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Our **12TH ANNUAL ROAD WARRIOR CONTEST** winners touch down on the beautiful island of **Curaçao**

SPECIAL ROAD WARRIOR ISSUE



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Win-Win

IT WAS RIGHT around the time a sweet lady came into my hotel room — toothy smile preceding her entrance as she arrived to rescue me from my own stupidity — that I began to ask myself, and then answer, the following question: What is the mark of a Road Warrior?

The context of this self-moderated Q&A, as well as the reason for my half-clothed presence on my third-floor balcony at that forlorn hour, were born out of time and circumstance. At approximately 1 o'clock in the morning, after our second straight day of photographing the winners of our 12th Annual Road Warrior Contest, I was riding an emotional high. This contest is *American Way's*, well, way of honoring some of our most frequent fliers and loyal readers. For the 2014 photo shoot, we took our five winners to the island of Curaçao, one of the famed ABC islands (Aruba and Bonaire being the A and the B). Each winner, just as in years past, was allowed to bring a guest who would also receive an all-expenses-paid trip. In fact, as many guests have expressed over the years, they are the real winners because they don't have to primp and preen for two eight-hour days of photo shoots. Nope, they just have to wake up before the sun is on high and take a snapshot with me (the photo below shows what I mean).

Don't get me wrong: Our winners — none of whom is a professional model — acted as though this rather uncomfortable process of hair and makeup and multiple wardrobe changes was nothing more out of the ordinary than a day at the office. Even the guys sat in the makeup chair and took their medicine, as it were, with neither fit

nor fuss. But it was the guests who accompanied Becca Powelson, David LeVan, Ashley Baker, Tim Glasson and Malcolm Griffiths who really got the best of what Curaçao has to offer. They were able to watch the circus unfold from their ringside seats, retreat to the beautiful pool at the Santa Barbara Beach & Golf Resort Curaçao (which butted up to the Caribbean Sea), take a disco nap and then dine like royalty.

That is what I thought about as I sat in my boxers and a T-shirt on my patio at 1 o'clock in the morning. I was decompressing from the day's activities with an ice-cold, Venezuelan-brewed Polar beer (that country is only 40 miles south of Curaçao) and my thoughts. My work-issued international loaner BlackBerry sat on the patio table in case, given the time difference, one of the editors was working late back home and needed to reach me.

I sat there and watched and listened as the waves broke on the soft, fine grains of Caribbean sand — the very grains that may have been there when the native Arawak Indians roamed this island in the 1400s. I sipped my Polar beer and looked south in the direction of Venezuela and thought about where and when my beer was born. Then my thoughts shifted to our Road Warriors and the last two days. I thought about how model-esque Malcolm came across during his hero shot; about how pretty-yet-mischievous Ashley looked pouring the champagne; about how West Coast cool and athletic Tim looked with his beach cruiser; about how fun and scholarly David appeared in the palm grove; and about how Becca radiated classic,

almost Victorian beauty on the beach. The more I reflected, the bigger the smile spread across my face. Had my patio not been so secluded, what a sight I would have been for any early-morning passers-by, what with my cat-got-the-canary grin, sitting there in my skivvies.

Polar beer safely consumed, I turned to retreat into my comfortable and smartly decorated room, except the doors wouldn't budge. I guess when I closed them firmly to keep the AC from escaping, I closed too firmly, and the deadbolt latched.

The good people at the Santa Barbara resort had honored me by giving me a very handsome, very private room with untrammelled ocean views. In fact, it was so secluded that I could say with 99 percent certainty that I wouldn't have seen a soul until noon the next day. I didn't cry. I didn't moan. I dropped my chin to my chest, shook my head and smiled, letting out brief, audible huff-laughes as I did. Why? Because as much of a pickle as I was in, I couldn't wait to tell the winners and their guests about it. That's how close we became after two days — close enough where I couldn't wait to tell them about my embarrassing moment.

My eyes were fixed on the Caribbean as I got comfortable in my patio chair for what was going to be a long, pants-less night on my porch. After about an hour of soul-searching and reflection, it came to me in a flash: the loaner BlackBerry. I snatched it off the table, looked up the phone number of the hotel, called the front desk, and when the guy stopped laughing at me, he dispatched a rescue party.



As the sweet lady sprung me from my patio, and as I asked myself what the mark of a Road Warrior is, the answer came to me in a similarly brilliant flash: I was locked out, half naked, in the middle of the night, and the first thing I thought about was how excited I was to tell the winners — and the guests — all about it. Because we were all so comfortable and so very happy when we were together.

What is the mark of a Road Warrior? The friends they keep.



FRIENDS FOREVER: Adam (center) with our Road Warriors' guests, from left: Amanda Morris, Anne Powelson, Leslie LeVan, Wendy Glasson and Walter Alencar


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