

World Citizenship

Origins, Obstacles, Prospects

By

Scott Leckie

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by Scott Leckie

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Praise for *World Citizenship*

“Scott Leckie’s latest book *World Citizenship* does many things - not the least of which to call for the next step in our collective political evolution from nation-state-based citizenship to a planet of world citizens. His elucidation of not only *why* this is necessary but also *how* we can achieve this is novel, ground-breaking and visionary. The book’s core thesis confronts the multinational powers and authoritarian states that currently prey upon the poor and calls for a new and supremely logical system of global governance and law based on the shared attributes of the human race as a whole. This may appear to be a radical idea but if it is carefully pursued and then achieved, it may just save our planet. This book is a roadmap to saving millions of lives and healing the globe on which we all live. Read it and save the world.”

– Skye Fitzgerald

2x Academy® Award Nominee

World Citizen

“In a world increasingly interconnected yet divided by borders, Scott Leckie proposes a radical vision: world citizenship for all. This book challenges the entrenched system of nation-states, advocating for a unified political framework where every person, regardless of origin, has equal rights and a voice in decision-making. By transcending nationalism, Scott offers a path toward tackling climate change, inequality, and authoritarianism. The book is a call for a new global movement—one that empowers all people to shape a sustainable, equitable future.”

– Reed Brody

Author, *To Catch a Dictator*

“For many years Scott Leckie has been working and fighting for human rights. His most important concern has oppressed people who had lost their homes. Without human beings such as him, these people would have had no chance to gain their rights. Respect and empathy are words which came into my mind thinking of his life-long battle against injustice. In these days when democracy is under fire from Trump to Erdogan and Netanyahu or even was destroyed like in Russia, Scott Leckie and his work give us some hope that there is still a possibility for change for the better. Open your mind. That’s all he is asking us. Let’s go for it!”

– Jürgen Walter

Former Green Party member of Parliament in the German State of Baden-Württemberg and former State Secretary of Culture.

“Scott Leckie has spent his career pushing the peripheral to the center of international attention especially in the field of human rights law. Now he seeks to do the same with the idea of world citizenship. May he succeed again!”

– Lobsang Sangay

Former President (Sikyong) of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile

“Scott Leckie’s new book *World Citizenship* outlines the type of world I and billions of others would like to live in; a world where all people in all places share the same citizenship, the same rights and the same opportunities on the same planet. This remarkable book is a timely call for action that should move all of us towards embracing the better future we all deserve.”

– Preethi Nallu

Director, Report for the World

For my father

Bernard A. Leckie

(And for you, my fellow world citizen)

At times this book uses my memory of dialogue and insights that may have changed over time. Any allegations or finger pointing or contentions of human culpability that you may read in this book should be taken as my opinion and not as an assertion of fact. Because I intentionally camouflage some of this book's various identities, leading to changing the factual background on occasion, you may find that I have purposely changed the identifying features of many individuals to protect their privacy. This is my account from personal memory and based on a blend of real and imagined events.

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Foreword

"We need to banish one word from our lexicons in whatever language we speak, and this word is 'them.'"

That sums up the philosophy that Scott Leckie has lived by and acted on for the last 40 years. There is no "us," no "them," only "we." None of us is inherently better or worse than anyone else.

During a recent French election campaign, a presidential candidate told the television audience the exact opposite - "I don't dislike foreigners, I just like French people better." Politicians worldwide, from India to Hungary, the United States to Myanmar, are using—even creating—a fear and hatred of "them"—minorities, immigrants, and foreigners—to strengthen their power.

I first met Scott Leckie at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva in the early 1990s. Amidst the hundreds of career diplomats and the earnest buttoned-down human rights lobbyists (like me) vying for their attention, this blond California beach boy in loose Dutch clothing and a bandana, cut a very different figure. There he was, in the famous glass-enclosed Serpentine lounge, the social hub of the Commission looking out on Lac Lemman and the Alps beyond, good-vibing one and all, distributing corny nicknames. A casual observer might have missed that Scott carried dozens of carefully crafted draft resolutions and declarations in his briefcase, which the United Nations would later adopt to study, create, define, and expand the right to housing, land, and property.

