

A woman in winter gear stands on a snowy mountain peak, looking back at her wildest achievement. The background shows a vast, icy landscape with a fjord filled with icebergs and a small boat in the distance. The sky is overcast, and the overall scene is one of a remote, high-altitude environment.

Out and About
Journeys Completed or Contemplated

SEVEN

by Pam Mandel
Freelance travel writer and photographer

*One woman looks back at her wildest achievement
and the inherent loss in a dream now realized.*

I slumped back into my chair, overwhelmed. My seat at the window faced the stern. We were sliding past giant blue glaciers, their cracked faces a wall above the blue black mirror of the Lemaire Channel. I felt oddly sad all of a sudden, like I might cry, though sad isn't the right word at all. "What's the matter?" asked my breakfast companion. She must have seen the shift of emotion on my face, in my body.

"This is the last continent," I said. "I've been to all seven now."

Exploration in the Modern Age

"Charcot was an idiot," said the doctor, as we walked the icy slopes of Petermann Island.

French explorer Charcot anchored on the wrong side of the island. The prevailing winds blew ice into the cove, forcing him to winter over. The other side of the island, where the *Plancius* — "my" ship — was anchored while we were ashore, was free and clear. I looked south at Charcot's cove. A block of blue ice, vaguely reminiscent of a cowboy hat and the size of a modest house, was shifting, gradually, toward the shore. The weather was bad that day; it was raining, hard. The island was a worn-down slide of algae-covered snow and muddy penguin guano. Every now and then my boots would punch through the surface into a puddle of icy water. In two hours, I would be back on the ship. I would be wearing slippers and eating butternut squash soup. I would be uploading photos from my camera to my laptop. Charcot would probably have been listening to the ice crunch up against his ship (a sound I know now) and worrying. Charcot survived the winter — he died later in a shipwreck off the coast of Iceland, something I have no plans to do.

Lately I consider my travels in historical context. It's not that I am a great explorer; it's that I like to put the significance of my travels in the context of those brave humans, those madmen — and in some cases women — who went off the map so they could find out what was there. I like to be taken down a notch or 12 when I think I'm doing something special. I like to keep in mind the absolute privilege I have in being able to — can you believe this — take a ship to Antarctica to see penguins and seals and the wild

raw places where nature makes lunch out of all of us, should she be so inclined. Iced in with his crew, Charcot probably had hard tack and seal meat, while on the other side of the island I eat steamed rock cod with asparagus in a delicate mustard sauce followed by a baked fruit tart and coffee with milk and sugar.

I live in modern times, and for that I am grateful. Anyone who has the financial means can go to Antarctica; you need not be all that sturdy. Many travelers who go to Antarctica are retirees, gripping the handrails as they wander about the halls of the ship, moving carefully up and down the gangplanks. Not all travelers to Antarctica are wealthy, either. An Australian couple I met told me how they'd saved for years in order to take this adventure. This was their once in a lifetime experience. But once in a lifetime or not, a trip to Antarctica is achievable, for those with some means and the will to plan.



