

[Theme music: upbeat electronica plays in the background and then fades as coun]Katie speaks.]

Katie Axelson: Welcome to Have Hope; Will Travel, I'm your host Katie Axelson. Today I'm here with a new friend Janet Sandberg. Janet lives in Canada, she's married to an American, she's lived in the United States, in Germany, in Indonesia, and in China. She's had kids in two different countries, and she's here to help us understand a little bit what it's like to have an international family. Janet, welcome to the show.

Janet Sandberg: Thanks, happy to be here.

KA: I am so excited to get to hear what took you all around the world, so let's dive right in. What made you decide to travel?

JS: [Janet laughs.] I think, I think a lot of it had to do with hearing my dad's stories. He was in the Air Force and he was stationed in Germany for three years in the '60s and he just had so many stories.

KA: Sure.

JS: And he had this little container, I think it was actually a tobacco tin, that had money from all the different countries and as a kid I would like, pour it out on the floor and I would look at all the money and I just I think that's kind of what started it. And I got my first opportunity to live abroad right after I graduated from university, to go to Germany of all places.

KA: Cool!

JS: And be a nanny. And made friends from all over the world, from all different countries because all foreigners tend to congregate and hang out together and that's where I met my ex-husband who I then proceeded to travel the world more extensively.

KA: Yeah! And so where did you go after Germany?

JS: So after Germany I came back to Canada, and then went back to Germany. I think I actually did that twice - then came back to Canada again [Katie and Janet laugh.] and then went back to Germany again. And then we went to Indonesia. So we actually went to China before we got married.

KA: Okay.

JS: Yes. So I guess China was the first place other than Canada and Germany that I lived.

KA: Sure. And then -

JS: We were in Germany for - oh, sorry, we were in China for three months.

KA: Oh wow, okay.

JS: And then after we got married, we moved to Indonesia and we were there for three years.

KA: Okay. Did you just like, pick a fun place on the map? Or was there like legitimate reasons to be in those countries?

JS: Legit reasons! So my ex-husband worked for a big, multinational company so he just looked for job openings in different countries.

KA: Sure, cool! That's a good way to do it.

JS: And went where there was a job open.

KA: Perfect! And so you had kids, your kids were born, you said, in Indonesia and Germany.

JS: Correct.

KA: Can you help us contrast those experiences a little bit? Giving birth in two different countries?

JS: Yeah it was it was very, very different. A lot of friends who were having babies in Indonesia, they would really only let you stay there and give birth if you were - if it was a complication-free pregnancy. Like, if you had any issues at all, they would say, "You should go to Singapore."

KA: Oh, interesting.

JS: So my OBGYN was trained in England, so he had better schooling [Janet laughs.] which is why he worked with the foreigners and everything. So I felt I was under great care and like I said, they were very forward about their own healthcare system and were like "We think you should -" or, or a lot of people chose to go home also for identity purposes.

KA: Sure.

JS: Some countries wouldn't recognize nationalities if you were born abroad. So there was a lot of things to consider. We were able to just stay there, I'm like "This is where we live, this is what we're doing." And honestly, I was ill-prepared for having a baby.

KA: Okay! [Katie and Janet laugh.]

JS: Which is kind of annoying, because I had friends who had had babies there and they didn't warn me about a lot of things. My Indonesian wasn't great. I can speak enough to get by, but when things are crazy and you're in the delivery room and everybody's talking a mile a minute and there's twelve different people talking at the same time, and you know, we did prenatal classes in Indonesian so there was a lot of words we didn't know. Yeah and it was crazy. There's a lot of things that they do. So for example, one of the things that they are known for that nobody told me about was that sometimes the nurses will help you push.

KA: Okay...

JS: So they will come and like, up at the top of your belly and from the outside, they will push - try to push the baby.

KA: Is that effective?

JS: No!

KA: Okay. [Katie laughs.]

