

Postcards from Bill Clinton

Relationships for an American in Europe are usually easy to predict: If someone likes you it is because of Bill Clinton, and if they do not like you it is because of George Bush.

TRAVEL

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Photos: Ben Rasmussen

This is one of the first lessons the Mother Continent (Europe, ed.) taught my husband and I on our month-long honeymoon trip en route to the Faroe Islands where we will start life together in Klaksvík. After a week of marriage, we left my home in rural America, a place of big highways, big sky and a big family, to travel across the Balkans, a land of young countries, local cheese and small cars.

Our first stop was Athens, Greece, where my husband, Ben, waited 30 minutes for me to clear foreign immigration after he had zipped through the European Union queue.

Lacking a purple passport, I realized quickly that being American is not as valuable on this side of the Atlantic. The next phase of our trip was to visit several of the world-famous Greek Isles. We have few friends from the United States who have enjoyed the cool white houses and bright blue waters of the isles, but we were not without company as naked Germans and baked-brown Scandinavians basked with us on the beaches.

Free from a daily schedule for the first time in months, Ben began to teach me essential Faroese. Unfortunately, as he spent most of his youth living in the Philippines his spoken Faroese is not so great, either. We are limited to phrases like "Góðan morgun," "takk fyri," and "skulu vit fara?" which I proudly recite with a harsh American accent that makes him cringe. My biggest accomplishment so far has been with

counting, and I can now tell Ben the price of something in Faroese so long as it is a number below 20.

Bush in Greece

After a few days of beaches and big meals we grew restless, and have since spent the last two weeks of travel staying with anyone who will take us in. Staying with locals is a great opportunity to learn about a culture and find the best restaurants. It also saves money, which is essential for two young unemployed journalists traveling in Europe for a month with only the increasingly devalued U.S. dollar to spend.

On the island of Samos, within sight of the Turkish coast, we stayed with a lovely pair of English teachers who treated us to the only bed in the apartment and an eagerness to talk politics.

"It is clear to us, based on Iraq, that President Bush is mentally handicapped," they told us earnestly as we visited and watched the sun set over the city.

It is not a bad point, but as the only American within 500 miles, and with a husband claiming Faroese citizenship, I felt it was my duty to defend our leader. We may have been wrong as we cast our votes, but we were not that wrong. In these circumstances Ben only has to explain where the Faroes are located; I have to try and explain my country's entire foreign policy.

Clinton in Kosovo

Anxious for the next leg of the trip, we happily set out for Prishtina, the capital of Kosovo, on the green velveteen seats of a Soviet-era train. When we

arrived we saw something jarringly out of place amidst crumbling traditional homes and concrete apartment buildings: a 20-foot replica Statue of Liberty boldly rising above the city atop Hotel Victory.

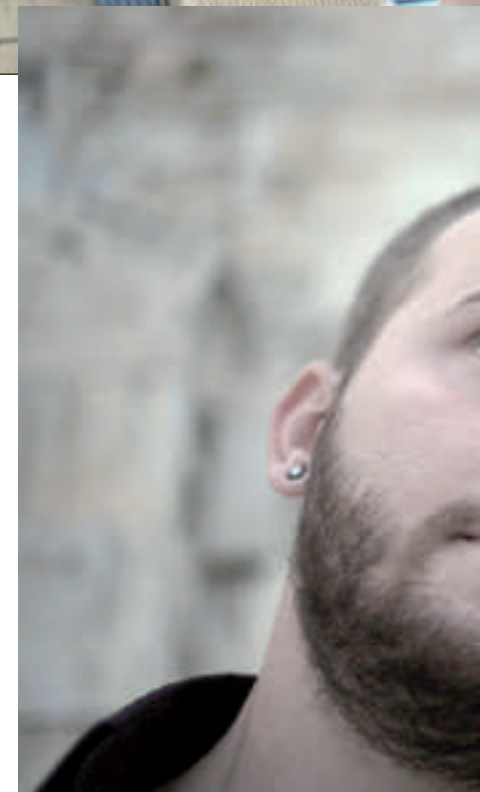
Our reception in Kosovo as Americans was pleasant and unexpected. It is the only group of people in the world who are able to reconcile Clinton, Bush and Iraq, and still come out loving the U.S. It is Clinton, though, who holds the key to their hearts for his support during the Kosovo War in 1999. Over coffee one woman put it that, "We don't like each other, but we all like Clinton."

Her statement was chilling as it came less than 24-hours after a bomb went off in a coffee shop late at night on the centrally located Bill Clinton Boulevard. Two people were killed and twelve more were wounded in

what locals accredit as a mob hit. As I watched the wreckage from across the street, stepping over broken plates and plastic, I thought about how there will not be any more hero-presidents to help this fledgling country as it works for independence and stability in the coming years.

In just a few days we will leave for Copenhagen, where we will enjoy the orderly public transportation and expensive coffee before catching a bumpy flight north. I do not know everything that awaits us in the Faroes, but I highly anticipate the natural beauty, a new family and community, and the wool.

If you see me on the street over the next year shout out a greeting: We can count to 20 together.



Bio:

Abby Kirkbride and Ben Rasmussen come from opposite sides of the planet. Abby is from Chugwater, Wyoming, USA, where she was raised on her family's cattle ranch. Ben's father, Jogvan Just, is a native of Klaksvík, Faroe Islands, but Ben spent most of his life on the island of Balabac in the Philippines where his parents are missionaries.

The couple met as students during their first year at John Brown University in Arkansas, the home state of Bill Clinton. They both graduated this spring with degrees in journalism.

For at least the next year they will be living in Klaksvík, Faroe Islands. It will be a chance for Abby to learn about her husband's heritage, getting to know his family and the Faroese language. Their plans for the future include graduate school and working with environmental and social issues in the developing world.

Abby Kirkbride and Ben Rasmussen in front of the Statue of Liberty which will end with them moving to the Faroes