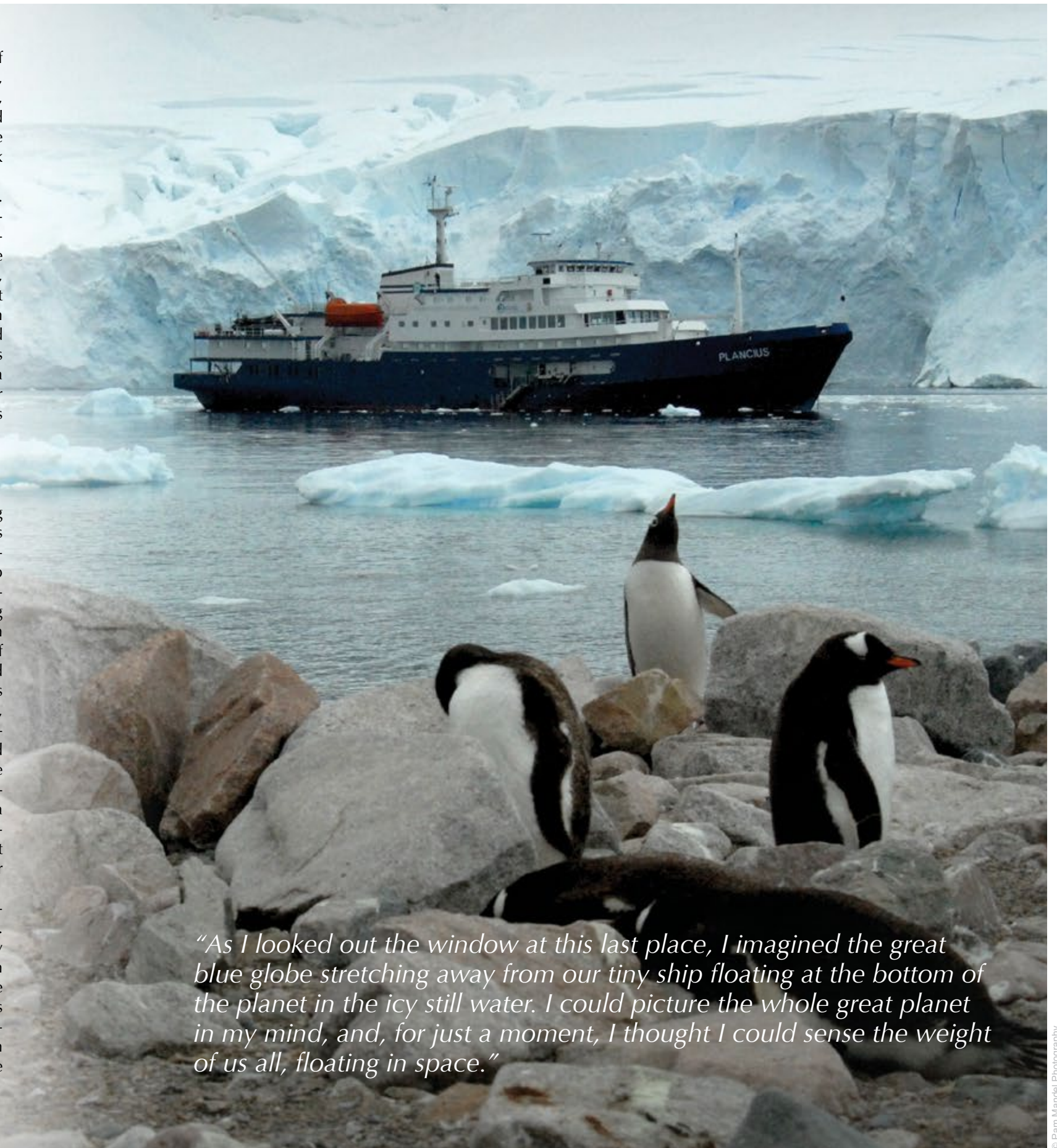
Where Have the Frontiers Gone?

If, instead of being born to modern times when a bookish, slightly odd female can step foot on all seven continents without raising an eyebrow, I'd been born in, say, the age of exploration, my world

would collapse upon me. To complete such travels I'd require a past life as the child of missionaries, diplomats, or a father involved in obscure botanical research for some institute, probably British, and later, back in London or Cambridge, there would be presentations in which I was not involved in anyway. I am much luckier to be born curious and to a somewhat open globe, to a time when the infrastructure exists in such a way that I can stand looking at Charcot's badly chosen anchorage and, a week or so later, sit on my couch in Seattle writing about it.