Scott's Geneva years were a time of hope and possibility, just after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The end of the Cold War seemed to bring a new consensus around the human rights ideal. A new democratic majority, now including many Eastern European and Latin American countries, unlocked the potential of the Commission on Human Rights to take human rights seriously and, in some cases, adopt an activist role similar to Eleanor Roosevelt's vision.

The human rights movement itself was expanding, as activists like Scott pushed previously neglected issues, particularly those dealing with economic and social rights, into the mainstream. Once he had the run of the UN, Scott would come to Geneva accompanied by those seeking justice from places like Colombia, Bougainville or the Dominican Republic to make their own case to diplomats and experts. As a good activist, Scott understood that the emancipatory possibilities of advocacy can only be achieved when the affected and oppressed parties are in the center of the struggle.

It was a fertile time in which a visionary like Scott could help plant the seeds of what would grow into a corpus of standards, guidelines and laws to protect the world's most vulnerable populations.

We didn't realize then that governments would replace the walls keeping people in with others that kept people out and that the East-West conflict would soon be replaced by lasting conflicts between the rich, industrialized North and the impoverished people of formerly colonized lands of the South.

Scott set out to build a different kind of wall—a "human rights protection wall"—based on our shared humanity, to protect each and every one of us from the daily abuses inflicted by governments and private individuals. And the Geneva years were for Scott only the beginning of his wonderful "personal 50-year work plan," to

identify holes in that wall, patch them up and build the wall as high and as strong as possible.

So, after contributing to some 100 standards dealing with housing, land, and property rights, or HLP, Scott went on to the even more challenging work of seeking to enforce those rights. He helped develop UN mechanisms to monitor compliance with those rights and spent 15 frenzied years as director of a new housing rights NGO, trying by every legal means possible to force the world's governments to comply with the standards he had helped draft. He participated in actions that stopped forced evictions in places like the Dominican Republic, Panama, Zambia and many others. He worked out compromises with reluctant authorities, brought attention to forgotten disasters and strategized with the displaced, the homeless and the occupied in places ranging from East Timor to the Maldives, from Tibet to Palestine.

As it became clear that global warming and climate change were the gravest threats to our survival, Scott sought to meet the challenge by creating a new NGO, Displacement Solutions, dedicated to working with governments and affected communities to resolve the human displacement caused by climate change. One of their best ideas, in my view, is the establishment by states facing large scale climate displacement in the years ahead of Climate Land Banks to hold land in trust, to be distributed to the poorest and most vulnerable.

Finally, Scott lays out another journey, one we all have to take, "a painful journey going from where we are today in 2025 and to where we need to be... if we are to have any hope of surviving." It is a journey towards oneness, towards world citizenship, towards a recognition of our common humanity, in which the life of an

Afghan woman is treated, not just in theory but in practice, with as much respect as the life of a London banker. As global warming and the COVID-19 pandemic have amply demonstrated, we are all in the same boat and we will sink or we will sail together.

A book like this gives us hope that another world, a world of oneness and world citizenship, is possible.

Reed Brody

Author of *To Catch a Dictator*

18 June 2025

Preface

It hasn't always been easy, but I have had the good fortune of embracing a life lived as a world citizen *by actually living one*. For me, this loaded, and deeply misunderstood term is anything but an esoteric dream clouded by delusions of some impossible utopian future. Yes, in legal terms I am a citizen of two nation states. But above all else, I am a citizen of the world and wish for all 8.2 billion of us to share a single citizenship. It is the life I lead, and the life I have led for decades.

