoop of *Green Vibrance* ♦

**Transformation:** Continued from page 37

*"What's wrong with me, I wondered. I share the same birthday as the Dalai Lama, so I should be capable of grasping thoughts of higher consciousness."*

After two hours of this mind-mash I became discouraged and began poking anthills with pointed sticks and decided to wait for the inspiration of the night sky.

It did not disappoint. The sky was chandeliered with a celestial vanity of cosmic awe and wonder, the type of spectacle that I imagine inspired Beethoven to compose his "Ninth Symphony" or country singer Jimmy Dean to sell breakfast sausages. Yet, I felt no inner transfiguration.

What's wrong with me, I wondered. I share the same birthday as the Dalai Lama so I should be capable of grasping thoughts of higher consciousness. But maybe, perhaps, any cosmic advantage I've gained by this is negated

by the fact that George W. Bush also celebrates July 6<sup>th</sup>. I nodded off with no answers.

In the morning, I hiked down the trail discouraged. I thought for sure I'd be hiking back giddy from Mom Nature's counsel, and that I'd soon be moving to Southern France to become a beret-wearing truffle farmer. Disappointed, I stopped at the trailhead registration box to check off my name. As I did, I noticed on the adjacent National Forest information board a trailhead map with a small red circle captioned with "You Are Here."

Finally, I thought, a genuine found-myself moment. Let the transformation begin. ♦