It was this sense of historical, geographical whiplash that had me gazing into the middle distance. In the collected lives of travelers, my existence, my adventures, are insignificant. I walked a mountain pass in the Himalayas. I rode a bicycle to see the Valley of the Kings in Egypt. I drove a car to Ayers Rock. I took a tour bus to see the temples of Angkor. I boarded a cruise ship to stand on the frozen ground of the seventh continent, Antarctica. I have

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"As I looked out the window at this last place, I imagined the great blue globe stretching away from our tiny ship floating at the bottom of the planet in the icy still water. I could picture the whole great planet in my mind, and, for just a moment, I thought I could sense the weight of us all, floating in space."



A Prairie Home Companion

For the length of a single broadcast of Garrison Keillor's famed radio show — the final broadcast in the movie's fictional universe — onstage shenanigans vie with backstage drama to create a lively, wry portrait of a community. Being the last broadcast, an elegiac air hangs over the event; indeed, Death itself (or herself, as the case may be) is literally waiting in the wings. This warm and lovely 2006 film turned out to be the final work by the radically talented director Robert Altman, whose sardonic edge keeps the movie from becoming simple, and whose work with actors unleashes a marvelous cast (Keillor is but one of a large ensemble that includes Meryl Streep, Lily Tomlin, Tommy Lee Jones, and Kevin Kline as the radio detective Guy Noir). In the end, the party is not just a celebration of showbiz or a particular radio show, but of life itself.



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accomplished so little — probably you know many people who have done exactly what I've done. But now, I hold this unique honor of having visited all seven continents. What times we live in that someone like me, with weak upper body strength and perpetually cold hands, can stand on all seven continents!

I travel in the footsteps of all the great explorers. Sitting on the ship,

while my coffee went cold, I again imagined the long blue lines of the planet between where I sat and my home back in Seattle. I wrapped the lines the horizontal way, too, around the belt of the planet to Honolulu, Alice Springs, Saigon, Delhi. (There are yet many places in the world I have not been — I would like to see the churches of Ethiopia. I would like to see elephants in the wild.) As I looked out the window at this last place, I

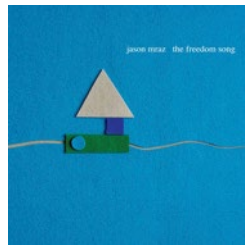
imagined the great blue globe stretching away from our tiny ship floating at the bottom of the planet in the icy still water. I could picture the whole great planet in my mind, and, for just a moment, I thought I could sense the weight of us all, floating in space.

I pushed my toast away; I wasn't hungry anymore. "I've been to all seven continents." I said. I looked out the window and tried not to cry. ♦

MUSIC REVIEWS

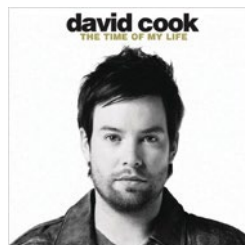
In our summer issue, it's only fitting that we honor a few choice selections that celebrate the irresistible call of happiness, the unique joy of living in the moment and loving it, the gift of love everlasting, and embracing whatever comes your way.

by Beverly Ingle / San Antonio-based freelance writer



The Freedom Song (single) — Jason Mraz, 2012

Without a doubt, Jason Mraz can be counted on for delivering feel-good melodies and lyrics, and he doesn't fail with his cover of "The Freedom Song," a popular standard in his live sets but never before recorded by Mraz himself. Arguably a bit "poppy" and upbeat, it could be a little too cheery for some who might not have yet fully embraced how good life is no matter where you are. "The Freedom Song" was the first of three tracks released exclusively on iTunes before Mraz's latest full album, *Love Is a Four Letter Word*, was released in April 2012.



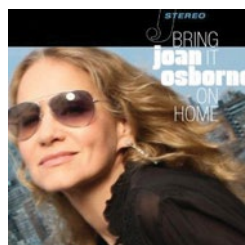
The Time of My Life (single) — David Cook, 2008

If you missed David Cook the first time around when he won the seventh season of popular reality show *American Idol*, get thee to iTunes or Amazon right away and download this anthem to making the best of every opportunity and celebrating whatever comes your way. "The Time of My Life" was Cook's closing performance following his win on the reality show, as well as his first single to be released post-*Idol*. If you're the kind of person who wants to "live every moment out loud," then this could very well be your theme song.



