

# Writer Paul Theroux: The Principles of Travel

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**Melissa Biggs-Bradley** Hi, and welcome to Indagare's Global Conversations, a podcast about how traveling the world shapes our lives and perspectives. I'm Melissa Biggs Bradley of Indagare, a company I founded on the belief that how you travel matters. I'm sitting down with some of the most inspiring and innovative people I've met while on the road. They're activists and conservationists, designers and filmmakers, writers, chefs, and entrepreneurs. They will share stories about their travels and how they lead lives of passion and purpose. They inspire me, as I hope they will you. Welcome to the Conversation!

When we first found ourselves under lockdown during the COVID-19 crisis, what I immediately missed the most was connecting with people while traveling because so often it's meeting people that helps you understand a place and leaves the greatest impact. So I reached out to people who I consider true global citizens, people who've spent their lives seeking and exploring, which is by the way the meaning of the work "Indagare," because even while isolated, I thought we could continue to discover and share and learn from each other through conversation.

In the travel world, writer Paul Theroux doesn't need an introduction. And when one is offered, it is usually full of superlatives. He's been called the world's most perceptive travel writer, but he's also one of the most prolific. He's published 56 books, both fiction and nonfiction, including the acclaimed *Great Railway Bazaar* and *The Mosquito Coast*, which was made into a movie in the 1980s starring Harrison Ford. And it's now being turned into a series for Apple starring Paul's nephew, actor Justin Theroux. One of Paul's greatest honors was receiving the highest award attainable for a traveler, a medal from the prestigious Royal Geographical Society. I was lucky to meet Paul more than 20 years ago. His wife is a dear friend, and I'll say that Paul makes quite an impression when you meet him. So much so that when my kids were preteens and we went to Hawaii and they got to meet Paul on Oahu, they came away totally in awe of how cool and how smart he was. In fact, I think it may have been the first time they thought somebody really smart was also really cool. Paul's most recent book, published last year, is called *On the Plane of Snakes*, and it is a vivid, moving and thrillingly informative telling of a road trip that he took along the length of the U.S. Mexico border, exploring deep in Mexico's hinterland where few travelers ever visit. But that is perfect for an adventurer like Paul, who is said, "if you tell me not to go to a place, that's the place I want to explore."

So, Paul, let's start with what lockdown looks like for you and where you are and how your routines have changed.

**Paul Theroux** Lockdown...I may say, I've been in lockdown as a writer since 1963. My routine hasn't changed at all. We're in Honolulu now. We've got a little place here in Honolulu. But normally we live on the North Shore near Waimea Bay, where I have a little chicken farm. I raise geese and chickens and I grow exotic bamboo, non-invasive bamboo. So the lockdown for me is...my day is wake up, have something to eat, you know, oatmeal. And then look at my emails and I go to work and I work till 1:00 or 1:30, have lunch, go to the beach. Come back. Do a little work. Have dinner. Have a drink. Sheila comes home from work. That's been my routine in Hawaii for the past 30 years. It hasn't changed. The only thing is that here, Waikiki is closed. I very seldom go there. All restaurants are closed. All hotels are closed. So it's...the problem, if you want to enjoy the scenes and sights off of Hawaii, it's constricting. But as a writer, my mission in life is not to be interrupted, to be alone. To enjoy my solitude. To be in a room and to

