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Re: The Joy of a Life Well Lived

To the Makers of the Finest Headware on Planet Earth:

Greetings.

On June 4, 2009, I, together with my wife and two young children, aged 9 and 11, embarked on a lengthy journey. We were to begin in London, crisscross Europe (with a hop into Morocco) move eastward to Greece, Turkey, and the Middle East, make our way to East Africa to Kenya, Tanzania and Zanzibar, jet to Bangkok to explore Southeast Asia, drift southward through Bali on our way toward Oceania, where we would navigate through Australia, New Zealand, stop through the South Pacific haven of Fiji, and finally return homeward to Denver, Colorado. The adventure was to last one year.

The rules were simple: everyone must carry his or her own equipment. By necessity, this meant our clothes and gear must be lightweight, durable, fast-drying, compact-folding, odor resistant, and (naturally) must fit in a single backpack. And, ahem, fashionable, of course.

Enter the Tilley Hat.

A necessity in just about any climate or season, especially if, like I do, you wear your hair short and thin. Ample protection from the elements on the windswept cliffs of the Giant's Causeway in Northern Ireland. Ventilation to permit the bone-dry siroccos to ease the heat of the searing Sahara. Reliable shade from the equatorial veldts along Lake Naivasha to the foot of Mount Kenya. March found me resting my tired bones on the endless white beaches of Ko Lanta, my Tilley pulled low over my face. And when we ventured into the ancient ruins of Angkor Wat in the midst of war-ravaged Cambodia, my trusty Tilley carried our family's emergency plan—a portrait or two of U.S. Grant, just in case. From the end of the monsoons in Malaysia to the fjords of Doubtful Sound on the South Island of New Zealand, where the autumn of mid-May was edging toward winter beneath the Southern Cross, my Tilley kept the rain out and clung faithfully to my head through the howling winds coming off the Tasmanian Sea.

And, when we finally reached the safe harbor of Fiji in late May, weary and counting the days to the last flight of our fifty-thousand-mile journey, my Tilley was my constant companion.

Much has this trusty, olive-green 7-3/4 seen, and much has it done. Three hundred sixty days of hard travel across five continents found my Tilley alighted comfortably on its customary perch, low over the brows in the misty morning, high atop the forehead in the afternoon heat, and angling jauntily to the left at happy hour. Drinking in the sights, the sounds, and, good-naturedly, the sweat, of hundreds of miles of city sidewalks, forest paths, volcanic trails, and ruined cities, my Tilley and I were daily companions.

When visiting churches, crypts and catacombs my Tilley demurely permitted herself to be removed, held gently in my hand. And when respect demanded that the head be covered when we visited synagogues and temples, my Tilley angled gracefully back over the crown of my skull, ironically proud in her act of humility. The Tilley has seen the wonders of nature and man, from the Rosetta Stone to the Pantheon to the pyramids of Giza, to the faerie-chimneys of Capadocia, the bat-caves and leach-infested mud tracks of the Malaysian jungles, and the glaciers of southern New Zealand.

So overcome with the wonder of human art and ingenuity was my Tilley, that she even acquired some art of her own—a hand-painted elephant, sacred to the Thais on the outskirts of Chiang Mai (and, incidentally, a bargain at 50 Baht—slightly less than two Canadian dollars). (On the subject of elephants, by the way, I was careful to keep my Tilley away from the business end of the elephants we fed and bathed in the elephant sanctuary of Central Thailand. While I have no doubt my Tilley would have undertaken the passage through the elephant as willingly as the Tilley of legend, if I had so requested, I had set my sights on different feats for my Tilley.)

As you must certainly understand, my Tilley was my companion for every step of our journey, as much a part of the family as my lovely wife and two delightful children. Through endless cycles of searing heat, soaking sweat, drying winds, washing, stretching, drying, and on and on.

Tilley: Performance. Versatility. Trustworthiness.

Of course, it is impossible to undertake a journey of this scope and scale without changing and growing. We become our experience. It must be admitted, however, that not all change is for the better. My children, for example, now aged 10 and 12, feel completely comfortable critiquing our local Vietnamese restaurant in the voice of authority, asserting in a loud, steady voice that “this doesn’t taste anything like Vietnamese food!” Experience, in other words, has taught them not only recognize a fraud when one sees one, but has also entrenched the habit of blurting out whatever is on one’s mind, comfortable in the knowledge that nobody around can understand the first word of what one is saying. Change indeed.

And, alas, change affected my trusty Tilley as well. Over the weeks and the miles, by airplane, car, bus, ship, rail, rickshaw, camel, elephant, ferry, canoe, long boat, paddle boat, junk, and on foot, braving the sun, wind, rain, and the repeated soaking, scrubbing, washing, stretching and drying, my Tilley changed too. As I went gray along the journey,

so did my Tilley, surrendering her vibrant green for a muted, olive dun. And as our journey wore on, my Tilley began to sag under the weight of the trek.

I must face the facts: My Tilley has reached her golden years, and simply cannot recreate the flower of her lost youth of the summer of 2009, nor even her calming and mature middle age of April, 2010. Like all of us, even a Tilley must face the eventual prospect of senescence and that gentle night.

I write to express my sincere gratitude for the, well, persnickitiness your company embodies, and to report to you the wonders of a life well-lived. If ever a Tilley represented the quintessence of quality—indeed, if ever a Tilley belonged in the Tilley Hall of Fame, I can scarcely imagine a more worthy candidate than my own beloved Tilley. As proof of my Tilley's remarkable feats, I direct you to our web site at www.culhanetravelblog.wordpress.com, which is the faithful (albeit backwards) chronicle of our journey. While, alas, the Tilley is seldom, if ever, the centerpiece of our musings, you will see from abundant photographic evidence that the above report of my Tilley's accomplishments is true in every respect, and that my Tilley has achieved more, much more, than I can be expected to summarize in a few short pages.

But even though I grieve over the retirement of my Tilley, my own journey continues. Even though my wanderings for the foreseeable future will be closer to home, my head will still require comfort and relief from the blazing sun of the Rocky Mountain summers and the rain and wind as fall sweeps across the North American plains.

In a spirit of adventure and reverence, I write to inquire if, perchance, your fine company would be willing to provide a replacement companion for my journey ahead. For while you may not yet be fully familiar with me and my story, I have forged a bond with Tilley that yearns for renewal and new adventures. If you would like to join me along the roads I will travel, I wear a size 7-3/4, or perhaps ever-so-slightly smaller. As to the fashion and style, I leave that to your good judgment, although I love the air-flow model that has grown so familiar.

I salute you and your remarkable headware.

Very truly yours,



Daniel J. Culhane