

To Whom it May Concern,

I had no idea what to expect when I received a school email announcing Denis' visit in conjunction with the screening of his film *In the Footsteps of Marco Polo*. As a parent, I often find it challenging to prioritize obligations and invitations, especially those held on weekday evenings. Little did I know what was in store for all of us who attended the unforgettable parents' evening with Denis and the 6th grade students who had the opportunity to view the film and participate in an extended conversation with him earlier that day. My husband and I can say without hesitation that the evening with Denis was the most memorable speaker event we have attended during the course of our children's elementary school education. I know that my children share this assessment.

Denis is a talented filmmaker and he proved to be an equally talented teacher. My children came home from their visit with Denis inspired by his stories and his powerful messages. Denis provided a vivid, age appropriate history lesson that helped put the modern day globe into focus for the children. He challenged the students to question their assumptions about various world cultures. He offered insight on nations that the kids only hear about in context of the evening news. Denis also spoke to the children about the power of perseverance and friendship. The kids could not quite believe that two grown ups had dreamt up this courageous adventure to retrace Marco Polo's journey and had actually followed through with their idea, despite the risk involved, the time it required and the lack of guarantee about the end result. Denis completely engaged his young audience and instilled within them a newfound curiosity about the world around them and an appreciation of what it means to realize one's dream.

The parents' evening was an equally remarkable experience. The film was visually stunning, provocative and eye opening. And yet the film proved to be just an introduction to the dynamic, memorable conversation with Denis that followed. As Denis started answering the audience's questions, it quickly became clear that we were in the presence of an exceptional speaker and storyteller. The anecdotes he shared with us about the making of the film were as entertaining as the film itself and revealed the nuances of Denis' experiences. Each question from the audience seemed to invite the next, and introduce another fascinating dimension of his story. No one wanted to the evening to end – how rare is that for most of us to say?

Parents and administrators alike are in constant search of the gifted teacher who can create electricity in a classroom, and can inspire a group of students to think outside the box. We all wish for our children to come in contact with the teacher who can model how to use one's imagination and intellect to turn one's dreams into reality. We all know how rare it is to encounter that kind of teacher and Denis is one of them.

What a true gift it was to spend the evening with Denis. I cannot recommend him highly enough to any teaching establishment.

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