work. And the older I get, the harder it is for me to concentrate, because, I mean, I get phone calls. You mentioned the movies, in the 56 books that you mentioned...what are people looking for these days in the media? They're looking for content. I'd say the past couple of years my books have been optioned for films and TV. So that has...I'm very busy; I've never been more busy. Lockdown here is nothing to me. It's nothing. It's...to me, it's been a break. The only glitch was I was sitting on the beach two weeks ago and a policeman asked me for my I.D. I was reading a Rebecca West Book about Henry James and he said, "What are you doing?" I said, I'm reading "Rebecca West on Henry James." And he gave me a ticket, a citation. So I have a court date in June. I said, "You must be joking. There's no sign on this beach saying no trespassing." He said, "you're not supposed to sit on the beach. You can surf, you can swim, but you're not supposed to sit." So I said, you know, "come on, give me a break." He said, "The governor said so." I said, "So if the governor says something, it's a law. I've broken the law because of the government?" Anyway, they gave out 5000 citations to people who...I don't know, they were sitting on the beach, I guess, all over the islands. I wrote a letter objecting yesterday. The short answer to your question is lockdown me is pretty much business as usual. In some respects, it's heaven. In other respects, very hard for other people.

**MBB** Now, you said, Paul, that your life as a writer and as a man in some ways began when you left home and spent six years in Africa. Can you talk about what that experience was like and how it informed what you decided to do with your work?

**PT** Sure. I knew I wanted to be a writer. I was a great reader and I had fantasies of travel. A lot of people want to be writers. I had nothing to write about. I just had my dysfunctional family. A lot of, you know, big, quarrelsome family. And I suppose that was a subject, but I didn't know how to approach it. I did write about that two years ago. Three years ago, I published *Motherland*, a book about my family. Sometimes people write it as their first book, about their family. Thomas Mann wrote *Buddenbrooks*. It's about his big family. James Joyce wrote about his family. He wrote about growing up. I couldn't do that. My first book was about an unhappy kid. But when people say, "I want to be a writer, what should I do?" I say, "The first thing you should do is leave home." Just go away somewhere. Go get a job at Jiffy Lube. Go to Omaha. Go to California. Go somewhere. Just leave the family and read. I joined the Peace Corps, that was 63, September 63. And Kennedy was shot in November. I was in Peace Corps training when he was shot. I went to Africa and it was the making of me.

**MBB** And what specifically was it about Africa that was so transformative for you in the 60s?

**PT** You know, Joseph Conrad said "I was a mere animal before I went to Africa," before he went to the Congo, I was a mere animal. And he'd been in Poland and the Far East. But Africa transformed him as it transformed me because Africa itself was being transformed. You'll remember that in 62, 63, 64, many African countries were becoming independent. Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania and Tanganyika became Tanzania, Uganda. And I was in Malawi, which wasn't independent when I got there. So I got there six months before independence and it became independent in July 64. But it was a lead up to it. And this is a place that had been a colony since the 19th century, a territory anyway. So suddenly they're taking the Union Jack down and becoming an African...people were saying, it's our century, it's our liberation. And I was liberated. It was the 60s, free love, drinking. I was on my own. I was living in the bush. I was happy. I must say, I've been the most rewarded writer person you've ever met. I mean, I have no complaints. I've had my bad days. But, I mean, going to Africa was just the opening up of, you know...Peter Beard, who died, was found dead just recently, could say the same thing. He went to Africa roughly the same time I did. He went to Kenya. He had a lot of money. I had no money. I was a teacher. He was sort of an adventurer. But he could have said the same thing, which was his liberation. And he wrote a book called *The End of the Game*. I was writing novels. So I realized I had a subject: not myself. It was other people. And in travel,