JS: No, it's not. I was bruised so badly. [Janet laughs.] And afterwards my friend goes, "Oh did

they help you push?" and I'm like, "You knew about this?! You could have warned me!" [Janet laughs.] So yeah, on the bright side there was no worries about getting the wrong baby at the hospital because we had a ginormous, bald, white baby [Katie laughs.] and all of the local babies you know, had this mop of dark, dark hair and were probably half the size of my guy. [Katie and Janet laugh.] Like, we know which one is mine.

KA: "Oh, I know that one!" [Janet laughs.] Interesting. I had never - first of all, I had never heard of external attempts at pushing but I had never really thought about that. I mean I speak other languages too, but you're right - it's not like a native speaker and there's so many words I don't know. Especially even as I think about birthing, like I would have no idea where to even start with words like that.

JS: Yeah yeah. It- was

KA: So what was it - oh, go ahead.

JS: It was pretty chaotic.

KA: I bet!

JS: But you know Indonesians love children. So once we had the baby, you know everywhere we went people were just loving on him, and you know, we could go out for dinner and the wait staff would just take him off and play in the corner, and [Janet laughs.] It was a - it was a neat experience in that sense, like they just love children so much there and that was a really nice thing to experience.

KA: Oh for sure. That was a new experience for me, over the last summer I had the opportunity to go to Uganda and one of the people on my team brought her eight week old baby with us. She said she wouldn't recommend doing that again but it worked out fine and you're right, like the locals will just like, pick up your baby and walk around or like if you need a "babysitter" for lack of a better term for a couple of hours. Like she was teaching trainings, and somebody was just out in the hall with the baby and it's totally fine.

JS: Yep.

KA: Which is very different than my experience in the US.

JS: Yes! And very different from my experience in Germany.

KA: Yes. What was the Germany experience like?

JS: Yeah, very - much less chaos. Also my German is sort of fluent, so language-wise was a lot easier. But just, you know, they're very - they like to plan things and everything is very structured so you know going in like: this will happen, this will happen, this will happen. If this doesn't happen, then this will happen. But they're also much less, at least in the part of the country where I lived, they're not really like, warm and fuzzy people. Umm, yeah. So we - we, I remember when we first went in she said, "Well how long -" So both of my births were induced, so they're very long. And she said, "Well how long was the first one?" And I told her, and she said "Well it won't be that long here." [Katie and Janet laugh.] And I was like, "Oh you can control that? Cool!"

KA: External pushing didn't help, so what other tricks do you got? [Janet laughs.]

JS: You know, and then yeah. It was just like - it was a very different experience. It was very efficient, as you would expect it to be.

KA: My family heritage is very German, so all of that is resonating deeply.

JS: Yes! [Janet laughs.] And Germans are not particularly child friendly so it was a very big adjustment for me to then have two little ones and living in a country where you know, we get on the street car and other people would just yell at me because my kid's feet were on the seat. And I'm like, "He's crawling up into the seat to sit down. Like, how do we not - how does he do that without putting his shoe on the seat?" You know? Like, he's two.

KA: Sure, right he's not big enough to just sit down.

JS: Yeah and people would tend to - people, you know, strangers would just come up to me and like, critique my parenting.

KA: Oh my gosh.

JS: And there's no help. You know, it's not like - like you said in Uganda or Indonesia where people just love babies, and they're like "Oh, let me go play with your baby!" That didn't happen. So I - I felt that lack of community.

KA; Sure.

JS: Like a lot, living there. I felt very much alone.

KA: What other differences have you noticed in the places that you lived culturally?

JS: Well also, just baby-wise and parenting-wise, between Indonesia and Germany - the amount of things that you can purchase, you know for your baby. In Indonesia you have nothing, you have like a changing pad that goes on the floor. And then coming back to North America was like a whole nother level of...

KA: Reverse culture shock?

JS: Yeah! All these things that are available and I'm like, "But you don't need any of them!" Because I - some of them yes, do make your life easier. A lot of them are just unnecessary. And I'm like, I had my kid in a third world country. You don't need it.

KA: You figure it out.

JS: You figure it out, exactly. So yeah there's like, there's so many differences on so many levels just all the time. And you know, the more you travel the more you just want to create your own little utopia!

