

SPECIAL  
ROAD WARRIOR  
ISSUE

MARCH 15, 2012

**WINNER**

2011 NORTH AMERICAN TRAVEL  
JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATION

**Gold Medal**

BEST LOCAL LIFESTYLE  
(05.15.11 "HELSINKI")

Lutheran Cathedral

# AMERICAN WAY

AMERICAN AIRLINES • AMERICAN EAGLE

## The Heat Is On

Our 10th annual  
**ROAD WARRIOR**  
Contest winners  
light up Miami

### GOOD BAD MOVIES

Learn what to watch  
for low-grade  
Saturday-night fun

+

### BREW SCHOOL

You may think you majored  
in beer in college,  
but these folks really do

**GETAWAY**  
Buffalo, N.Y.'s  
best-kept  
secret p. 28

TWICE MONTHLY



# Life is a Long Song

**ON MY WAY** to Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport, a song came on the radio that made me think about my life, their lives and how our lives would intertwine when this week was over. I reflected on the lyrics and on what lay ahead, figuratively and literally. This was not an ordinary flight. No, this was the flight that the *American Way* staff looks forward to every year. And seeing that this was the 10th anniversary of our annual Road Warrior contest, the anticipation was sweeter than a South Florida orange.

Upon touching down in Miami, and before our drive over the causeway to South Beach — even before we met any of our winners — I heard that same song blaring from a store at Miami International Airport. I don't think my traveling companions, senior editor Anna Fialho and design director David Radabaugh, noticed the "wow" look on my face. I mean, how often do you hear Jethro Tull's "Life is a Long Song" not once but twice in one day ... in 2012? I hummed and even sang out loud as Anna, David and I made our way to the storied Hotel Breakwater on South Beach.

## If You Wait, Then Your Plate I Will Fill

Our rendezvous point with the winners was the Breakwater rooftop terrace, followed by dinner at the hotel's restaurant, Nine. Prior to my arrival, Brian had already made himself at home behind the bar. He was holding court for the other Road Warrior winners and their guests, keeping them thoroughly entertained. That's how quickly this year's crew jelled.

We all drank some tequila-infused concoctions (see Brian's profile on page 52 to see why), and as we headed to dinner, the feeling was similar to other Road Warrior photo shoots. Which is to say that it was awesome. Dinner progressed, as did our late-night banter in the hospitality suite, and true to Road Warrior form, the winners and their guests became comfortable, the conversations familiar and the atmosphere entertaining. Claire charmed us with her stories of the night before in Miami (she came in a day early), and Bruce offered excellent analysis of the NFC Championship Game that night. Dave was the face of satisfaction, as he spoke quietly and wore a contented, North Carolinian smile, and Neal ... well, Neal was the grand-prize winner. Everyone sized him up, then devoured the mountain of ice cream he brought to share (see Neal's profile on page 45 to see why). Everyone was happy. Everyone was relaxed.

## We Will Meet in the Sweet Light of Dawn

This photo shoot started early in order to capture the best Florida light, and these road warriors were up to the challenge. In fact, with Claire looking like a professional model in that green dress and Brian instantly becoming the talk of South Beach with his, um, appearance in the Breakwater's infinity pool, this 10th Annual Road Warrior crew was bonding at a record-setting pace.

As he stood waist-deep in the hotel pool, fully clothed and with an apple-green libation in hand,

being photographed with the rest of the winners, Brian thought, "Funny that I'm in the tequila business and this has never happened to me before."

Something else that had never happened before is the *AW* design director having the grand-prize winner styled as though he'd just been in a '50s street fight. "I felt like the big man on campus walking around with my pompadour and 1 million miles," Neal said, "until I stood three feet away from LeBron James at the AA Arena and once again felt like a scrawny eighth-grader whose only date at the winter dance was the gym wall."

"Maybe," Dave replied. "All I know is my wife and I just sat courtside for a team that might well be the NBA champions this year."

That's right, folks. As promised in a long-ago "Editor's Note," we had a suite at the Miami Heat game, plus six courtsides to boot. What was more, the Heat managed a 50-point swing against the perennially threatening San Antonio Spurs. Everyone took away a memory.

We broke character that weekend. Even our measured dollars-and-cents guy. "I blatantly ignored my financial good sense and played blackjack at a table that only paid 6 to 5 for blackjack, just because it was outside," Bruce said.

But even the Hard Rock Casino in Hollywood, Fla. — and the money it kept — couldn't keep us from enjoying the atmosphere, the scenery, the company. Our final dinner was at Red, the Steakhouse, which is a favorite of several Miami Heat players. It was the perfect swan song to the perfect week, as was that same song that came on in the car yet again as I drove Bruce, Dave and their guests to a late-night club.

"Definitely the best week of my year is the Road Warrior photo shoot," said Anne Weidner, *AW*'s senior marketing manager. "It's so rewarding to finally meet our winners and spend time getting to know them and their guests. I just wish it didn't have to end so soon."

But the tune ends too soon for us all.

  
ADAM PITLUK  
Editor

**FROM LEFT:** Lise Cacho-Negrete (Bruce's wife), Renee Brincks (Neal's guest), Kim Reynolds (Dave's wife), Adam, Jessica Kim (Claire's guest) and Leslie Butler (Brian's guest)



-  **Want to talk to Adam?**  
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