that's really the important thing. Other people matter. Their stories matter. Their food. Their culture. So you realize, Flaubert says travel shows you how small you are. And I realized I'm not this person in the family bouncing around. I'm a very small but observant person. And I'm very lucky to be in a country which is...hadn't changed since the 19th century. It was nothing. I mean, if Conrad had gone to Malawi on the Essel and I was there, he would have recognized it. It was just dirt roads, bush, jungle, river, very small populations. And I was fluent in the language. So I was a lucky guy. And you become a writer not by going to a writing school. You become a writer by being able to transform experience. And you need experience, real experience actually, to aid in your transformation. So I was lucky. Someone going to Africa now would have a totally different experience. They would be probably more cynical. They would see a broken place. It wasn't. I was in Africa during the Golden Age, in East Africa too, because I went to Uganda after that. Fantastic place. It was a fantastic place. It was prosperous. There was no racism. It hadn't had a big white presence. So colonialism was alive and well when I was in Africa. I mean, there were clubs, British clubs that wouldn't allow Africans to be members, golf clubs. The Gymkhana Club, you know, horses and so forth. There were no African members. It was a sports club. The Blantyre Sports Club. They had rugby. There were no Africans. I mean, Africans weren't really objecting to it because they was so small and the club was so seedy, you know, you wouldn't really want to join. And anyway, no one lived there. It was just sort of British people saying, you know, jolly good, you know, having the sundowner. So I saw that. I saw that. And I met people in the 60s who were born in the 19th century. They were born in the 1890s. And they remembered the coming of the British. They remember the Germans. They remember the First World War. In 63, I mean, a man of 73 would've been born in 1890. Well, I met that guy, you know. And I met that woman. So it was just an experience that helped transform me to become a writer...so travel, leaving home, reading, travel and not being an adventurer. Certainly not sort of looking for the Hemingway experience of killing animals and risking but just living in a different place, adapting to it and understanding that it's a different culture. Those things make you a writer.

**MBB** How important do you think mentors are?

[00:11:22] You know, it's very helpful if someone wants to be a writer, or wants to be anything, is to meet someone, for someone to believe in you. Doesn't necessarily have to want to be a writer. You want to be a broadcaster, you want to be a traveler, you want to be a dentist, whatever it is, to meet someone. And the person says, "you can do this. I did it. You can do it. Here's what I advise you to do." You won't get that at home necessarily. But meeting another person at a crucial time in your life is very important. I met V.S. Naipaul, the great writer, Nobel Prize winner, V.S. Naipaul, when I was in Uganda. I was 24 years old and I was a punk. I was free. I had a car, I spoke Swahili and he didn't and he was kind of timid. But he had all the lessons and he was 10 years older than me. And meeting him changed my life, not because everything he said was wise. He had a lot of cranky opinions, but he was someone who believed in me. And he even said, "you're going to be alright." You know, when does it happen in life? Someone looks at you and they say "you've got it, it's going to happen." And he used to say, "don't make a million dollars before you're 40. Try not try not to get really wealthy before you're 40." Strangely enough, when I was 40, I became incredibly wealthy on the strength of *The Mosquito Coast*. I mean, I wrote the book, the book was big. I sold the movie. I suddenly had to...And I knew Naipaul then. I was 40 and I said, "I've got a ton of money! I'm loaded." He wasn't. That was a big problem. But meeting someone who believes in you is very helpful, particularly if you're a writer.

**MBB** You've actually given a great list of the principles that you think you need to follow in travel. One: leave home. Two: go alone. Three: travel light. Four: bring a map. Five: go by land. Six: walk across a national frontier. Seven: keep a journal. Eight: read a novel that has no relation to the place you're in.

**PT** Ideally, *Madame Bovary*.

**MBB** Yes! Nine: you must bring a cell phone. Avoid using it. And ten was make a friend. These were all in the *Dow of Travel*. But do you still subscribe to these? It's a pretty good little.

**PT** Yeah. Except for the cellphone. I mean, when I wrote that I just found cell phones an annoyance. I still find them an annoyance, but they have their uses so I wouldn't draw a hard and fast line about the cell phone. But being alone, crossing a frontier, going by land, having a map; all that matters. Making a friend. Learning a language will be important too. I subscribe to all of those. Yes. Those should be etched in your notebook. People don't go alone, but going alone is very, very necessary. If you go with someone else, it's a different experience, a shared experience and you're enclosed too. You suddenly have someone, "Well, what's that over there?" Oh, I don't know. What is it? You know, you're having a dialog with the person. You need to have a dialog with the country that you're in. Not not your significant other.

**MBB** No, I agree with you and the idea of solitude scares a lot of people being on the road by themselves but I think it's how you actually start to see things.

