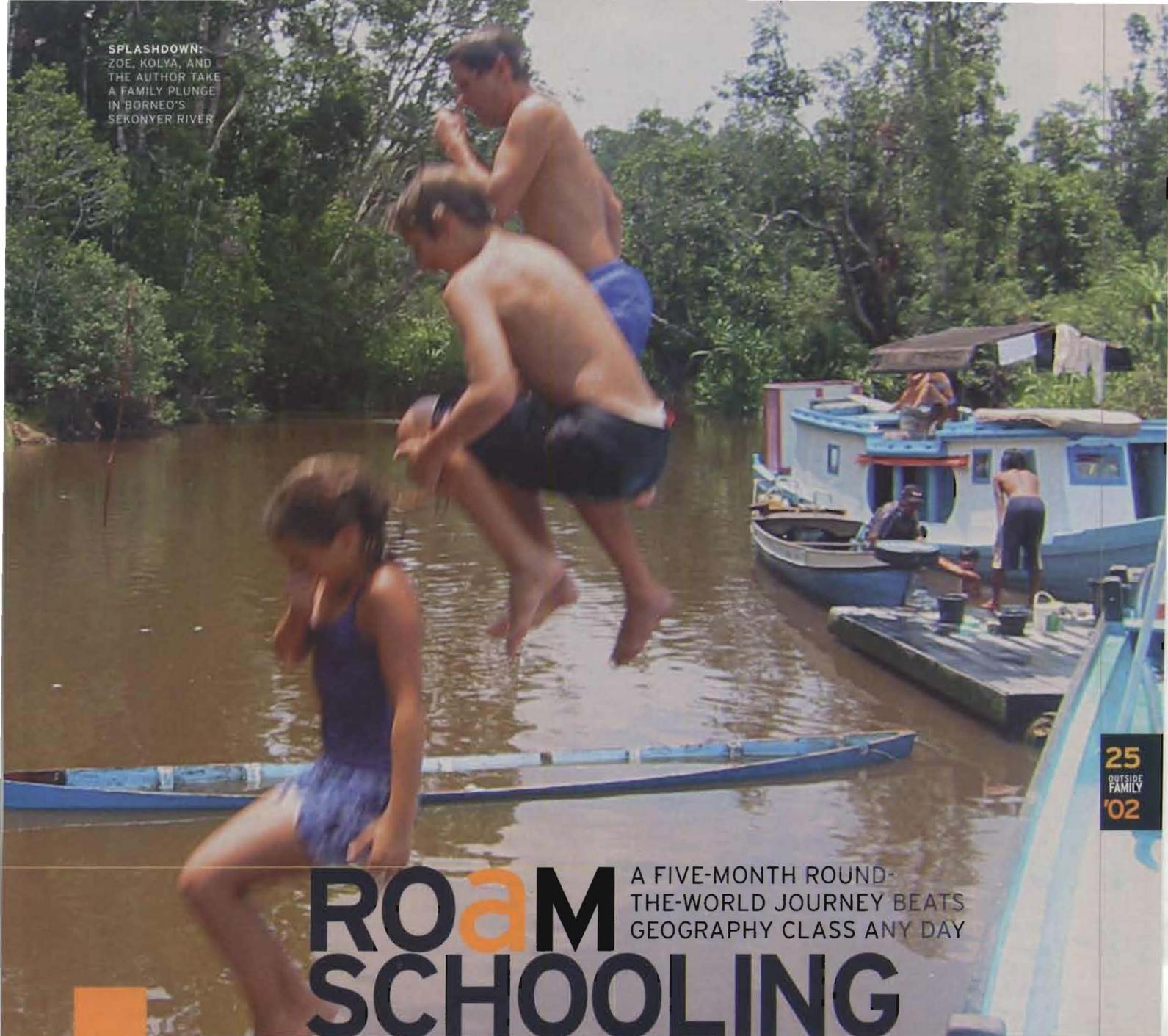


SPLASHDOWN:
ZOE, KOLYA, AND
THE AUTHOR TAKE
A FAMILY PLUNGE
IN BORNEO'S
SEKONYER RIVER



25
OUTSIDE
FAMILY
'02

ROAM SCHOOLING

A FIVE-MONTH ROUND-THE-WORLD JOURNEY BEATS GEOGRAPHY CLASS ANY DAY

BY DANIEL GLICK

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT, after my daughter, Zoe, woke me up for the third time because she was afraid of the snakes, I wondered if maybe this trip wasn't such a good idea after all. Earlier, Zoe had been complaining about leeches, and before that about mosquitoes, and it dawned on me that unless you were raised in the rainforest, accustomed to strangler figs and spiders the size of gerbils, Borneo was a pretty forbidding environment. For a nine-year-old girl reared in suburban Colorado, it was downright menacing. Zoe's 13-year-old brother, Kolya, didn't help things when he authoritatively informed his sister that, as the smallest mammal among us, any predator obviously would attack her first.

I shot Kolya a fierce look that silenced his sibling cruelty, and reassured Zoe that it was unlikely snakes could board our 55-foot houseboat (called a *klotok*), moored on the banks of the Sekonyer River. Her fears weren't assuaged. Zoe *knew* the serpents were lurking. Heading upriver that afternoon, past suffocatingly green jungle crawling from the riverbanks and proboscis monkeys hanging in the trees like misshapen, mischievous fruit, a sudden movement in the water had caught our eyes. We were certain it was a crocodile. We were wrong. The animal's head, although

TORY CAPRON

Outside Magazine



almost as big as a crocodile's, belonged to a 25-foot-long python with a body circumference only slightly smaller than my thigh. Within minutes, we saw another serpentine motion in the river, and took in the sight of a bright-green reptile with a triangular head: a pit viper, one of the world's most poisonous snakes.

After Zoe had been coaxed back to sleep, I wondered about the kids' ability to cope with the stress of such an unfamiliar place. We had come to Borneo to see the orangutans of Tanjung Puting National Park two months into our five-month odyssey to visit some of the planet's great ecological wonders. So far the three of us had done a five-day "walk-about" on an Australian rainforest island, snorkeled off the Great Barrier Reef, surfed in Byron Bay, and climbed the highest mountain in Bali. But there were months more to go, and I questioned whether I had pushed the kids too far.