Since the 1980s, I've been a human rights activist across the globe (or perhaps better said, a non-conformist human rights renegade - maybe even a human rights outlaw) - in more than 80 countries and carried out additional human rights work concerning another 25 countries beyond those that I have visited. I documented a few of the key moments of this journey in my recent book *Mr. Housing Rights: The Joyous Highs and Devastating Lows of an Eccentric Human Rights Life*. I've lived this life as a living, breathing, world citizen. Of course, because of the way we have chosen to collectively and legally define and organize ourselves as humans with individual nationalities legally tied to particular nation states and their respective jurisdictions, to live a full and free life I am forced by law and necessity to have a passport indicating a particular nationality - I have two actually - and have renounced another, but my greatest allegiance rests not with the legal fictions we all call nation-states, religions, or ethnic, racial, gender or other groups or identities, let alone sports team, university, band or other things I choose to love, but with the human race and the planet on which all of us depend and that provides everything we need for a full and satisfying life. As a proud Earthling, a humble world citizen, a cosmopolitan

lover of all people and all cultures, my allegiance lies with *you* my fellow human beings and the Earth on which we all dwell.

I am far from alone.

Perhaps *you* have dreamed of being a world citizen but found yourself unable to figure out exactly what it means to be a citizen of the world. If so, I hope the pages that follow will give you some ideas to work with. I have aimed to reveal many of the ways that a real person has done this and (perhaps remarkably to many) actually made a living all along the way working as a justice seeker the world over trying to improve the lot of people everywhere, all of whom I see as equals, as sisters, brothers, all potential planetary patriots sharing this brief life together. Being a world citizen may seem an implausible impossibility on a planet witnessing growing nationalism and increasingly inward-looking populism. But if my story is anything to go by, we can all live our lives as world citizens even set within the parameters of contemporary life where nation states still, for the moment, reign sovereign and supreme.

For instance, before I even knew what they were, for my own sanity I refused to ever work in an office cubicle no matter how financially desperate I may have been. Yet I was able to live this world citizen life without ever having to commute to my job and, in fact, though I travelled the world constantly, as a matter of principle I went 30 years without driving a single inch and only began driving again as a duty of fatherhood living in a semi-rural coastal area poorly serviced by public transport. I've never really had a boss *per se*. While I lived many years of my adult life in very simple ways, I never had to do without too often, and even those lean years provided the foundations for the years to come where

income, freedom and influence all converged in the form of my world citizen life.

One of my earliest professional dreams, once I realized I wanted to pursue a human rights career, was to be able to fly around the world to as many human rights hotspots as I could, paid for by someone else. Though there was surely a climate cost to these thousands of flights for which I am not proud (and which has at least partially been offset by the 2222-day personal *No Fly Vow* I am now almost at the tail end of – yes, joyfully not a single flight in more than six years) each and every one of those hundreds of trips was devoted to reducing human suffering, making the world better and holding the guilty accountable; a bit of *yin* with the unavoidable *yang*. So, if you are interested in pursuing a working life that resembles what I have just described, please read on, learn what it looks like and the skills you'll need to live out your world citizen dreams as I have been so lucky to have done.

I know there will be some who see me as nothing more than a hopeless idealist, a bleeding-heart progressive, a rather useless – or even dangerous – empathetic loser with utopian dreams in a dystopian world or some aging hippy still deluded by the drug-laden dreams of the 60s. That's fine. But I am much more engrossed in the others who will see the stories that follow as proof that we can all in our own ways be part of a human-wide movement all across the world; a movement that represents a massive quantum evolutionary leap from our world of bifurcated division to a world of unity, a world of modesty and simplicity, of universal dignity and a world that truly represents the best we can do, not just materially but socially, spiritually, ecologically and even mystically.

Such a dream, as with so many worthy ideas is far from original or new. Indeed, as Pankaj Mishra reminds us:

Socrates wasn't much interested in utilitarian knowledge: 'I have no concern at all for what most people are concerned about: financial affairs, administration of property, appointments to generalships, oratorical triumphs in public, magistracies, coalitions, political factions. I did not take this path...but rather one where I could do the most good to each one of you in particular, by persuading you to be less concerned with what you have than with what you are; so that you may make yourselves as excellent and as rational as possible'. For Socrates, to be rational and excellent was to know about moral choice, about choosing the good, and about knowing how to live. Knowledge lay not in concepts, but in virtue; and it was available to everyone since the capacity and desire for the good existed within all human beings. The philosopher merely alerted individuals to these inner possibilities, which they had to excavate on their own. For, as Socrates famously put it, 'an unexamined life is not worth living for man'.¹

