

In the Monitor  
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## In London, I let the adventures find me

*I was a tourist on a different mission. I planned to meander like the river, letting the day take me where it wanted, ending up at the Globe Theatre.*

**By Margie Goldsmith**

It was sunny with cottony clouds in the sky as I strolled past the huge crowd at Buckingham Palace waiting for the changing of the guard. I had done that, along with all the other London tourist attractions, 10 years ago. Today, I was a tourist on a different mission. I wanted to see a real thatched roof, and I knew there was one at the Globe Theatre, a re-creation of Shakespeare's theater that didn't exist the last time I was in London.

According to the map, I could get there by following the path along the Thames. I planned to meander like the river, letting the day take me where it wanted, ending up at the Globe.

I leaned on the railing at Westminster Bridge, taking in the view. Boats of all sizes moved in both directions. The sun made the river seem as though it were blanketed with glittering sparklers. As I stood back from the railing, I realized I had been leaning on a small plaque that read: "William Wordsworth 1770-1850, Composed Upon Westminster Bridge Sept. 1802."

A poem followed, and I read a stanza:

This City now doth, like a garment wear  
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,  
Ships, towers, domes, theatres and temples lie  
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;

Back in freshman English, I thought Wordsworth was boring, but now I was standing in the same spot he'd been when he composed this poem. I could see how the modern city evolved around old London. Tall buildings had replaced the fields, but the towers and domes

remained. I could imagine the three-masted ships moving downriver, sails billowing.

Today, the city's garment was anything but silent and bare. Tourists speaking every language crowded the bridge, snapping photos of Big Ben. The road had bumper-to-bumper traffic in both directions as bright red double-decker buses and sleek black turtle-shaped taxis pulled to a halt at the red light.

I walked past the long line waiting to get on the London Eye, a gigantic Ferris wheel offering a bird's-eye view of the city. A little farther up the path were outdoor bookstalls. Farther on, a man and woman wearing silver Elizabethan dress stood motionless, pretending to be statues.

At the end of a tunnel, a man who wore a red artist's cap, red shirt, and wrinkled rain jacket stood by a display of brightly colored envelopes spread out on a blanket. He smiled at me and gestured at a sign that read, Poetry Recited. About 30 envelopes were laid out like a patchwork quilt, each with a different crayoned inscription: "To a Muse," "To a Rationalist," "Bright Person," "A Word of Love," and "Incident at a Well."

"Feel free to look," he said.

"Do you have a poem for a tourist?" I asked, half joking.

"I do!" he said, his face brightening. "I just wrote one for a special friend of mine." He stood taller, took a deep breath, and began to orate, trilling his "r's" dramatically:

This is London calling -  
To a beautiful Lady  
of the New World  
Our old sends greeting.  
Set aside all hurts and harms  
London has its special charms  
No man of salt can be tired  
In this home of the inspired.

The poem went on for a long time; the tunnel filled with the sound of the poet's rich, booming voice. At the end, I dropped a pound coin in his bucket. "Do I get a copy?" I asked.

"You do," he said with a grin. He handed me an envelope. Scribbled in purple crayon was, "A Welcome to London." I unfolded the paper inside, on which 38 stanzas were printed.

"How can you possibly remember all those words?" I asked.

He seemed shocked at my question. "I wrote it," he said.

My poem tucked in my pocket, I continued along the bank of the Thames, and suddenly there was the Globe Theatre: round, with white plaster walls and dark wooden beams, just the way I'd seen it in books, thatched roof and all.

I walked into the courtyard but wasn't allowed inside because there was a matinee of "Measure for Measure" being performed that day. But I discovered that for £5, I could get a "yard standing" ticket to see the play. There were no orchestra seats, just a big, open pit where audience members stood less than 15 feet from the stage. The more expensive seats were in three tiers, just the way they'd been in Shakespeare's day. I was so close to the stage I saw the sweat on the duke's face and heard Isabella's costume rustle as she entered.

But what astonished me most was hearing Shakespeare's language, about 400 years old, come alive when spoken by these actors. I'd always understood Shakespeare's words, but now I understood the meaning.

Later, as I stood in the London Underground waiting for the Tube, I couldn't believe my good fortune. In one afternoon, I'd stood in Wordsworth's shoes on Westminster Bridge, had a poem recited to me by its author, and had seen a 400-year-old play. I pulled out a notepad and scribbled:

If you plan every moment of your day  
You'll find you are living it only halfway  
Instead, wear your life like a loose flowing cloak.  
With room for surprises, adventure and hope.