**PT** Yes. And I also should distinguish between what I'm talking about and tourism. And I'm occasionally a tourist. I was on a Silver Sea ship with Sheila. We left Dar es Salaam. We went to Madagascar. We went to Cape Town. You know, we went to Mozambique. I was with a group of people. It was very enjoyable. Food was great. I wrote every day. That was different. I mean, that was travel, but it was a different kind of trouble. The travel I'm talking about is the kind of travel that can transform you as a person, the kind that allows you to become a writer. You can't really write when you're in the company of other people. Although I've done it. But in terms of self discovery, going alone is very important. And, you know, I will also say that a lot of travelers didn't go alone. There's a chapter in the *Dow of Travel* about travelers who never went alone. Graham Greene never went alone. George Simenon never went alone. Henry David Thoreau never went alone. He never traveled alone. He was always with a group of people; in the bane woods, in Minnesota, he went to New York City. He didn't travel a lot, actually, Thoreau. And even when Thoreau was in the solitude of his cabin, he used to go back home. His mother cooked for him. She did his laundry. So the idea of Thoreau in the solitude of a cabin is really humbug. You know, that really wasn't the case. But there are many travelers who just set off alone and did their thing. And those are the people I relate to. Traveling by car in the South with my *Deep South* book, that seemed to be the ultimate liberation. Being alone in a car, going wherever you want, waking up. So I subscribe to all of that. The going alone thing is very important. Although, you know, if I had a daughter and she was 18 years old and said "I want to go to Pakistan." I'd say "great, but go with someone; ideally a big, strong man." Or Turkey or, you know, wherever, I would say go with a guy. I don't know, Melissa, what your experience as a woman traveling alone, but you may have a tale to tell. I think women have a different experience. There are many women travelers, I mean, who travel alone. But I'm talking about my daughter. I don't have a daughter. If I had one, I would say you have to be very careful.

**MBB** Yeah. I told mine she can't go to Pakistan at the moment. But in some ways, Paul, what you're talking about is fast travel is getting on airplanes and slow travel is going by train or by foot or by car. And that's what you've always celebrated in your books.

**PT** Yes, because the ideal travel for me is, well, it would be the great railroad bazaar for an ideal trip. I leave my house. I take the train to Victoria Station. I take a train to Victoria Station, to Folkestone. I take a ferry to Berlin. I go from Berlin to Paris. I go from Paris to Venice. I go from Venice to Istanbul. Like from Istanbul to Tehran. There's no transition. There's no taxi.

There's no TSA. There's no plane. It's all walk to this. Get on this. And then this. And then this. And then this. And so I never leave the ground.

**MBB** I don't always have the time for that kind of slow ground travel. But I do cherish those moments deeply when I do have them. Now, I want to take a moment to talk about your time in Uganda. And I know you wrote recently about how that was a period in time when you were there, that when the whole world was upside down and in some ways it's comparable to the world being turned upside down for all of us now. But you said that there's something about the privilege in bearing witness to these moments where, you know, everything is in serious flux. Will you talk a little bit about that?