I knew nothing of the views and barely even the existence of Socrates as I was evolving into the world citizen I am today, but I would excuse you for somehow accusing me of thinking I was somehow comparing myself to one of humanity's most advanced minds, for I most certainly am not. But as the following chapters will hopefully show, I have lived anything but an *unexamined life*. What you could say is that beyond examining my own life, I have examined the lives of millions of others, across the world, through my work in slums, war zones, disaster zones, with and in the

¹ Pankaj Mishra, *An End to Suffering: The Buddha in the World*, Picador, 2004, pp. 205-206.

UN, with national liberation movements, climate change threatened communities and so much more, my world citizen life has taught me countless things. None more so than the fact that all of us human beings matter, all of us are at our cores the same, and all of us need to shift our minds more and more into the direction of unity and cohesion, which ultimately will allow all of us to share the same citizenship and in the process preserve our planet for generations to come.

Accuse me of being a dreamer, sure. But one thing you cannot accuse me of, though, is naïveté about the shape of the world, what some call “human nature” or about our collective potential as currently 8.2 billion souls. I rarely use the word *literally* unless I have to, but in this case, I feel I need to say that I quite *literally* know people from everywhere and call people close friends from scores and scores of countries, and I think I now understand quite well what it is that makes people tick. I understand people’s and nation’s obsessions with power. I understand people’s materialistic desires and the utter power of greed. I get the collective delusion of so many that acquiring things and *doing* are, in their minds, somehow far superior to non-materialistic living and simply *being*. I know all there is to know about US efforts at global hegemony since 1945, that elements of the authoritarian Communist Party in China also seek to rule the world in their own image and that the US, their allies and virtually the entire rest of the world wants nothing less. I know that totalitarians, authoritarians, and dictators everywhere have personal flaws and egos so huge that there is no measurement device large enough to accurately calculate their true size, and that their paranoia of losing the power they have accrued terrifies them so much that they will stop at nothing and are willing to crush any and all dissent including killing,

rape, pillage and imprisonment. I know all about it. I've seen it, I've been to these places and I know that the human consequences of these are incredibly dire. So feel free to call me a dreamer, but be aware I am anything but naïve.

What I also know is that most people in most places most of the time are good and even sublime fellow humans, and thus I remain an optimist full of hope despite all the reasons not to be. I believe that the human race despite all of our flaws, is worth saving and that a world of dictatorship, climate destruction, mass poverty, *apartheid*, ethnic cleansing, disease, nationalism, out of control artificial intelligence and war is not the world I have in mind or want anyone to have to live in.

I want a world that is finally, for once, based on what we all in our hearts of hearts know to be true, a world where the humanity that we all share at our cores is what matters most. I want a world where we work hard to find ways to organize ourselves politically in recognition of this, and in the process build a world leading towards the emergence of a new global culture, a new global democracy and a new relationship with nature where levels of universal satisfaction, contentment and happiness reach levels never before seen. As world citizens we can do this. As nationals of fictional administrative units called nation-states, I know for certain we cannot.

It will doubtlessly be a long, and in some instances, a painful journey going from where we are today in 2025 and to where we need to be. But nonetheless it is a collective journey we all need to take if we are to have any hope of surviving as a species for thousands of years to come. It takes a lot for that plump and gooey caterpillar to turn into an exquisite butterfly, but isn't the transformation worth

it in the end? It took a lot to get the miracle that is humanity to the point we have reached today after 300,000 years, as well. So, yes, it will be challenging to many of us, and for some such an evolution will be resisted with all their might, displaced by thoughts that simply cannot be verified by science, history or any other discipline other than belief or faith.

But to the doubters among you, just stand back for a moment wherever you are, First World, Third World, global North or global South, and just imagine for a moment what life might be like as you get closer and closer to becoming the world citizen that exists within every human, but which lies dormant within all too many of us. Imagine not how it would make your life worse, present you with even greater challenges and lower the future prospects of your children. Rather, imagine how both the path towards your very own world citizenship and the end of the journey once you reach there might, in fact, be a process that makes your life so much more textured, rich, evolved, fun, expansive and just outright better.