KA: For real.

JS: Picking all the good things from all the cultures you've lived in and wanting it - which I've kind of done in my own life. You know, we do this thing because that's how they do it in this place and we do this thing because that's how they do it in that place. We have sort of created

our own little way of doing things, and I think you know, the way we exist in my home is a little bit like that.

KA: That's a cool way to do it, to pull the best from all the world. Because there are different parts of the world that have things that are way cooler than the way we do things here, or the way that they've been done historically. It's a good chance to learn and incorporate that into your own life.

JS: Yeah.

KA: What made you choose to live to raise kids abroad?

JS: We were living abroad and we had children. [Katie and Janet laugh.]

KA: Perfect!

JS: There wasn't a whole lot of thinking or planning.

KA: It wasn't an intentional choice of "I want my kids to grow up in a different culture," or something like that.

JS: No. No we were living abroad and we were like, you know that's just the time of our lives where we want to have a family so this is where we happen to be living right now, so this is what's going to happen.

KA: Sure. That's a cool way to do it.

JS: Yeah, and we actually moved from Indonesia back to Germany about six weeks before I had my daughter.

KA: Oh wow!

JS: So like yeah, not much thinking or planning involved. [Janet laughs.] Just kind of - just did stuff and it all worked out.

KA: And that's where it is.

JS: Yeah. And then of course I got to Germany and they were all like, "Well do you have a midwife booked?" And "Do you all of these things?" And I'm like, "No man. Do we have a place to live?" Like, no!

KA: Right! As long as they're not externally pushing, I think we'll be fine. [Janet laughs.] What are some things you've learned from traveling and living abroad with small children?

JS: Just to relax. So many parents are so high strung, and they want everything to happen a certain way and they want their kids to do things a certain way, they want their kids to have certain jobs when they grow up, or they want them to go to certain schools. And I think the biggest thing that I learned was just to let my kids be the people that they are, and allowed them to make their own decisions. Like obviously guide them! Mind - they're both grown now. So, you guide them and you give them support but they're their own people. And they've also obviously traveled a lot growing up, and it was really interesting to see how their perspective on the world is very different from kids their own age who have never traveled. Or have only gone to Florida.

Or you know, never left the country. They've done a little bit within the country but never gone anywhere else. And my kids would get very frustrated with these small-minded people and they're like, "But!" Even though my kids don't even necessarily remember the trips they went on when they were little, or the other countries they lived in, it still affected them. You know, it still helped them become who they are and just more open and creative and accepting of other people and other ways of doing things. I think that's probably the biggest, is that you know, you go to a different country and you see somebody doing something and you're like, "Well that's not the way we do it, it must be wrong," well no, but they all do it that way! They think the way we do it is wrong. And so you're just like, "Oh, it's just a different way of doing things." So I think that - that's the biggest gift of traveling.

KA: I bet. I've experienced that too. I've traveled – not quite as much as you have, but still I've traveled a fair amount – and you do see different things. And when your first reaction is to say "That's wrong," you're shutting down the conversation to be able to learn from someone else even if you're just learning by watching.

JS: Yeah. You know like, with going back to the babies in Indonesia, they feed their babies bananas like from very early on. And you know, we're all horrified because you're not supposed to give your baby solids until whatever, they're six months old – the number changes all the time – but "Whoa!" But they're fine. That's what works for them and their culture, because they have bananas they just pick from the trees.

KA: Right.

JS: That's what they have. And like I said, also because they're born with all of this hair, they have a ritual that at thirty days old they shave off the baby's hair so that it will come back in thicker and fuller. And I'm like, "My child has no hair. We obviously we don't have this ritual because at thirty days old there's no hair."

KA: There's nothing to shave.

JS: There's nothing to shave off! So it's just, it's eye opening to see and it's like: it's not wrong! And I'm thinking like, "Thicker and fuller? They already have thick, full hair!" But you know, for them it's still baby hair.

KA: Sure.