My fears abated the next day, when the volunteers at the orangutan research station began bathing in the river, and Zoe and Kolya began to see the water not as a haven for monstrous beasts but as a jungle swimming pool. (Apparently the human activity ensured that this stretch of river was snake-free.) In no time the kids were doing cannonballs off the boat deck. I felt the glee and relief of having nailed the crux move of a difficult climb.

Our round-the-world adventure was born out of loss and grief. In a perverse cosmic joke, my older brother Bob died of breast cancer a year to the day after my divorce was final and my ex-wife moved out of state to go back to school. My children and I were recovering from these dual January shocks when I saw a story in *The New York Times* proclaiming that nearly half of the world's coral reefs could be dead within my lifetime. The

headline underscored what I already knew: Life-forms were disappearing from this planet faster than you can say E. O. Wilson. In that moment, tragedy mixed with promise, and I decided it was time to take the kids to see some of these wonders before they were all gone.

"Before it's gone" became a mantra for the trip, with a triple entendre. The first, literal meaning was to see some of these amazing critters and environments before overpopulation and poverty and global climate change and pollution and development maimed or destroyed them. The second was to seize the opportunity to really spend time with my kids before they left my reconfigured single-father's nest. Kolya would be starting eighth grade, and Zoe fourth, and already I could tell they would be out of the house too soon. Lastly, the big "before it's gone" loomed especially large: my own mortality. After witnessing my brother's

July 6: Flew from the States to Sydney, Australia

July 8-August 17: Australia, including Daintree National Forest, Great Barrier Reef, Hinchinbrook Island

August 18-September 1: Bali, including Mount Agung

September 2-9: Java and Borneo, including Tanjung Puting National Park

September 10-12: Singapore

September 13-24: Vietnam, including Cat Tien National Park

September 25-October 1: Cambodia, including the temple of Ta Phrom

October 2-4: Thailand

October 5-22: Nepal, including Chitwan National Park

October 23-30: Zurich, Switzerland, beginning European swing

October 31-November 13: Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam, London