Becoming a world citizen and living as one is not beyond your reach. It is a real, attainable goal, and when enough of us begin living this way, who knows just how bright the future for us all might become. Allow me to give a very brief glimpse of my reality living as I do as a world citizen as I write these words on a random day. Though I am primarily a human rights man, a political junkie of sorts of real-world developments all around the planet, much to the surprise of many who know me I also love watching sports and playing them as well. As a sports fan, I follow teams far beyond the borders of whatever country I happen to be living in at any given time. One day I might be cheering for the Netherlands in their never-ending quest to finally win the World Cup and then

next I might watch the LA Dodgers in their pale-blue stadium in Chavez Ravine (once home to a vibrant Latino community that was forcibly evicted and removed to free the land up for the stadium, alas) and perhaps even on the same day a few hours later I might catch a game of my Australian Rules football team, the Western Bulldogs, as they battle on snarling towards their third ever Grand Final victory. In a few months my University of Oregon Ducks will play their first football game of the season as will my USC Trojans and before we know it, it will be cricketing season again and I will watch several five-day long test matches between India and whichever team and cherish the incredible spin bowlers and the big batsman who seem to hit fours and sixes almost at will. The LA Lakers could have been better this season, but I still love watching them whenever I can.

I love all of these sports and all of these teams, and many others I haven't felt it necessary to mention, and yes, they span the globe. I feel intimately close to all these teams in different ways and do love it when they win and feel ever so briefly sad when they lose, and so I ask you: Is my life worse by being able to follow all of these sports and all these teams from all across the world, or is it better? Or is it perhaps more expansive, deeper, more engaging and in the process providing me ever more connections to our shared world? Is my life poorer for being able to watch a lot of these games with my friends in the very cities or countries where the games are being played, either in person or via a Zoom call or texting back and forth? As it happens, yesterday I was on Zoom with friends from five continents. Early morning California was on my screen. This was followed by Uruguay and then a few hours later northern Australia and then finally Bangladesh was on the line and then Germany as evening unfolded. Is my life worth less now that I

can watch Argentina play while my friend Pablo watches with me on Zoom from neighboring Uruguay? When I watch Brazil play with my São Paulo friend Nelson or my musician pal Pingo from Fortaleza, is my day augmented or made shallower? When I trash talk Oregon's opponents with other friends who attended West Coast schools like my old pal Doug who proudly went to Stanford, is my life enriched by knowing these people or made scarier by such engagements?

I could go on and talk about work relationships around the world, fellow music fans everywhere or my many other areas of interest, let alone my thousands of friends spread all across the face of our incredible planet, but hopefully the point is sufficiently clear. Yes, being a world citizen doesn't just mean one believes we are all united by our shared humanity on a common and very finite planet, but in the most practical terms possible, it means you get to know people from anywhere and everywhere. You get to be friends with people from every culture, every religion, every point of view and you get to expand the reach of your empathy and compassion. You get to enjoy everything that all the world's cultures and peoples can offer, be it food, music, traditions, art, fashion, design, architecture, history, and everything else. You don't get to merely read about these things in books, or watch them on TV or in films, but experience them firsthand together with people from that place wherever it may be. You can read about the delicious and historic wonders of hummus, or maybe even make some yourself at home or order it the next time you go to a Middle Eastern restaurant. But as great as those experiences will be, how do these compare to diving deep into a still warm plate of homemade hummus, sharing this culinary delight while sitting with your Palestinian friends trying to forget for at least a moment the ruthless occupation of

their land and their still yet to be achieved freedom in some small village somewhere in the West Bank?

And as these experiences grow, as your circles of friends and acquaintances expand, as your wisdom of people matures, as your knowledge of the world multiplies, so too does your understanding of your very own humanity, your very own short life, and your very own destiny in this world. You begin to realize perhaps that the most important bit of wisdom of all is simply that we need to banish one word from our lexicons in whatever language we speak, and this word is *them*. I'll repeat that: There is no *them*.