**PT** Yeah, I've been in serious fluxes a number of places; in Vietnam and in Africa. Africa, after independence, witnessed a lot of coup d'états and a lot of attempted revolutions. There was one, the one I mentioned in The New York Times a couple of weeks ago was the attack on the palace of the Kabaka. The Kabaka was the king of Uganda - Kabaka Mutasa the second. His ancestor, great grandfather, had met Henry Morton Stanley. So Mutusa's a big king, but they attacked Idi Amin and the president of Botha attacked the palace. So I remember what happened. I was in my office and I saw this....I heard gunfire. I mean, full automatic bang, bang, bang, bang, bang. And then mortar fire. And I looked across Uganda, Kampala's on Seven Hills. So I saw the hills, smoke rising. I said, you know what the hell happened? So someone said, there's an attack. It was an all day assault. But it's very hard to make an uphill assault, particularly if you're not very good soldiers. Ugandan soldiers weren't...they had never really been in battle. So they were shooting uphill. The Kabaka king was at the top of the hill shooting down. They were shelling him, so he got away anyway. Immediately after that, there was a curfew and the curfew was a total lockdown. I was at the university then. I was teaching at the time. It was kind of the early days. And I was, you know, stayed in and drank. We had a staff club, so we're just drinking, writing. I didn't do much writing, actually, but it was my first experience of confinement, of that kind of confinement, and of a kind of anarchy because no one knew who was in charge. All you saw were soldiers. I would have missed it for anything because I understood what an authoritarian society looks like and what a police state looks like, a state run by soldiers and also the concomitant of that, which is rumors. The rumor mill goes. There's no free press. It's just rumors. Someone said this. Someone said that. And the stories were grotesque. Stories of killing, massacres and trouble and that. There are a lot of rumors now.

**MBB** You've said in your travel writing that you want to get into the flesh and blood of a place. How do you do that? Are there certain things you think you can do that really bring you closer to the heart of a destination?

**PT** Getting into a place, to penetrate the place, to get to the heart of it, you need to understand the humanity of the place, not the history necessarily. Not just eating the food and smiling. But you need...you need somehow to understand what these people are going through and they need to trust you. That only happens over time. And this is why time is the friend of the traveler. If you don't have time, if you're pushing it, it's not going to happen. But even if local people think you're in a hurry, or you're here today, gone tomorrow, they're not going to confide in you necessarily. To find the flesh and blood of a place, you need to be a listener. You need to care. You need to keep paying respect. You need to make a friend. All those things. But, you know, it takes time and effort. I thought one of the quickest ways to make friends is to become a teacher. Prove yourself.

**MBB** I know you worked as a teacher in Mexico. What did you discover and learn there?

**PT** Well, in Mexico and other places, I've tried to be a benefactor in my way. You know what I found in Mexico...I went to Mexico City and I volunteered as a teacher. I said, I want to teach. Right. I'll give a seminar to writers. Well, the writers I had were quite, quite accomplished. I mean, it turned out that they were extremely good writers. But a friend of mine in Mexico, a Mexican writer, got these people together. And after three weeks of teaching, talking, listening, having meals with them, they said, what do you want? I said, I don't want anything. I don't want to be paid. In fact, I have some books for you. Books in Spanish. I drove here in my car. What do you want? I said, I just want to improve my Spanish. I want to have lunch with you. Great. So we had lunch every day. We had dinner sometimes. I studied Spanish. We talked. And because I wanted nothing except to know them, they were moved by it. And, you know, there were older writers as well as younger writers. So it led to great things happening. And this is why the best travel is not about travel. It's about living your life, being in a place, being a resident, living your life and being a teacher, working, you know, aid workers sometimes or just, you know, doing your thing. You're not thinking about going home. You're there and you know, you're actually engaged in something that's helpful. So that's another way of doing it. It's not easy because in the way that other people are stereotyped, the American is stereotyped as a person with money who's here today, gone tomorrow. And so you need to kind of convince people that that's not you, that you're not the stereotype. You're a different person. You have something else to give. I'm just the old gringo, gringo viejo or as they say in Kenya - [indistinguishable]. I'm just, I'm the elder. So that gets you some points, too.

**PT** Now, Paul, do you think that this period is going to change either the conceptions of Americans or how we go back out into the world when we come out of lockdown? And you thought about how it's going to change things?