JS: So it's just yeah. There's just always surprises and and learning experiences.

KA: That's one of the beauties of traveling, is the surprises and the learning experiences and getting to see different things.

JS: They're not always good learning experiences. [Katie and Janet laugh.]

KA: You are right!

JS: The dysentery is never a good learning experience.

KA: No! No, no, no! [Janet laughs.] With your kids born in Indonesia and Germany, were they born citizens of those countries or how does that process work?

JS: No! So their father is from Belgium. I'm from Canada. So all four of us were born in different countries. The way that citizenship worked when my kids were born, they were automatically Belgian and Canadian citizens. Both countries allowed dual citizenship. Both countries allow citizenship to parents automatically, even if they were born abroad. In the meantime Canada has changed its rules, so that wouldn't work now. But they were not citizens of the countries they were born in. So in Indonesia, you have to have an Indonesian father to be Indonesian.

KA: Interesting.

JS: So yeah we have friends, you know dad's from England and mom's from Indonesia: the kids were in English. They were born, raised in Indonesia, lived there their whole lives, had to fight for Indonesian citizenship. I don't know whatever happened to that, but yeah. Like, that's their rule. In Germany you have to be born to German parents, even if you're born in Germany. And getting German citizenship is quite challenging. So yeah.

KA: Yeah.

JS: That didn't happen either.

KA: Yeah. And so you said Canada has since changed their rules. So if your children were born now, would they have just been born Belgian citizens?

JS: Yes in that sense. Yeah. Now you have to come back and be born in Canada. So I have other friends who are living, I think they were living in Africa, in Kenya at the time, and she had to fly back. And of course you have to fly back like six weeks before the baby's born.

KA: That's a hall.

JS: And camp out in Canada for several months, hope that hubby arrives in time for the baby, to time that well. But yeah, you have to be born in Canada to be a Canadian citizen.

KA: Interesting.

JS: Yeah.

KA: So as you've traveled and as you've lived in other countries, what advice do you have about getting to know the local culture where you are?

JS: Learn the language! That is super, super helpful. It also really gains you respect from the locals - especially like, less so in Europe because everyone just automatically speaks English. But if it's a country where people don't speak English or they don't want to practice their English all the time like in Asia, or South America, you know just respect the people and learn their language as much as you can. Even if it's just "please" and "thank you," or a few words here and there. I had friends that had lived in Indonesia for ten years and didn't speak the language. I lived there for a year and I was translating for them. And I'm like, "How?" Like, I just don't understand that sort of mentality. And then those people were also the ones who were always afraid of being mugged or being robbed or - and I'm like, "Yeah but if you speak the language and you make friends with your neighbors then they'll look out for you. And you won't have to worry about it." It's just that removal and that disrespect from "I'm in their country but I'm just

using them,” kind of a thing. That's how the locals see it. So yeah, just try to learn a few words. It depends on how long you're there for!

KA: Of course.

JS: But before you go, even if you're just there for a week on vacation, like learn a few basic words and talk to the locals, make friends with them, like have a chat on the bus, or...

[Katie and Janet speak at the same time.]

KA: Get to know the people.

JS: They're just people.

KA: Exactly!

JS: Exactly.

KA: I can't imagine living someplace long term without at least attempting to learn the language. Maybe that's judgmental of me to say, but like, I speak Spanish so I spent significant time in Latin America. That's all fine to me. I went to China for three weeks and I did take like a Chinese class crash course before I went. I was there to teach English so me not knowing Chinese is beneficial in that respect, but like there were so many times I'm trying to speak Spanish with the Chinese people and that's not working. [Janet laughs.] And I was like, “Oh my gosh, if I was here more than three weeks I would seriously invest in this because I'm sick of being frustrated that I can't communicate with anybody.”

JS: Yeah.

KA: So of the like, what'd you just say, twenty-five places you've been, twenty-five different countries, what are some of your highlights?

