

# The Valley Breeze

## Woonsocket native Bob Riel advocates life sabbaticals

By **LOUISE TETREAU**  
*Living Editor*

WOONSOCKET - Woonsocket native Bob Riel wasn't thinking about writing a book. He just wanted to see the world, take a life sabbatical, with his wife, Lisa.

Their journey now has been turned into "Two Laps Around the World," Riel's self-published book about his and his wife's two separate trips and the life lessons and global rules they learned.

Riel, who lives in Tucson, Ariz., will talk about his travels and sign copies of his book on Tuesday, Aug. 21 at Ocean State Dance Academy, 73 Eddie Dowling Highway, North Smithfield, owned by his sister, Robin Galipeau.

In a phone interview, Riel said the idea of traveling around the world was always appealing to him. After working as a reporter for the *Woonsocket Call*, he joined Up With People, where he got a taste for world travel.



See **RIEL**, Page 19

# RIEL:

## *From Page One*

He returned to the United States to earn a master's degree in political science from Boston College, and took a job as manager of editorial services at Eaton Consulting Group, now known as Aperian Global. There, he wrote more than 70 training manuals about the business cultures of different countries and conducted cross-cultural trainings for business executives.

In 2001, Riel married Lisa and the couple took an extended trip to Europe.

"On our honeymoon we met an older couple who said that if travel is important to you, there's always a way," said Riel.

The couple spent the next year building their careers, but Riel said he was drawn into the idea of taking a sabbatical, a more common offering of the academic world where professors are encouraged to fulfill some goal. The idea is that the person returns re-invigorated and ready to share his or her newfound knowledge with students.

"I think everyone can benefit from taking a step back and looking at their lives," said Riel.

After some research, they

found they could take three months and decided to travel to non-Western countries. Their trip took them to Istanbul, Kenya, Thailand, China and Japan among other places.

"I wanted to have more personal experiences with other parts of the world," said Riel.

The idea was that the couple would return from their trip, buy a house, and have children.

"Two years later when the house wasn't bought and the kids hadn't arrived, we decided we should travel again," he said.

This time, the travel coincided with a move from the Boston area to Arizona, Lisa's home state. Before the move, they decided to put everything in storage and take four months to continue their eastern travels. That trip took them to Vietnam, Cambodia, India, Singapore, Egypt, Jordan and central Europe.

Riel said their travels did not follow the traditional tourist vistas but rather the everyday life of people in different countries.

In Thailand, Bob said his wife met a Japanese couple on a snorkeling boat. They spent time together and the couple invited them to visit them in Japan during a scheduled visit for the Riels. When

they arrived, sure enough, the couple took time out to show them Tokyo from a native perspective.

"People are friendlier than you think," said Riel. "The people in the Middle East are probably the friendliest."

He said a group of men in one Middle Eastern country got up from a table and urged the couple to sit there because it offered the best view.

Riel also said that their American citizenship has not been an issue as people, almost uniformly, have said that they aren't happy with the American government but love the American people.

The Riels won't be traveling at least for a little while. The couple is expecting their first child in a couple of months. Asked if the baby's arrival might curtail their travels, Riel said, "It'll be a different type of travel. No cheap hotels."

Riel's book, "Two Laps Around the World: Tales and Insights from a Life Sabbatical" is available on [amazon.com](http://amazon.com). The list price is \$20.95.