**PT** Yes, I think it's going to change radically, dramatically. It's going to change everything. It's going to change our perception of ourselves. It's going to change people's perception of America as a place that wasn't particularly well-prepared as fumbling and bumbling. It will change the way we relate to other people

**MBB** When in need of inspiration, is there a specific place that you turn to find it?

**PT** There wouldn't be a place. It would be a book, I think. I think I would read a book I'd never read before. I don't find inspiration in places. I find inspiration in people and in literature. People especially, you know, sometimes I'm talking to someone and they tell a story. And I think, you know, that's something. A Vietnamese immigrant, he was a boat person. And we were talking a couple of weeks ago and I said, how did you learn English so well? He said through soap operas. I said, how is that possible? Through soap operas. He said, not English, but in English classes and talking to people, they talk too fast. But in a soap opera, which he watched religiously, he said, people say things like "go back to your mother and don't come back here until I tell you." A soap opera is, for him, peremptory. He said in soap operas, people speak very clearly and they denounce each other. "I love you and I will always love you. Don't you believe me? Don't you believe..." that kind of thing now? I never thought of that. You don't get that in the book. You get that by talking to a Vietnamese guy who speaks English quite well. So inspiration comes from other people, I believe.

**MBB** In your book, *Riding the Iron Rooster*, you comment on how resourceful the Chinese are. Can you speak to some of the ways China has changed or will change due to coronavirus?

**PT** Coronavirus is going to change everyone. Well, I was in China in 1980 at a time when no one threw anything away. There was no garbage. There was nothing on the street. Everything was recycled. It was a mend and make-do so. People had patches and they will wear blue suits and they had patches on. No one had anything new. They fixed shoes. They cobbled

shoes. They mended coats. It was a mending society. Now it's a throwaway society. Like the world. China has changed radically that way. It's a less interesting place for that reason. But what they've managed to do is that they're still inventors and makers of things. So they've made television sets, they make planes, they make high speed trains. So they make other things. They're not mending clothes. It's not the society that it was, although I like the idea, I love having my shoes fixed and the idea of fixing clothes, mending clothes to me is very appealing, actually. It will become a mask wearing society of people who don't congregate. It will become more individualistic. I would imagine they'll have fewer children. There won't be...the government will be in greater control, ss happens in a time of pandemic. Authoritarian governments become more authoritarian because people are worried. They're saying "who can I appeal to? Who's going to help me?" So the Chinese will submit to greater control, I think.

**MBB** What would you say the greatest gift, in this case some people would be giving up, of travel is or what did you learn the most from travel?

**PT** The experience of other people, other cultures. And Flaubert's comment was travel teaches you how small you are, shows you how small you are. And you realize that's I guess what I found was I'm small, I'm insignificant and unimportant. The world is huge. It's complicated. It's...some of it's falling apart. Some people have figured it out. I always thought that, you go to Japan, you're in the future. You go to Brazil, you're in the past. I don't know...Malawi, you're in the past. That all travelers time travel. So it's not one lesson. But I mean, it's the experience of difference. But it's experience, real experience and knowledge derives from direct experience. You don't get it from a book. You don't get it from your father or mother telling you something. You need the direct experience of a place. So genuine knowledge derives from direct experience. Digging a ditch, teaching a class, catching malaria. Driving on a bad road. Whatever it is, I mean, the person who said that was Chairman Mao Tse-tung. You don't have to abide by all the thoughts of Chairman Mao. But that's one of his bits of wisdom. He was a malignant old monster. But I learned that, you know, a lot of what I learned at home, people say don't go. But my family didn't say that to me, actually. But people say, you know, what's the point? Well, I go all that distance. What are you gonna learn? You learn a lot. You learn a lot from leaving home. You learn everything from leaving home, I think. And so that's what travel just gave me the experience to give me something to write about. It gave me a life, actually. So I wouldn't be the same person if I had stayed home and I had an interesting family and went to Medford High School in Bedford, Massachusetts, and went to college. That was all fine. Read books, but I didn't learn anything. It wasn't till I was completely out of my element, completely out of my element. I was the odd man out. I guess, you know, a lot of my writing is about the odd man out.

**MBB** Can you elaborate on that? How much of your writing is about being the odd man out, as you said, and forcing yourself out of your element?

