

MERIDIAN

The Place Where Latter-day Saints Gather



MaeserAcademy.com • (801) 225-5186
Online School • Elementary, Jr. High, High School
High School Full Time/Part Time • Accredited



HOME

Arts & Entertainment

Extraordinary Stories

Family Value of the Month

First Principles of Marriage

Gospel Doctrine

Latter-Day Laughs

Ideas & Society

Myth of the Month

Travel

Meridian Japanese

Meridian Radio

MERIDIAN MARKETPLACE

LDSGetaway.com

LDSPRO.com

ARCHIVES

Letters to the Editor

About Meridian

Contact Us

Guest Registry

Corporate Sponsors

RootsMagic Software

BeautifullyModest.com

Shelf Reliance

Wallwoody

FAMILY CONNECTIONS



In June 2006, the Higham family returned to their home in Mountain View, California, after an entire year on the road. John returned to his job as an aerospace engineer and September to her software consulting business. The kids, Jordan, 9 upon their return, and Katrina, 12, spent their summer vacation like other kids in their neighborhood and started public school in the fall.

It was the return to normal, after 52 weeks that were anything *but* . They were \$120,000 poorer, but agree that the experiences they had as a family were priceless.

About the Author:



Laurie Williams Sowby has been writing since grade school, and getting paid for it the past 30 years, with articles in LDS Church magazines, *Exponent II*, *This People*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *Redbook* as well as the *Deseret News*, *Daily Herald* and *Utah County Journal*. She is a graduate of BYU, taught writing at Utah Valley State College for 12 years, and has traveled to all 50 states and 36 countries (so far). She and her husband, Steve, recently returned from serving as fulltime missionaries in the Chile Santiago West Mission. They live in American Fork, Utah. Their youngest son, Rob, is currently serving in the Germany Berlin Mission. The older four children are married and have provided 14 grandchildren so far.



The Higham family of Mountain Ridge, California , poses among the mystical peaks of Machu Picchu, Peru, during a year-long trek around the world which they'd planned for 10 years.

They carried only the bare necessities as they traipsed across deserts and through jungles and trekked up mountain trails. John Higham had the foresight to record their travels in emails as they traveled, using the fold-up keyboard he'd packed along with a Palm Pilot. Because the family was camping or staying in hostels, he hooked it up in Internet cafes and shared their adventures with family and friends.

Since he's been back, he's compiled the descriptive and entertaining emails into a manuscript and is looking for a publisher for "Armageddon Pills: Don't Leave Home Without Them (and Other Lessons from a Family's Journey Around the World)." "Armageddon pills" is what son Jordan called the peanut M&Ms that saved them from he was sure would be starvation when their Jeep broke down on the salt flats in Bolivia.



Being stranded on the salt flats of Bolivia in this Jeep gave rise to the name "Armageddon Pills" for the peanut M&Ms that the family ate as emergency food rations.

The book will suggest interactive links to Google Earth, just as their web site, www.armageddonpills.com, already does. The site also features photos, how-to advice, and sample chapters from the book.

"Armageddon Pills" is not a travel guide, notes John. "It's about a family with school-aged children who strike out on an adventure and learn that the biggest one of all is just being together 24 hours a day for 365 days in a row."

It's also an account of how these American travelers came to feel more like citizens of the world. "Through experiences such as backpacking in Thailand and paddling a canoe through the Amazon Basin," John explains, "we gradually lost the ubiquitous American swagger and came to understand that the inhabitants of this planet are much more complicated and interesting than what we have seen on CNN."

In addition to chronicling their adventures in 28 countries, the book offers appendices outlining exactly how a family can go about planning such a trip, or even shorter ones. The practical advice covers such topics as medical insurance, home schooling kids on the road, how to estimate the cost, how to avoid being targets of thieves, and questions such as, "Can you buy Ritalin on the black market in Turkey?"

They're many of the same questions the family's been answering as they've given standing-room-only presentations at R.E.I. outlets, firesides, community groups, and Relief Society enrichment nights in the Bay Area. Their goal is to encourage other families to "make plans and go somewhere besides Disneyland." "We really feel like we have a responsibility to share our story and inspire others," September explains. The kids participate by reading excerpts from their journals.



The family takes a jungle trek in Thailand aboard an elephant.

The Higham family's adventures around the globe were the culmination of a longtime dream shared by John and September to expose more of the world to their children. They began planning in earnest soon after Katrina was born. Three years later, Jordan joined the family and was barely learning to talk when he heard of the trip. He dubbed it the "world-the-round trip," and the name stuck.

A large map that covered their basement wall was plastered with sticky notes on destinations that seemed interesting. Many a family home evening was spent learning about the attractions, people, and customs of a place, recalls September, as they winnowed the list of where they'd go. Tanzania was Katrina's idea, and Jordan wanted to go to China. "We took their interests into consideration," notes September.



Jordan and Katrina are in awe at lions in the wild in Tanzania, the country Katrina chose for the itinerary.