How can I possibly call my Chinese friends *them*? Or my Indian friends? Or my American friends? Or my Turkish friends? Or my Russian friends? Or my French friends? Or anyone? How could I possibly treat anyone, anywhere as *them*, as the stranger, the foreigner, the other? The simple answer is, of course, that I cannot, for there simply is no *them*. I may despise the things that certain people do and consider some of their acts as crimes against humanity or just abhorrently selfish behavior, but it is these deeds I hate, not the doer. I have seen so many people come to their senses after behaving horribly and once believing truly ridiculous things that I know within everyone, even the vilest among us, lies the path to redemption, atonement, and grace if we are only courageous enough to find it.

Looked at from another perspective, throughout my life, unable for years to satiate my adoration for the romantic, I have been lucky (or in some cases unlucky) enough to have been madly in love many times with people from all corners of the globe, an incredibly beautiful and diverse array of nationalities, ethnicities, classes, colors, religions, interests and all the other so-called differences

that keep so many of us apart and unable to banish the meaning of *them* from either lived life or even theory, but which for me played no role whatsoever. Before I decided to marry my wonderful wife of 30 years, I came close to marriage with several women from very different countries and despite a lot of trials and tribulations mixed in with the glee, feel far richer because of it.

In the end, I found myself with a wonderful family comprised of people who were born in three countries on three different continents. I learned long ago that relating to one another should have little or nothing to do with where we come from, for we all come from the same planet on which we all depend. At a very young age, I realized that all of us can, and should, love people from everywhere just as people from everywhere can also love us. We can all love everyone no matter in which culture they were born, which town they live in today or which religion they may or may not believe in. We are one human race, and love wherever it emerges is the same love that people everywhere have felt ever since we all emerged on the eastern side of the great African continent. There is no them. There is only us, all of us. None of us inherently better or worse than any other. If COVID-19 and the ever-worsening ravages of climate change have taught us anything, it is simply that we are all on the same boat, feeling the same threats, all of us universally vulnerable, but equally universally part of the solution to every crisis, and whichever new ones come next, for they certainly will.

Just before the first global pandemic in a century suddenly struck and spread like wildfire across the world, I was in one of my many global home cities away from home, and every day I walked for hours as I have hundreds of times before over the years through Bangkok's wonderful Lumpini Park as the sun rose, passing many

fellow walkers far older than me walking and even running slower than I was walking, passed by others younger and stronger than me. Beyond the speed of their exertions, were all these people I passed and those that passed me any different from me really? Were they anything other than fellow *homo sapiens* with whom we are all so lucky to share this life at this time? Everyone was kind, respectful, smiling and many joyous, as they are every day in that special part of a very big and noisy city. What does it matter if their passports say they are Thai or Indian or Chinese or Spanish? What does it matter if they are rich or poor or tall or short or whatever delusory so-called differences that we seem to have such difficulty transcending as a species? It matters not at all.

That they may have political beliefs different than mine, fine. That they may choose to eat more chili than me, no worries. That they may lean a little bit too much in the nationalistic direction; not so nice, but I understand. And yet, as much as this may be my way and perhaps your way of seeing the world, most of us still hold on to our nationalities, our citizenships and our countries as if this was the pinnacle of the human sense of belonging. People often still relate to the flags associated with these sentiments in very much the same way. As Tim Marshall reminds us:

Usually flags mean identity: they identify what people are. But by the same token, they also identify what they are not. This is why a national or religious flag can have such a hold on our imagination and passions. But the UN flag doesn't stand in opposition to an external enemy, which makes it more difficult for us to unite behind it. Perhaps we lack the imagination to see ourselves as one united entity with a common purpose and must wait until Mars attacks to truly understand that. But let's end with a more positive view. What we have, while waiting for our

*Red Planet cousins to visit, are, running the full length of the UN headquarters complex, the flags of the world's nation-states. They are lined up, one after the other - representations of the groupings of peoples in every internationally recognised state in the world. It is a visually clear and bold affirmation of our diversity in color, language, and culture, political and otherwise, and simultaneously a reminder that we can come together and that for all our flaws, and all our flags, we are one family.*²