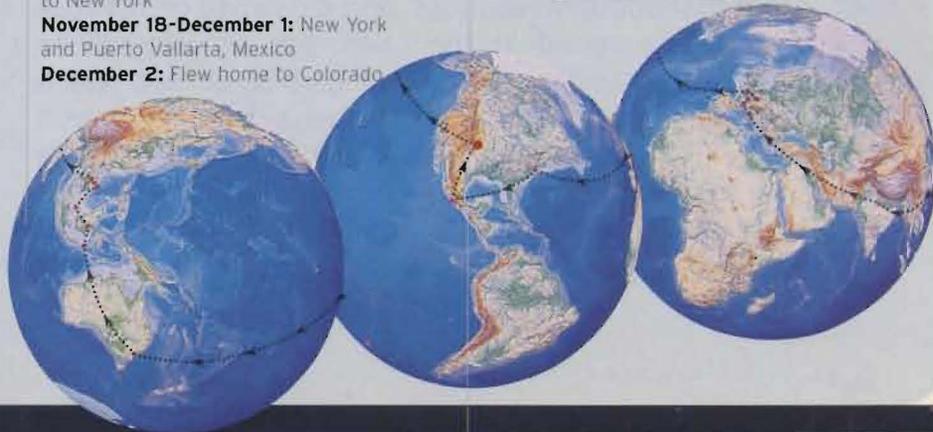
November 14: Flew from London to New York

November 18-December 1: New York and Puerto Vallarta, Mexico

December 2: Flew home to Colorado

In Global Orbit

THE PLANET-CIRCLING ITINERARY



untimely death at 48, I knew viscerally there were no guarantees about how long any of us would be around. It was time to do something drastic: I nominated an epic road trip.

I broached the subject with the kids in February, and Zoe was immediately enthusiastic. Kolya began negotiating: Could we go surfing someplace along the way? "Why not?" I replied. Could he take his skateboard? "Sure." They'd have to miss some school, of course. Not a problem, or as we would say later, "No worries." Did they want to do an Australia–Southeast Asia–Japan swing, or maybe go all the way around the world? Around the world it was.

By mid-March, the idea had taken firm hold. I investigated plane tickets, researched ecological case studies,

time in Queensland, exploring the environmental issues of the Great Barrier Reef. Kolya learned to drive the right-hand-drive camper van on outback roads (another promise he had extracted), and we backpacked through virgin rainforests in Hinchinbrook Island National Park.

By the time we reached Bali five

orangutans, gibbons, and macaques, as well as kingfishers, river otters, and crocodiles. We also visited logging camps and gold-mining operations that threaten all of the above. Despite the fact that Kolya calls me a "hippie tree hugger" for doing my environmental research, I think he got the point.

AFTER SEPTEMBER 11, WE CARRIED ON WITH OUR TRIP FEELING SAFER IN ASIA THAN WE MIGHT HAVE AT HOME.

weeks later, the kids were primed to settle into Asian travel. With my girlfriend, Tory, who joined us for five weeks of the trip, we rented a car and almost circumnavigated the island over the next couple of weeks. We climbed

On September 11, we were in Singapore. After seeing the searing images of falling bodies and buildings, I wondered again if we should call the trip off. But we carried on, feeling safer in Asia than we might have at home, and



CLASSROOM NEPAL: ZOE AND RHINOS IN CHITWAN NATIONAL PARK

became a walking "to do" list: rent the house, get immunizations, and arrange to pay all my bills online from Internet cafés in Sydney, Singapore, Kathmandu, and elsewhere. By the end of June, we were on a plane heading west.

I had planned for our first leg, Australia, to be a gentle introduction to the traveler's way—and it was. We rented a camper van, our little tortoise shell on wheels, and traveled among people who spoke English (okay, Australian). We saw kangaroo roadkill and wallabies by our campsite and ate sausage rolls and fish and chips. We spent most of our

Mount Agung, a 10,308-foot volcano, after dragging the kids out of bed at 2 A.M. and ascending with flashlights to make the summit by dawn. We spent several days in the town of Ubud, watching Balinese dance and shadow-puppet performances. We snorkeled off of Menjangan Island and spent some time in Amed, a fishing village with great snorkeling and beach massages.

