

“Oh, I’ve been to Baltimore!”

“Really?! What took you to Baltimore?”

I was chatting with the newly arrived visitor in the Maltese guest house where I was temporarily staying. I was eating breakfast in the shared living space, and he joined me. I learned that his name was Rueben and that he was from Belgium, but he spoke impeccable English. This was the first vacation he’d taken away from his young family in a while. He’d come to Malta for a week of scuba diving lessons.

He then asked me where I was from and thus began a precious moment of sharing.

“A few years back, my family and I decided to spend a month traveling around the United States in our old VW hippie camper van. We shipped it to Baltimore, but we arrived first so had a little time to explore the city. You know the aquarium there? There’s a bench outside near it. I sat my wife and two young boys down on that bench just before we went to pick up the van and I said to them, ‘Pay close attention to this moment and this place. Look around and notice what you see, what you feel, what you’re excited and scared about, what you’re looking forward to. We’ve got a month of experiences waiting for us on this vacation, things we’ll see, hear, taste, and learn. Afterwards, we’ll return back here, back to Baltimore, back to this bench before sending our van on home ahead of us. This bench marks the beginning and end of our American road adventure.’”

“Ooh ... I love that! Did you, indeed, go back to that bench before heading home?”

“Of course. First, I asked them to remember how they had felt when we had last sat on that bench, and to then remember all that had transpired since then. What expectations were met? Which were exceeded? We’d been collecting things in a box from everywhere we visited so I brought it out and while we all sat on the bench, we went through the box and relived the various experiences we’d had during the past month, reminiscing about the highs and lows, the surprises and disappointments, telling stories about the things we’d never forget. I told them that this Baltimore bench was also a container of sorts, kind of like our box of collectibles, holding the boundaries of our road trip experiences. So it’s a special bench, our special Baltimore bench. We had had someone take our picture sitting on it a month earlier and we found someone to take another picture that day. Both pictures are now in the photo album with all the other pictures from that vacation. So, when you return to Baltimore, try to find our bench, sit on it, and remember the experience of when our paths crossed in Malta.”

And indeed I will!

