Secrets of a…

Teen *WOLF* Tourist

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THE MOMENTS when I actually enjoy life the most are those moments when I let my guard down and forget about what people might think about me. No, I'm not talking about throwing on a cape and running around Walmart in my underwear. (Please don't visualize that. You'll need therapy afterward.) What I'm talking about is … well, let me give you two examples.

Example **1**
'Ello Gov'na

I was 17 when my mom ran into the kitchen and shouted, "This is it! This is our trip to England!" In my mom's hand was that year's tax return. It was enough to fly our family to the U.K. for a much-needed vacation.

It was my first time to the British Isles. The plan was to stay in London for a few days, rent a car and venture out into the countryside to see the sights, and visit old friends, all while hopping from one bed-and-breakfast to another.

During our stay, though, I did everything I could to not look like a tourist. How embarrassing, right? Tourists are so not cool. And I … was cool. So cool that, despite my excitement to see all the sights and experience all the sounds—like traveling on the London Underground, touring medieval castles, going to the theatre district, and watching the street performers at Piccadilly Circus—I walked around like, "Eh, I come here all the time. I eat fish and chips every day for breakfast. Nothing to see here. Move along."

On the streets of London, I walked just ahead or just behind my parents and younger sister. There was no way I was going to be associated with those American tourists. What a bunch of nerds.

Even while visiting one of the English castles, I tried so hard to fit in that, when this attractive red-headed woman came up to me to ask me if I knew where the bathroom was, I put on my best British accent and quipped, "Top of the road and to the left."

What the heck was I doing?

Who'd I think I was, Bert from Mary Poppins?

I was so conflicted—a tourist on the inside, an experienced world traveler on the outside. It was all an act, and I was miserable. Sure, I wanted to be on vacation, but I didn't enjoy it because I was so preoccupied with making sure everyone thought I wasn't a tourist.

Then Scotland happened.

Many of my forefathers … and foremothers, foresisters, forebrothers, foreaunts and uncles … came from Scotland. Which could explain why, when we crossed the border from England into Scotland, I had the oddest sensation come over me. I felt like I was home. (I never told anyone, 'cause, you know, I was too cool to have feelings.)

One of the castle ruins we went to was Dunnottar Castle in Scotland. These ruins were so epic—like, right out of *Lord of the Rings* "epic"—that I just had to ask for the camera. I started taking pictures of the castle, then pictures of my sister, then pictures of me … then I started exploring.

I imagined what it would have been like to live there and fight there. I started thinking how cool this location would be for a movie, all while snapping pictures.

When we left the castle to head back to the car, I was on a total high. For the first time during the trip, I was actually having fun.

Walking back to the car, there was a ping-pong match going on in my brain:

Be cool, be miserable.

Be a tourist, be happy.

Cool, miserable.

Tourist, happy.

Pretend to be cool, people will "respect me."

Be real and a tourist, people will laugh at me.

Be fake, people will accept me.

Be myself, people will reject me.

Fake, miserable.

Myself, happy.

Cool. Nerdy. Accepted. Rejected … Aaaaarrrgh!

As we got close to the car, my dad stopped at a tourist stand. As I bent down to tie my shoe on a spot of mulch near the parking lot, I made a decision. The following were my exact thoughts:

"Dang it, I'm a tourist! So I'm gonna act like a tourist!"

When I stood up, I was a new man. And at 17 years old, it was one of the smartest decisions I ever made.

After my decision to embrace my inner tourist, I stopped thinking about what I did or did not look like to others. It wasn't like I forced myself to stop worrying about it; it just sort of happened on its own. Now that I was no longer preoccupied with projecting this "cool guy" image everywhere, every place we visited was more exciting and mysterious than before, every plate of local cuisine was more intriguing and delicious, every hillside covered in blooming heather was more colorful, and every countryside vista or city skyline was more breathtaking.

In that *one* moment, on that *one* day in Scotland, *one* choice completely changed the rest of my vacation.

And not just for me, but for everyone else! Once I decided to stop trying to be this know-it-all British kid, embrace my inner nerd, and be the tourist I really was, not only did I enjoy my vacation more, but it made my family's experience that much more enjoyable as well.

Example **2**
Teen Wolf

You may think this is a little too much information, but I hit puberty early. I started shaving when I was 12. My voice changed overnight, and over the following year, hair multiplied on my arms, legs, underarms … it even established prosperous settlements on my chest and abs.

When my late-teens hit, though, I began growing hair somewhere that was just unacceptable for a teenager— my back!

NOOOOO! I was so embarrassed.

If I was headed to a pool party, or the beach, I would either try to shave it or wear a T-shirt. Neither option was very fun.

During my senior year, I hosted an end-of-the-year pool party at my house. It was great! Swimming, hamburgers and hot dogs, billiards and ping pong … and there I was, in my T-shirt and swim trunks.

If you have yet to experience swimming in a T-shirt, it can be restrictive. So, here I am, at my own party, watching all my friends have a good time while I was struggling. I was, again, miserable. I allowed my self-consciousness to scare me into believing "everyone is going to think you're gross and not like you as much anymore," especially the girls I "like-liked."

After a few hours of suffering, though, I couldn't take it anymore. Off went my shirt, and I jumped in the pool with all my friends. At that time, it was more important for me to have *real* fun with my friends than live in fear of what they might think about my Teen-Wolf appearance.

And you know what?

They didn't care. What was I afraid of?

From that moment on, I had the best time. My friends didn't care that I had a hairy back. They still thought I was cool. I think one of my friends made the comment, "Dude! You're hairy."

"Yeah, I know."

And that was it.

When I accepted those things over which I had no control, like my hairy physique and what my friends may or may not be thinking, I was free! I had fun and enjoyed life.

It was then that I realized that most people—at least the people who matter—don't really care about how you look as much as you do.

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