

THE SINGULAR MAN

## A Visit to the Loneliest Planet

March 19, 2012

Randy Ross, a singular writer and humorist, went on an around-the-world adventure that inspired him to write a hilarious book about being single.



Randy Ross (center) prepares to bungee jump in New Zealand – just one of many misadventures during his four-month travel odyssey.

Have you ever dreamed of taking a trip around the world? Massachusetts-based singular writer Randy Ross did, and five years ago, he made his dream come true. After traveling for four months, across five continents, he offers the following advice for other would-be world travelers: “Don’t do it.”

In 2007, Ross was laid off from his job of 15 years as an editor at *PC World* magazine. Three months later, he lit out for Venezuela, Greece, South Africa, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Australia, and finally New Zealand. He traveled continuously from September through December. “I wanted to come home after two weeks, but I had already spent \$6,000 on plane tickets,” he says. “I was stuck.”

So what was the problem? Ross, who used to run a world travel site, says that some people are configured to travel for long periods alone and some aren't. “Unfortunately, you don't know what kind of traveler you are until you're living in a hostel with 22-year-olds, in a country that we bombed and invaded, and trying to figure out how to use your first squat toilet.”



Ross faces his fear of heights.

The four-month journey wasn't all bad. Ross can now say in three languages: “Do you speak English?” “How much is the Pepto-Bismol?” and “Excuse me, is this the evacuation helicopter?”

During the trip, the 53-year-old writer went bungee jumping three times. “I'm usually afraid of heights, but when you're up on a bungee platform with a bunch of heckling college kids, it's more painful to chicken out than it is to jump.”

When pressed, Ross did have one good thing to say about the trip: Facing his fears of heights, dysentery, and toilets without seats, changed his attitude. “Once I got home, I found that I was a lot less afraid of life and of taking risks.”

For the last four years, he has been writing a novel with the working title: “The Loneliest Planet: A Handbook for the Chronically Single,” which he expects to circulate to agents later this year. The book is about a never-married hypochondriac by the name of Burns, who takes a trip around the world hoping to change his luck with love.

The book combines the personal journey of “Eat, Pray, Love” with the romantic frustration of “Portnoy’s Complaint,” he says. “In other words, it’s about what it’s like to be over forty and single.”

If the story sounds a little familiar, it’s because it is. “The novel is based loosely on the trip, and the main character, is kind of my alter-ego,” Ross says. “But he gets a lot more action than I ever did.”



Ross doing a reading from his book at a Boston “Story Slam.”

In the book, Burns strikes out with women on three continents, experiences loneliness that would have broken Papillon, and ruminates about old girlfriends. Jay, with the cute shiksa nose, dumped him because of a pair of socks. Ricki? A pair of shoes. Why hadn’t he married Jackie with the nice trust fund? Why did all his exes have masculine names?

On continent four, Burns meets a Western sex tourist and his girlfriend *du jour* who offer a tour of Phnom Penh massage parlors. Burns is lonely and desperate. But he is also germ phobic and the one thing he fears more than undercooked beef is catching an STD.

Ross has reworked scenes from the book as stand-alone stories and reads them at poetry slams, story slams, and even at one smut-slam. “I won a story slam, but I wasn’t smutty enough to win with the smut-slam,” he says.



[Randy Ross](#) lives in Somerville, Massachusetts (just outside of Boston). When he’s not working as a Web content consultant or finishing his novel, he enjoys complaining, downhill skiing, and eating hot spicy food that makes his hair stand up. To find out more about Randy, visit his website at [www.randyrossmedia.com](http://www.randyrossmedia.com) and his blog at [www.theloneliestplanet.com](http://www.theloneliestplanet.com).