Next stop was Kalimantan, the Indonesian part of Borneo island. (One of the great ironies of "taking the kids out of school" was that Kolya's class was at home studying geography.) We gaped at

also sensing that being part of the world community was better than hiding out in the States. Moving on to Vietnam, we visited Cat Tien National Park, the last mainland-Asian home to the gravely endangered Javan rhino. Tory left us in Ho Chi Minh City, and the three of us went overland into Cambodia before heading to Thailand. In Nepal, the last stop of our ecological tour of endangered places, one daylong jungle walk afforded us a frisson of danger when we saw tiger prints, but no tiger.

We came home through Western Europe, visiting friends and family in

Switzerland, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. For the kids, Europe seemed blissfully familiar after three months in Asia.

Highlights? Just doing it, getting out of our quotidian cages and into global orbit; the kids' faces after we had hopped barefoot out of our jeep at dusk to watch an enormous rhinoceros grazing by a riverbank, and realized that we were standing, smiling, ankle-deep in rhino poop; watching Kolya and Zoe sit atop an elephant in the middle of a Nepali river, bathing under the elephant's trunk spray; visiting Ta Phrom, in Cambodia, an ancient temple where *Tomb Raider* was filmed; swinging from vines in the Australian rainforest; visiting an orangutan orphanage, where one female sucked her own breast and playfully spit the milk at Kolya; Zoe dressing up like a Balinese maiden on the way to a ceremony. And on and on.

Lowlights? They are already receding from memory: the kids tormenting each other with words and fists; what they dubbed the "crack hotel" in Kumai, Borneo, where the power stopped but the mosquitoes didn't; a 14-hour rickety bus ride from Ho

Chi Minh City to Phnom Penh with roadside food sellers offering fried toads to hungry travelers; Kolya throwing up all night at a caravan park



in Queensland; Zoe throwing a fit at the excruciatingly slow customs line in Kathmandu.

One story sticks in my mind, my own metaphor for the trip. Two weeks into our travels, we are camping on a mile of white sand, our last night backpacking on Australia's Hinchinbrook island. After dinner, the kids drag me to the deserted beach under a half-moon midway through the antipodal sky. The two of them jump me, and we begin a three-way tag-team wrestling match that mostly involves the kids running kamikaze at me and me tossing them to the sand like a benevolent King Kong. In the tropical night, Kolya and I stripped to the waist, Zoe to her bathing suit. Without a word, we begin a kind of simian step, hunching our shoulders up and down and dragging our knuckles on the fine sand. The three of us peer at each other with cocked heads, vocalizing like monkeys. We start moving slowly, almost in a circle, then faster, and faster, with more abandon and less inhibition. Soon we are dancing wildly along the beach, rolling around and jumping. Kolya dubbed it "monkey-dancing."

From that point on, we monkey-danced around the world. And even though we're home, there's a little monkey-dancer left in each of us.

DANIEL GLICK

29
OUTSIDE
FAMILY
'02

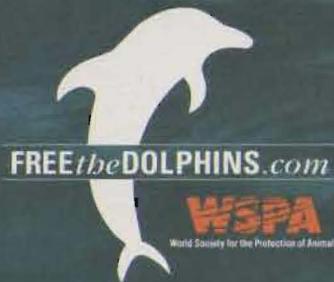
Take a Closer Look.

We'd all like to believe that the dolphins in shows and swim-with-dolphins programs want to be with us as much as we want to be with them. But the reality is much more grim:

- Captive dolphins are deprived of the inherent need to be with their families. Right now, dolphins are being hunted down by speedboats and dragged from the seas. Others are being bred like science experiments. These babies will never know the joy of playing freely or hunting alongside their mothers.
- Instead of covering up to 40 miles per day exploring the open ocean, performing dolphins are crammed into shallow pens or chlorinated tanks. A dolphin's highly developed sonar is useless in such a small space, virtually blinding and crippling him.
- Every day, captive dolphins are forced to endure throngs of tourists pulling on their fins and riding on their backs. To such an intelligent and gentle creature, this intrusive and unnatural experience is painful and distressing.
- The shock, stress and boredom are often more than captive dolphins can bear, but there is no escape. Many die young, only to be replaced with look-alikes.



When planning your next vacation, don't visit swim-with-dolphins programs and dolphin shows. To learn more, see www.freethedolphins.com or call 1-800-883-9771.



TO REQUEST INFORMATION, SEE PAGE 88