**PT** It's about just someone in a place where he shouldn't be or doesn't really belong trying to figure things out. I sort of worked that out a few years ago, I said, what...Do I have a subject? You know, I've written maybe 30 odd works of fiction, 30 odd novels. So what's the common theme? I think the theme is that; that I learned very early. The odd man out or the odd person out. Just a person out of their element in a place where they have to kind of figure out how to survive, how to get along with people. And I think that the other thing that travel teaches you that I learned, but I learned early in my family, you need to care about what other people want or what other people think. You have to learn how to negotiate. A selfish, narcissistic person doesn't know how to negotiate. They say that's one of the points about autism, is that the autistic person doesn't, can't imagine what's on another person's mind. I don't know whether that's true or not. But an egotistical person, a selfish person, I suppose many travelers don't really care or don't know or don't know how to negotiate. But travel taught me how to

negotiate, how to get along. Because you're there. You're a sitting duck. I mean, they can, they can rob you. They can do anything they want to. You're just there, they're unarmed. In my case, an older gentleman, you can be taken advantage of. You have to learn how to get along, how to negotiate, how to make a friend and try to imagine: what does this person want and do I trust this person? Does this person trust me? Those are all aspects of human interaction that you...it's hard to learn at school. It's hard to learn at home. But you start learning at home. If you come from a big family, you begin to know how to negotiate. But it's one of the lessons of travel, probably the most valuable one, really, is how to survive in a hostile world.

**MBB** And, you know, you always say that to be a great traveler, you must be a reader. So I have to ask you, what are you reading these days?

**PT** I mentioned Rebecca West a little early. I don't know whether you've read...do you know Rebecca West? She wrote the greatest travel book ever written, *Black Lamb and Great Felton*. It's a half a million words. I haven't read the whole thing. I've read, I would say, most. So I was reading Rebecca West and it turns out Rebecca West had this long affair with H.G. Wells. She had a child, Anthony West. So Rebecca West led me to read a biography of H.G. Wells. I thought, well, what about his womanizing? Because he was like a man of the future. He wrote about scientific romances of war. And this is a roundabout answer to your question but I actually met Rebecca West in London in 1981 or 82. She was a big, very heavy woman with cataract, big, thick glasses. And she had once been a beauty. She'd been an absolute beauty and a fantastic writer. The other book of Rebecca West is *The Meaning of Treason*. I've got a bit long about the reading, but I would also say if you want to be a traveler, be a reader. Be a reader. If you want to be a writer, be a reader, be a fanatical reader. I am. And I think it's a good idea.

**MBB** Fantastic. And what are you watching?

**PT** Well, Sheila and I've been watching the whole of *Better Call Saul*. I liked *Breaking Bad* and I kind of stayed away from *Better Call Saul*. Do you know what I'm talking about? I saw a couple and I thought, oh this is a true prologue to *Breaking Bad*. It's not just a spin off about this crazy lawyer. But that's what I was watching. I don't watch a lot of television. I must say, I don't have the appetite or the patience.

**MBB** And what's always in your carry on bag?

**PT** A book. I suspected you might ask me this question. A book, a book. I would be lost without a book. A book or paper and a pen. I never go anywhere without a book. And I don't have a Kindle. So it would be a book.

**MBB** Where do you want to go next, Paul? On the adventure scale.

**PT** I would like to take another road trip. I'd like to go back to Mexico. But if you're talking about an ultimate trip, I would like to go back to Malawi after, you know, almost 60 years. I'm very interested in return trips. What is...how has the world changed? I would like to go back to Africa. I would like to see my old school, the school that I worked in in 1964, 65. And just see if the school's still standing. Check it out, see the country. I did that when I took my *Dark Star Safari* trip. I checked out the school, but that was in 2001 and 2002. Well, that was 18 years ago. What's happened since then? So my curiosity is post lockdown, post pandemic, is travel to a number of different countries and see what do they want? What's changed? What do they want? Not an adventure travel, but inquisitive, immersive, hearing people's stories and just seeing how the world has changed. I'm very curious because I know that it's changed profoundly. It was changing before the pandemic. And it's changed even more now.