JS: Oh! I absolutely love England and Scotland which I think honestly is 'cause that's my heritage, like you got to go back several generations to get there, but you know I had my DNA done and I'm like ninety-seven percent British. Like, English, Irish, Scottish. So I think just being there just feels good, you know in my bones. Just beautiful. I love, I love a lot about Asia and Southeast Asia. I've been to Japan, China, Indonesia. Sadly not yet the Southeast Asian Peninsula, but someday I'll get there! I just, I think it's gorgeous, all of their you know, their art, their culture, dancing. Like it's - it's so rich, like all the colors and the shapes and yeah. I just love that. I don't know, there's just so many so many good places. I also really love Prague.

KA: Mmm, okay!

JS: Favorite European city for sure.

KA: Interesting. If somebody's listening and they're like, “I want to travel. I have this family with small children. I thought those two didn't work together. How do I make this work?” What advice do you have?

JS: Oh just do it. Like, there is no reason - and we had so many people who would be like, “Oh, I can't believe - you are so brave,” and I'm like, “But no!” Like, it's good for your children to see other things, experience different things, try other foods. We have a super picky eater, like my

son only eats about five things. We still traveled with him. You just make it work. The kids are fine on long flights, you know? Well they get used to it. But if you start them when they're little it's a lot easier as they get bigger.

KA: Sure.

JS: And yeah they may not remember it consciously when they get older, and I hear that a lot: "Well they're not going to remember it anyways." No, but it will be an experience for them, they will learn from it, they will - it'll be in there somewhere even if they can't.

KA: It'll still shape them.

JS: Yeah! Like - I loved traveling with my kids were little, and it makes you do different things too because you want to keep them happy. So you're seeing the places you're traveling to differently as well and having experiences that you wouldn't if you were just with a bunch of adults.

KA: Yeah. That's so valid. We experienced that in Uganda and then I've talked to other friends who've taken trips with their small children as well and they think differently, as you should! But you're not missing things, realistically. Your experiences are different, but they're not less than or anything like that.

JS: Exactly.

KA: You said that the UK is one of your favorites. I'm going to England for the first time this fall. I'm going to have twenty-four hours in London on a stop-over. Do you have any recommendations for things that I must do?

JS: Oh gosh! There's so much to do just in London! And London is huge. So bear that in mind. [Katie and Janet laugh.]

KA: Okay!

JS: But just the usual things like Buckingham Palace, Trafalgar Square, the Bridge, you know, the Tower. Like, all of those things are definitely worth doing.

KA: Are they? Good!

JS: Yeah, I mean I thought so. I've been several times. You know if you're a Harry Potter fan of course, you know go see Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$. There's always a mass of people there so it's not going to get to like it's just you and the sign. [Janet laughs.] There will be a lot of people there. We went out to - there's a Doctor Who Museum.

KA: Okay.

JS: It's like way out in Redding, it's an hour on the Underground. Like it's far but it was really cool. But again, I was traveling with my kids so that's where we went. I wouldn't have done that by myself, but I went and I was really glad that that we did that.

KA: Yeah. That's all great ideas. I have a list-

JS: And definitely stop in at a pub somewhere!

KA: Okay! Okay. Great!

JS: A lot of people don't like English food, I love English food. I think it's great, so like any sort of pub food is...

KA: Is yummy?

JS: Is yummy!

KA: I've heard to get your food takeout because it's taxed differently and it's less expensive that way and you then you get to see more of the time - more of the places, because I'll have a limited time, but I don't know. I'll have to see how I feel that day.

JS: Huh I've never heard that, but...

KA: Yeah. I don't know. I don't know if it's real, I just learned it from the internet. [Katie and Janet laugh.]

JS: It probably is. I mean, it wouldn't surprise me.

KA: I know doing the rest of the UK will be a future bucket list trip. I was like, "I can't do it all, but I've got twenty-four hours to make a layover somewhere in Europe and London seems like a good twenty-four hour spot." So I'm excited to do some of those things.

JS: Yeah. Yeah definitely. It'll be fun. Hopefully it won't rain!

KA: Hopefully! I'll bring an umbrella.

