

Go away, Doc!

Dr. Mel Borins' most recent book may tell the tales of 30 years of travelling, but it's not really a travel book, he says. It's more of a health guide

By NIKKI McMANUS

A man for all seasons. The words aptly describe Toronto family practitioner Dr. Mel Borins—traveller, photographer, musician, author, lecturer and latter-day Robinson Crusoe.

Now this medical practitioner has documented his family's 30-year predilection for journeying to obscure places in his most recent book *Go Away: Just for the Health of it*. Its *raison d'être*, he points out, is not just to be another travel guide but to share with others his experiences and, particularly, his fascination with alternative medical practice. And it's full of personal anecdotes, tips and fascinating details of strange customs, remote peoples and what it's like to get down and dirty in some of the world's most obscure and inaccessible places.

The travel bug first bit Dr. Borins before his pre-med school days at the University of Toronto's faculty of medicine. Like many, he high-tailed it off to Europe, spending months on the road. His objective was simple—to experience, not just look at. Those months abroad helped set the stage although, over the next few years, he resigned himself to the rigours of medical school.

Travel dreams temporarily

shelved, he devoted himself to his studies, met and married wife Bonnie, but yearned for the day when he could close the doors of Toronto's East General Hospital, where he interned, behind him once and for all. "(I was) stooped, frail, round-shouldered and pasty ... exhausted physically and emotionally and 10 lbs. overweight," he recalls. The antidote? A 15-month world wide odyssey that became the portent of things to come. "On July 10, 1974 Bonnie and I packed up our apartment, said goodbye to relatives, friends, material possessions and responsibilities and (set off) to circle the globe," he relates. "It was a real eye-opening experience. We travelled all over the world and didn't have a bad thing happen to us for 15 months. Our only regret was coming home too soon."

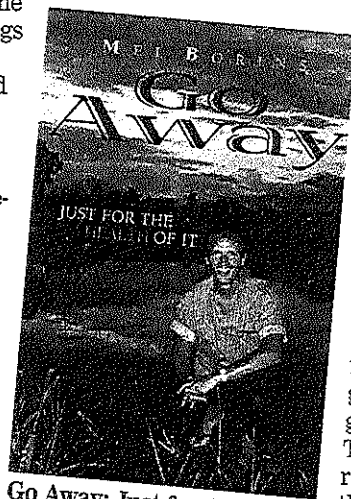
Their trips (and there've been many) read like an alphabet soup of romantic places and names—Afghanistan, Burma, China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia,

Goa, Nepal, Fiji, Thailand, New Zealand, Iran and Greece are just a smattering.

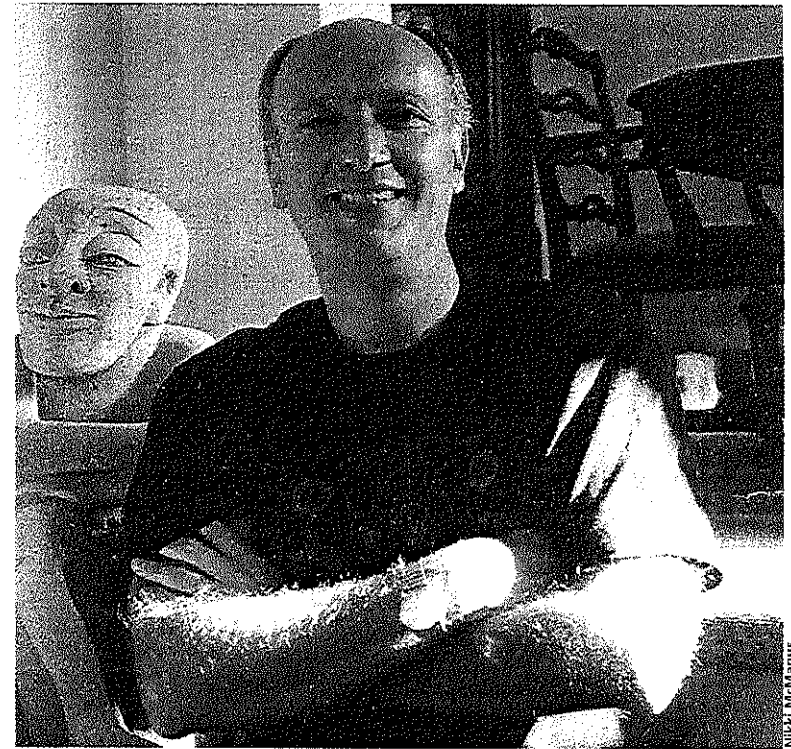
They've stayed with natives in isolated villages, camped down in grungy hotels and practically choked on exotic local delicacies like chicken's feet (Fiji), duck (beak and all in Bali) and pigs testicles (Taiwan). "So as not to insult people you don't want to object to what's put in front of you."

Nor are they without an occasional hair-raising experience. Ruefully, Dr. Borins tells the story of when the family, through a variety of mishaps, found itself flying in the belly of a ramshackle cargo plane that looked as if it was held together with chewing gum and string. They were bound for remote Irian Jaya, the other half of Papua New Guinea. "The plane was filled

with hundreds of burlap sacks, one on top of the other," he recalls. "The exit door didn't shut properly. The floor was covered in plywood, seats ripped out. And that magical invention—duct tape was used to



Go Away: Just for the Health of it, by Mel Borins.



Dr. Mel Borins with a stone carving from Bali.

hold (its inside parts) together." White-knuckled and shaking with fright, they finally landed on *terra firma*, swearing never to fly that particular airline again.

Dr. Borins attributes his first ventures into travel writing to the *Medical Post*. "Back in 1981, I was going on sabbatical and mentioned that to Derek Cassels, who was editor at the time. He got out 12 rolls of film and asked me to send an article from each place we visited." The rest is history—since then his travel features have appeared in the *Toronto Star*, the *Globe and Mail*, *Doctor's Review* and *Family* magazine.

These days the Borins family can't simply pack up and leave as they once did. Apart from the expense, it's more challenging to find a locum.

"I've always had locums to take over when I'm away," he points out. "I've been very lucky

to have had very good physicians who've looked after my patients. But now, because the government has put limitations on new doctors practising in Toronto, it's more difficult to arrange."

But such detail doesn't deter him from planning his next trip—set for July 2002. He and Bonnie will wing their way to their favourite spot—Bali in Indonesia. "Bali's a magical place for us," Dr. Borins notes wistfully. "It's our favourite. It keeps drawing us back. It's our paradise."

Go Away: Just for the Health of it will be available in bookstores this month. Copies can be ordered direct from Dr. Borins by sending a \$20 cheque c/o Wholistic Press, 27 Roncesvalles Ave., Suite 405, Toronto, Ont., M6R 3E5.

Nikki McManus is a Toronto writer.