The kids also "participated a lot in the spirit of saving," even to reminding their parents, "Are you sure we need that — or would we rather save it for our world-the-round trip?" After 10 years of serious planning, studying, saving, and "camping out in far-flung corners of the earth" so they'd know what worked and what to expect, they began their journey.

Jordan was 8 and Katrina 11 when they flew to England in June 2005 with two tandem bicycles in cases and all their gear stuffed into panniers (bags that hang astride the bikes). That gear included not only bike tools, cooking utensils, and first aid supplies, but also Sunday clothes.

September estimates they were successful about half the time in locating an LDS meeting site. "If we spotted missionaries, we asked where we could attend church," she says. "And we learned not to rely on the official Church website but call the local mission office for up-to-date information on where and when church was."

She recalls attending at a palatial building in Cambodia, a Utah-style ward in Beijing, and a branch with a mere six members in Sweden. In Hong Kong, they crossed police barricades and braved tear gas to reach the church building, only to find the meetings cancelled because of a riot.



Attending LDS church services all over the globe provided memorable encounters with "real people," not just those in the tourist industry. Here, September fixes Katrina's hair while Jordan waits in front of their campsite in Oxford, England.

But when they did manage to find the right place at the right time, the effort paid off. "We met *real* people, not just people in the tourist industry," says September. They also managed to make last-minute arrangements to attend the rededication of the Santiago Temple, after a 23-hour bus ride from the northern part of Chile.

On days other than the Sabbath, the kids studied math in the morning, but that was the only formal class. They were learning history, geography, and social studies on-site, and writing in their journals every night. In addition, Katrina and Jordan each received a new stack of books every month, purchased by September before the trip and Fed Ex-ed to various locations by her mother.

Much of what they read was excellent children's literature set in the country they were in. The literature served to enrich their visits to places like Cambodia's Killing Fields, the former concentration camp at Auschwitz, and the D-day beaches of France.



Cows were a common sight while cycling the Normandy Coast in France . The bags hanging astride the bikes held everything the Highams took with them.

The books were a hit with the kids, both avid readers. "But it occasionally backfired," admits September. "Sometimes they'd be so absorbed in their books that they were missing the scenes around them."

Despite the careful pre-planning, "Everything we'd anticipated could go wrong, did," John admits. And the hardest adjustment was just learning to be together 24/7. "In spite of it all, we not only survived, we thrived," he says.

The first leg of their journey — an 18-week trip bicycling from England across Europe to Istanbul — was interrupted by a broken leg. A rope had snapped as Katrina was rappelling in Switzerland. Her being in a cast meant the end of tenting and bicycling, and stepping up to accommodations in hostels and transportation via trains and buses. (They considered going home, but only for about two seconds, as their home was rented out and their furnishings were all in storage.)



The planned bicycle trip from London to Istanbul was brought to an abrupt halt when Katrina, shown here intent on her reading despite the new cast, broke her leg in a climbing fall.

Although some hostels approached comfort, despite the shared bathrooms, one particularly bad one helped them realize "you can push the budget traveling envelope too far." On the opposite end of the spectrum were week-long "vacations from traveling," where they twice stayed at a nice resort to process the past months and rest up for the months ahead. In Mauritius, John recalls, "We adapted so well to island time that we lost track of the date and were 24 hours late for

a plane that was no longer there."

Occasionally, their itinerary called for a rented car, but those were rare occasions. Modern conveniences were mostly left behind. September missed a washer and dryer the most — especially in humid climates where it takes clothes two days to dry. As for Internet use, they discovered that "the poorer the country, the more internet cafes."

Everyone had their favorites. Switzerland was among the top five favorite countries named by all four in the family. Bolivia, Thailand and Cambodia were favorites of John. September reveled in the exotic atmospheres of Turkey and China. Katrina, who'd chosen Tanzania, loved seeing the big game of the Serengeti. Jordan's favorite was Costa Rica, where he enjoyed the river taxis and rain forest.



September Higham makes new friends among the villagers of the Serengeti Plain in Tanzania.

But it was not so much the places as the people who impressed. "Despite the language barriers," says September, "people are naturally helpful and generous, no matter where they're from, no matter what their religious preference or background. People are universally kind to strangers."

She illustrates with a tale of being stranded on a mountainside village in Tanzania with less than \$9 among the four of them — not even enough to send one person to the nearest ATM, a five-hour bus ride away, let alone eat or sleep for the night. Amazingly, total strangers hearing of their plight offered them more than 100 US dollars, saying "Pay me back when you can."

"We as Americans perceive the world through the news media," says September. "We found people to be completely different from how they're portrayed."

The Highams hope their experience will inspire others to seek a broader perspective of the world and its inhabitants. As September says, "We need to go beyond the popular perceptions and see for ourselves."

To see photos of the Highams' trip and read excerpts from the

upcoming book, go to www.armageddonpills.com.

[Click here to sign up for Meridian's FREE email updates.](#)

© 2007 [Meridian Magazine](#). All Rights Reserved.