A Thousand Years (single) — Christina Perri, 2011

Who among us doesn't dream of the gift of everlasting love — to be told that you've been loved for a thousand years and will be loved for a thousand more? This irresistible love song appears on the soundtrack for the movie *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn Part 1*, but don't let that color your perception. Christina Perri's performance is appealing to anyone with a romantic side, and while falling in love with a vampire may be camp, the passion in these lyrics is anything but.



Bring It On Home (album) — Joan Osborne, 2012

The brash blonde with the smoky, irrepressible vocals handpicked this selection of vintage blues and soul numbers for her seventh album, which perfectly showcases her talent and style. Long-time fans and newbies alike will revel in her cover performances of such blues favorites as "I Want To Be Loved" and "I Don't Need No Doctor." Of particular note is Osborne's upbeat, enthusiastic cover of "Shake Your Hips," which is apparently the chance result of an impromptu in-studio jam session among Osborne, collaborator Jack Petruzzelli, and other studio musicians ... and a wonderful example of embracing what comes your way, planned or not. ♦

Coming of Age: Continued from page 21

The Work of Aging Includes Noticing What Brings Joy

So what is the work of aging that points us in the direction of finding our inner peace? What might you do to encourage this process? One thing is stunning in its simplicity: to notice what brings you joy and inner peace, and do more of those things! When you do feel that inner joy or happiness, stop a minute and stay with that feeling. Spend a little more time there. Be grateful for it, and experience it fully.

Another activity I find useful is thinking of the things that support this feeling in me. It is not the external; not movies or intellectual debate, interesting travel or fine food. Rather, it comes from within: thinking lovingly of others, singing or being with uplifting company. Other activities might include helping your neighbors, contemplating the higher truths, and reading uplifting literature or poetry. It is different for each of us, and we know our bliss when we feel it.

An excellent book that describes the work of aging is *From Age-ing to Sage-ing* by Zalman Schachter Shalomi. It explains how we can free ourselves from encumbrances, such as unnecessary hurt and anger from the past and fears of the future, that may hinder our desire to be free, live fully in the present, and be with our inner joy.

Aging work includes the process of coming to terms with our past — our younger life, how we grew up, and the choices we made along the way. It is a process of forgiving and allowing old hurts to release their grip on us. I call this becoming familiar with the terrain of our past. It may be rocky, but rocks have their own gifts don't they? Rocks can be sharp, difficult to climb over, and are generally hard. These hard experiences we have in our lives are

described in the book as "severe teachers." Among the gifts we receive after digesting our lessons from these teachers are empathy and compassion for ourselves and others, new understanding and wisdom. When the lesson includes loss, it may involve grieving and being aware of where our sadness comes from as part of the gift.

This is the process of facing our future, including our own death. We are so attached to our bodies and things of the material world, but they will not go with us. So what will our death be like, and what are our fears around death and dying? This is not a morbid thing to think about, really, but a vital and necessary preparation for our transition to becoming an elder.

Elders Can Leave a Legacy of Joy

Finally, the work of aging involves becoming an elder: being an example of kindness, thoughtfulness and joy for the younger generation to emulate. By this alone, we mentor and leave a wonderful legacy. Doing the work of aging and becoming an elder is a process of shedding what we don't need anymore, including the old hurts and anger, accepting with understanding and grace the situation whatever it is, and living with joy. Just as we may have twinges of envy for the young with their vigor and agility of body, they may envy and strive for our hard-won inner joy and peace.

Being old does not relieve us of life challenges; they come without concern for our age and may be even more challenging with the physical decline. Yet, since we have completed the tasks of raising our families, progressing our careers and so on, we now have time to dive into the work of aging and reap the rewards of old age. Let us grow and expand our inner peace and joy and be a blessing to all.

This is truly something to celebrate. ♦