He's very right that we are indeed one family, but how do we get there and what is life like when one has reached the point of seeing the world as one, living life as a world citizen on a planet where far too few are yet to live in such a manner? Differing points of view are as natural as the existence of life itself, so what really matters is not these comparatively subtle distinctions, none of which are permanent and thus all of which are pliable, but the broader and underlying bedrock of shared foundations, infinitely complex webs of our humanness that inextricably binds us all together to a common fate, on a common planet, dependent on a common ecosystem and increasingly common – albeit in its current formulation clearly non-sustainable – shared economy.

We share so much more than what we do not, and it is those similarities that this book is really all about. It is also what our future shared global polity must equally be all about if our beautiful species, capable of much more beauty than we can imagine, (and yes, capable too, of cruelties and brutality far too awful for mere words to describe), is to survive for thousands of peaceful, abundant and increasingly enlightened years to come. I hope with the many stories that follow to inspire you and everyone else that all

² Tim Marshall, *A Flag Worth Dying For: The Power and Politics of National Symbols*, Scribner, 2016, p. 271-272.

of us might have more fulfilling, more peaceful, more joyous and more rewarding lives were we to live as world citizens.

As will be outlined in the chapters below, it is hoped that readers will grasp rather effortlessly that my own journey of political evolution was comprised of features almost unfathomably *not* the foundations expected for my eventual emergence into a world citizen. And yet these led to my decades-long human rights adventures all across the world and served to constantly strengthen my embrace of world citizenship as a vehicle through which to build an ever-improving and ever more ethical world. For is this not the future we wish for the human race? Do we not all at our core wish for a sustainable, clean, regenerative planet, populated by kind, generous, loving and gentle people, mutually enlightening one another, together holding the hands of our species as one, meandering endlessly down the boundless road of experiences and delights and joys all of us today have immediate access to, but which so few of us even realize? To this quest, I dedicate not just this book, but also the rest of my sentient days on our extraordinary outpost in space, our shared, blue, green, life giving, and verdant home.

Scott Leckie, 19 July 2025

Part One

Becoming a World Citizen

I am not an Athenian or a Greek, but a citizen of the world.

— Socrates

Socrates was far ahead of his time. He had it right some 2,500 years ago when he became one of the first humans to publicly proclaim his allegiance not to a single place or a group of people linked to that place but to humanity and the planet as a whole. If I were to apply the reasoning of this early adopter of the world citizen credo to myself, I might say: Me too, Socrates, but with a modern twist or two. I am exclusively neither American (the citizenship given to me at birth but which I no longer hold), nor only Dutch or Australian (two citizenships I have acquired in a diverse life lived in multiple continents) nor any other nationality of the countless other nations I know and love, but a citizen of everywhere, a part of life on Earth, one element of the planet-wide human family. I am a citizen of the world.

But far more importantly we need to ask how did it come to this? How did I, surely one of the world's most *unlikely* world citizens during the early years of my life, end up embracing the entire human race as his own? As will hopefully become clear in the pages that follow, I can assure you if I can make this quantum leap, I guarantee anyone else can do so as well. World citizenship as an idea is – by its very nature – open to everyone, everywhere. Although it may seem more unrealistic now than ever, this book will reveal that the world may be closer than it seems to creating forms of citizenship that are far closer to *world* citizenship than many may imagine.

In a world of so much conflict, so much autocracy and so much inequality, how could such an opinion be true? In considering these questions, let us begin with a personal perspective on how and why I made the shift from a nationalistic young man into the ever-expanding embrace of world citizenship. Behind this monumental shift in outlook lie countless reasons, but perhaps it was the

seemingly endless series of near-death experiences or close shaves that I endured prior to making the shift to world citizenship that may have had the most impact of all. For me, for you, for everyone, life is full of close shaves. We've all had them. Some more than others, some less so, but each and every one of us have had moments in life where death, illness or harm were too close for comfort and much closer than we would have liked or planned.