JS: It's the fall in London, so bring an umbrella.

KA: I will! Thank you so much for your advice, that's super helpful.

JS: No problem.

KA: What is something that you've learned recently?

JS: In general?

KA: Sure.

JS: Or travel related?

KA: It's one of our podcast questions that we like to ask everybody, just to hear what they're learning and what they're working on. Because the goal is always to learn new things, right?

JS: Yeah! I feel like I'm learning stuff everyday.

KA: Right?!

JS: I feel like I learned something really cool yesterday and now I can't think of what it was.

KA: Bummer!

JS: Yeah. That is disappointing. I'm going to have to start like, keeping a journal of like things I learned today.

KA: Right! That's my goal too: learn something new everyday. But then you get to the end of the day and you're like, "Oh I don't know," but then two weeks later you're like, "Oh I just learned this."

JS: Yeah, yeah. My son is very good at – sort of what everyone teases him – like meaningless trivia. But I learned so much from him about things that don't really mean anything!

KA: No, but are just fun to know!

JS: They're just fun facts! Yeah, so in that sense, if I did learn something from him recently it's likely dinosaur related.

KA: Okay.

JS: So he's twenty-three but he still loves dinosaurs.

KA: I was going to say, "I thought you said he was grown," but okay cool. No judgment here!
[Katie and Janet laugh.]

JS: And I also love dinosaurs so.

KA: Win-win!

JS: I'm like, the only person he can share his dinosaur facts with. [Katie and Janet continue laughing.]

KA: Perfect! What have I not asked you that you want to talk about yet?

JS: I don't know, you've hit on just about everything. I think the only thing I would add is that if you have a chance to go somewhere: go. Even if it's, you know, it doesn't have to be abroad. It doesn't have to be far. Even just if it's, you know, a road trip to the other side of the state, go! Do it. Explore, discover, see new things. It enriches your life in so many ways. So yeah.

KA: That's good. I live in Minnesota but I've applied for a couple jobs outside of Minnesota and while I don't know if anything's going to materialize, it's still giving me that moment to "Oh my gosh, if I'm leaving Minnesota, what am I want to do before I've left?" And they were all like: well I've been to North Dakota, but I've not been to South Dakota. When else am I going to come back to go to South Dakota? I should probably do that. I'm six hours from Winnipeg, like that's a weekend.

JS: You need to go to Wall!

KA: Yes, I've heard Wall is great. [Katie and Janet laugh.] Wall, South Dakota: everything the billboards said it would be.

JS: Yes!

KA: I'm only six hours from Winnipeg, like that's a weekend trip. Let's go!

JS: Oh yeah! Not in the winter!

KA: No, not in the winter! I want to see the Northern Lights! Like I've made this list of things. So I'm going to start accomplishing those things and be a tourist in my home – it's not my home state – but the state where I live before I leave, if I end up leaving in the near future.

JS: Yeah, yeah perfect. Everybody should do that.

KA: Right. Well Janet, thank you so much for your time today. Thank you for your advice. This has given me plenty of things to think about, especially as I think about someday having my own kids. Do I want to have them in the states or do I want to have them abroad? And all the different options to travel, both as an individual and potentially with a family someday. So thank you so much, this has been super helpful.

JS: Oh you're so welcome! Thanks for having me on.

KA: Absolutely

[Theme music: upbeat electronica plays in the background as Katie speaks.]

KA: As always, a big thanks for listening. I would like to hear more about what you learn from Janet: what you found valuable from her perspective, what challenged you, maybe what you disagreed with, or what you're going to do differently in your own life. Let me know over on Instagram, I'm at @KatieAxelson. If you want to do more digital traveling, maybe head to Episode {89} where we head to New Mexico with Carrie Miller or Episode {87} where we go to Canada with Kellina. Until I see you next my friend, know that you are loved, know that you are valuable, you are seen, you are heard... and that subscribe button is waiting for you! That is not how I intended to end that, but here we are! We'll see you again soon. Bye!

[Katie stops speaking and the theme music: upbeat electronica ends.]