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Project Four – This I Believe – Draft 5 – Final
Beyond the Doormat

The alarm sounded at 4 a.m. announcing the start of my journey.

Because of the 4 a.m. start, I packed my gear the night before; yet, I still found it difficult stepping past the doormat of my home, for the doormat served as a bulwark between me and the rest of the world. Four months of conditioning accumulated into a terrifying 700-mile-bike-ride from Geneva, IL, USA to Niagara Falls, ON, CDN. When I looked at the doormat, 700 miles seemed an impossible feat. Somehow, I managed to take the step over the doormat.

The trek lasted fourteen blistering days covering an incredible expanse of asphalt, gravel, and mulch-stricken trails. Aside from water and some granola in a minipack on my back, all other gear (food, tent, clothes) was hauled in a sag-vehicle: a three-ton 2004 grey Chevrolet Silverado 2500HD series (eight cylinders!), which towed a loaded, 30-foot bleached, unmarked trailer – the Silverado was a marvel flying down the Canadian highway ahead of me; I was literally left in its dust, chugging one leg after another only reaching speeds of 22 mph.

Day one wasn't too bad; as I collapsed atop my sleeping bag that night, I didn't have time to reconsider my decision to leave the safety and sanity of my home – it was the best and worst night's rest I have ever known. Though physically depleted, sleeping on several branches and a few sharpened-by-weather-rocks is *not* ideal – my imagination led me to believe the trip would be like the movies where everyone is smiling, seated around the perfect campfire, toasting mallows and sharing stories: instead, I had rocks grinding into my tissue.

A repetition of early rising, early falling continued into day four – the only change was the soreness in my buttocks. On day four, the weather transitioned from blistering heat (truly, I had blisters coating my skin!) to a torrential downpour at about the half-way mark of the 60-mile-ride. A passer-by issued me a warning: three tornados had just touched down headed my direction. I was beginning to regret my decision to come on the journey a wee bit.

Thankfully a nearby Mobil 8 offered sanctuary – for the next few hours, a slightly sodden, blister-inducing bench under some flickering lights of the awning was home. Only when Ms. Cathy arrived with fresh towels did I remembered why I stepped over the doormat: meeting new people in new places, each with a story. I learned Ms. Cathy, too, was on a journey. On a whim, she decided to pack essentials into her faded-blue, rust-coated Toyota 4Runner circa 1985, and travel from the West coast to the East coast.

Rejuvenated by Ms. Cathy's story, I completed my journey. When I looked upon the Horseshoe Falls – the Canadian side is far superior – I sort of looked beyond the falls to my next journey. The Falls reminded me of the exhilaration I received after stepping over the doormat.

The Falls are breathtaking, for sure, but I needed a new journey. Europe seemed like a good idea. I figured if I survived 14 days on the seat of a bike, then backpacking across Europe would be relatively easy. Like I conditioned for the bike ride, I started preparations for a trip to Europe. Stepping into an Aer Lingus Airbus A330, I commenced my five-week journey across eight European countries.

I have a few more stories to tell, which, I believe, I owe to the first step over the doormat.