I have had more than my fair share of close shaves, and these helped shape and form me into the world citizen I am today. They span six successive decades from the 1960s until the 2020s and deal with everything from three vicious dog maulings, being harassed by creepy Burmese soldiers and even creepier spies in civilian clothing, horrid disease after horrid disease almost beyond the capacity of language to describe and repeated moments when vital internal organs just decided to pack up, sneaking illegally and not too cleverly into East Germany in 1985 which I learned afterwards risked a multi-year prison sentence had I been caught, watching helplessly as my daughter was bitten by a deadly scorpion, cancer mysteriously disappearing from my wife's body after 111 terrible days, deciding at the last minute to not accept an invitation to Baghdad from the UN to discuss a legal paper I had just written for UN superstar Sérgio Vieira de Mello and tragically watching TV coverage in Bangkok of a bomb blast that tore apart the UN building in Baghdad on the very same day my paper was to be discussed and so many more. With a very full working life as a human rights advocate in more than 80 countries my own close shaves might be a bit more than most - just imagine all those flights that could have fallen from the sky (and imagine all those that nearly did...), let alone death and arrest threats, violent muggings, nearby bomb explosions far too close for comfort, countless slum

lurks, war zone wanderings and so on - but something we all share are those memorable moments in our lives when things could have gone horribly wrong with the result being the 'inevitable end' that the Doors front man Jim Morrison used to rant about, the bitter beginning of our shared fate of infinite impermanence.

There are those who wish these close shaves to be more intense, more frequent, more daunting. I am certainly not one of those, though I do often feel like an unwitting magnet for them. I am far from being a classic thrill seeker who base-jumps off the top of mountains or wishes to sail solo around the world, far from it. I love calmness more than frenzy, a full belly more than an empty one and quiet more than noise. But there's another side of me, as I'm sure there is within you, that seeks and enjoys the intensity of a risky moment, the uncertainty of an unfolding event, impossible to predict, when arriving in a place that has dominated the global news headlines because of the horrors that have occurred there, or just the simple joy of pushing oneself beyond our limits and making it through relatively unscathed.

When you choose a human rights career, even if you go more down the generally (but not always) safer legal pathway rather than the activist road, to be truly effective you simply have to go to where human rights are violated (usually with impunity, always by some of the worst people our species can conjure up) and work with people in situations where high risk is simply part of the equation, whether you like it or not. These moments of potential menace may induce a measure of fear or disquietude, but somehow you make it through much the wiser. As my great friend Reed Brody, the world-famous *Dictator Hunter* who was kind enough to write the foreword to this book always says "You're safe until you're not", and that really captures the essence not just of human rights work,

but life itself. For most of us, even the most vulnerable among us, most moments are at least relatively safe; maybe not comfortable, but safe from violence or damaging harm. The burglar or robber is not always there, the terrorist is usually very, very far away and even the putrid pollution reduces at night at least when the wind blows in the right direction. All of us are safe until we're not, and it's those moments of *not* that very often define both who we are and become, and also often what we remember most of our ever so finite days on Earth.

Indeed, it is far more likely that you - all of us - remember the rare, but ultra-joyful life highlight moments such as the day you became a parent, getting married, that first job or diploma, rather than the frequently mundane moments of life at work, washing the dishes after a less than glorious dinner or waking up too early, too often. But it is the standout *bad* moments, the painful times, and the scary instants on the edge that often stick within our minds. Even for those fellow humans for whom life is more deeply and constantly mired in the tribulations of human suffering, it will be the particularly poignant moments of anguish, these memorable close shaves that will remain and that will disproportionately shape who you are and what you may wish to become. Buddha's first Noble Truth, of course, says as much, when he contemplated that "All beings suffer." In many ways these events define at least a part of who you were, who you are and who you may become.

Without question I have been extremely fortunate, born of an array of privileges as a white, male, affluent American that has made my ride easier than many, though nearly 20 years of relative income poverty from the ages of 17-35 did certainly play a role in bringing me much closer to the global middle than would have otherwise been the case. My lived moments of serene happiness and