



Alpine Dolphins



The old man,
the conch shell
and the key

Like a runaway Spring Break advertisement, I write this column to promote travel, to promote seeing the planet.

But the difference between me and an advertisement is this: I don't want your money.

If you're bored, I think you should leave. If you're content, I think you should stay. But there are two things I discourage.

The first is the "Job Market." I don't care what it looks like on television, the world of the yuppies is a façade -- simple coat-and-tie slavery.

The second thing is travel through a travel agency. It makes no sense to give money to a business in the city of your departure. Save it for the road. These places advertise bargains of grandeur but the bottom line is they work 40 hours a week NOT because they are concerned with the meta-ethical variations of traveling, but because they promote tourism.

Tourism is different than traveling.

Ever see "The Accidental Tourist"? The theme of the film was homeostasis -- the idea of traveling and returning without ever having to alter your lifestyle.

Leave the house to the cab, leave the cab to the plane, leave the

**COWAN
Kevin**

plane to the airport, to the cab, to the hotel, then a cab or tour bus, and so on.

Again, a financially created yuppie façade. Nothing in this life stagnates as much as still ponds of rain-water and business majors.

So don't be a tourist. If your wont is motion, break inertia by yourself. Don't be a business student and pay someone else to do it for you.

I'm rambling. My direction here is road-bound. I've been dealing with travelers at work, and now we move on to what travelers work for in the first place: travel.

And I want to be positive. I want to show the kinds of experiences one can have when notions of a common order are left behind in childhood's bedroom. The world is a strange, wonderful, dangerous experience, and there's no reason why everyone shouldn't know this. There's no good reason at all that people should go through life thinking the government or their religion takes care of everything. I'm pretty sure that we make this stuff up as we go along.

With any luck, in the long and bizarre course of traveling, you will not become lost. This is one mental playground best left to those who end up there because of the chemical imbalance in their brain. Bad chemicals are not a choice. That is

Fate -- another much longer story.

This story is just about losing yourself on the planet, about what it might be like were you actually to succeed in separating mind from body.

It's not the expressway, not the road not taken. It's more like traveling all roads at once, or no road at all.

...

The old man stood on the wrong side of the highway, facing the traffic going his way, but doing so on the opposite side of the road. His left thumb outstretched, his right thumb in his pocket rubbing a piece of conch shell from the Pacific Ocean and the ragged ridges of a rusty key that fit a box containing all the good things he had left in the world. He searched for the box with his two best buddies, his right and left thumb. He looked for the box, always. He didn't know where he'd left it -- so many places and faces whirled in and out of his memories, so many places he could have left it.

And he really wanted to find the box, put the key in and turn it, releasing all the good things he'd forgot he had. For now, however, he stood on the side of the road, the cars racing by like a video game, and he held no quarter.

He put his left thumb away in his pants pocket and started walking.

"This is definitely the middle-west," he thought to himself.

"MOOOOOOO!" he cried to the corn cobs and caule as though the field and its contents were a nearly complete steak dinner in a happy Midwest home, waiting only for an Idaho potato smothered in picanté sauce made in New Jersey.

The sun warmed the asphalt, which warmed the calluses sticking through the holes in his boots. He was happy. It was a good day to walk, walk, walk. The old man walked all the time. Truth was, he'd been walking along like this for 21 years, trying to find the larger piece fitting the small piece of conch

in his pocket, trying to find that blasted box.

His left thumb wiped sweat from his brow. There appeared a town in the distance as he reached the peak of a small, flat hill. He walked: left, right, left, right, left, skip, shuffle, right, left, shuffle-ball-change: left.

Right!

A semi-truck actually had pulled over to give him a lift. He got in.

"Where ya headed there, old wanderin' dude?" asked the young truck driver.

"Coffee, maybe a roll from a

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