**MBB** I know that you've been working on turning the *Mosquito Coast* into a series with Apple, and it's already been turned into a movie. How has that experience been different and how do you think this version of it will be different?

**PT** I know it will be different because I'm not writing it. I'm an executive producer. The writer is a man called Neil Cross. You know the series *Luther*? It's an English series, *Luther* with Idris Elba. He wrote that, he's a big reader of mine. He even, before he did the *Mosquito Coast*, he on his website you extolled my work, God bless lesson for that. So the *Mosquito Coast* will be different. It's not from Massachusetts to Honduras now. It's from California, Modesto, California to Mexico. The family goes across the border, they sneak across the border the other way. It's very exciting. It's different. The mother has a more active role in it. And they've done about seven of 10 series. My nephew is in it. Justin is in it. That's not nepotism, by the way. He got the part himself. I don't have a role in other than making suggestions here and there. And then, you know, it's very exciting when someone makes a movie from something you've written that I find exciting. I don't say don't change a word. I think it's a different medium and it needs to be imagined differently. So I'm excited to see what they'll make of it. It won't be the book. They're not filming the book. The Apple stories will be quite a different drama altogether. And I'm sort of interested in seeing it. Another book of mine called *The Lower River* set in Africa is being optioned for a film. It's about a man who takes money to a village and then the people take advantage of him and they won't let him leave. He becomes a captive to the village, in this village on the river. They won't let him go. And so that's a book about captivity in Africa. I'm curious to see what they make of that. But I don't have any input.

**MBB** Do you ever think about writing scripts and working on movies or TV series?

**PT** Once upon a time, I wrote scripts and I was involved with directors. And so it's very, very enjoyable. It's a very slow process. I can write two books in a time, three books in a time it makes about half a movie. I mean, movies...it's a long collaborative process. The great thing about travel, writing novels, writing travel books...I'm a one man band. I'm the only person doing it. I like that. And, you know, if you're making a movie, you're there with other people. You know, when you're talking, it's very social. But your vision is changed, whatever vision you have. You say, I'd like to do it this way. They said, no, let's try this and let's try that new thing online. So you just become one voice among many. I'm not a fan of either writing scripts or being...I like where I am now, which is executive producer, which kind of meaningless, but just means I see the scripts and I say, you know, maybe have the window open. I said, yeah, OK. And someone goes and opens the window.

**MBB** And when is it due to come out?

**PT** It was supposed to come out next fall, but they suspended. They were filming in Pueblo, Mexico and Mexico City. Now, I don't know; that that's the question no one can answer. Apple had a lot of I mean, they say 40 or 50 projects going. They suspended everything. So no one knows. But people are making plans. The *Lower River*...[indistinguishable] make a novel. And I wrote a novel called *Hotel Honolulu*, and someone's optioned that and people are talking about it. They're making plans. But as far as I know, no one's going strongly. But just, you know, filming gets you out of the house. It's exciting, you know. But it's not my thing. My thing is, is what everyone is doing now; sitting in a room and trying to get some work done. So this is familiar territory.

**MBB** From Hawaii to Marrakech, in next week's episode, I'm talking to someone who has long inspired me with her keen intelligence, great sense of humor and seriously fabulous style. And like so many of my favorite people, cultural entrepreneur, author and hotelier Maryanne Lou

Martin has had many careers and found a way to be at home in many different places. Meryanne began her professional life as a lawyer, but she fell in love with Marrakech so completely after her first visit that she decided to stay and began the city's craze for stylish riad hotels. Join the conversation to hear Meryanne talk about her international childhood. Her father was a Senegalese diplomat, but also what makes Marrakech's blend of cultures so irresistible and her many passion projects, including a cultural platform that showcases the African diaspora. I hope you'll join us.

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