

*“Travelling Heavy”*

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I should have known I couldn't travel light, the way I love books. It began with my first solo trip, when I was 15, to visit relatives in Boston. We had dinner at the Wayside Inn, and my aunt bought me Longfellow's *Tales of a Wayside Inn*, which made me realize how much more meaningful books are when I have visited the places they talk about, and vice versa. My next big trip, a few years later, was overseas with a history group that visited historical sites in Catalunya (the northeastern corner of Spain and the adjacent region of France). I was in the process of learning Spanish, and took the opportunity to buy several Spanish books that would have been difficult to find (not to mention outrageously expensive) in America. That experience made me take a personal interest in Spain and France. The next summer I went to South Africa, for research involving the native wildlife, and collected a few books concerning that country. The following year I returned to Spain and that time mailed home two boxes of Spanish books. I then took a whirlwind vacation with friends in Scotland, England, and Paris; my friends still complain of having to help me haul my luggage, weighed down with books collected along the way, through half the train stations and subways in Europe (a considerable exaggeration). Trips to the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and Mexico captured my interest in the political and cultural environment of Latin America and its relationship with the U.S. I took advantage of my last expedition, to Austria and Germany, to learn a little German and make yet another corner of the world personal for me. By the time of my second trip to Europe, I learned to prepare for trips by reading up on the countries before I arrived. Of course, I never accomplished as much as I hoped before the journey, so I ended up taking some books from home (I'd have plenty of travel time to occupy, I reasoned) to read while I was actually in the region. A rewarding plan, but definitely a heavy one!

My study of foreign languages and cultures has enriched my travels, and a Spaniard once commented that I knew the Spanish royal lineage better than he did. In addition to collecting books on individual countries, I have picked up several general books, on art, music, history and philosophy, to try to fill out my comprehension of the various cultures I have experienced. I have collected both fiction and non-fiction; some of my books I have found overseas, some in American bookstores, and many at library sales. In May I will have to settle down to a career as a veterinarian, but since most of my adventures have been based around career-related experience, I hope to find similar opportunities in the future. In the meantime, I am almost done with a grueling eight years of school, and I have a lot of catch-up reading to do!