

Dear Denis-

I just had the most serendipitous evening as I came across your amazing film on PBS and was on the edge of my seat for the rest of the evening. Marco Polo has excited my imagination since grade school. I decided, in 1994, to embrace my inner explorer at the age of 34, selling everything I owned to travel around the world, by myself, and attempting to travel through areas explored by Marco Polo...I spent a year, roaming the world, opening myself up to adventure and trusting that the people of the world would care for me - I marveled at how open and generous and kind people were every day. I never suffered misfortune through the entire year of travel, with the exception of contracting nasty parasites a few times. That trip changed the entire trajectory of my life - I returned home and applied for the Peace Corps. They assigned me to a country I'd wanted to see during my round the world trek but for which I could not get a visa - Uzbekistan. Seeing the Silk route cities of Samarkand and Bukhara and living with the Uzbek people, hearing about the history of Genghis Khan and Uleg Bek - it was a time I cherish and I hold the Central Asian countries and their many peoples close to my heart - they get a bit of a bad wrap in Western media.

I'm a teacher now, and the travels I have had around the world still inspire me every day in the classroom. I teach at an all-girls high school and I share my stories with my girls every chance I get, letting them know that travel, stepping outside their comfort zone, embracing their dreams will open up their lives in ways they cannot imagine. Having watched your film this evening, I am newly inspired to keep traveling any chance I get and to continue to inspire adventure in my students. Like you and Francis, I fell in love with the world - I found levels of generosity that I could not have imagined among people who had nothing, but who gave everything - I was reminded again of how humbling it is to walk with, talk with, eat with and laugh with the people of this earth - thank you for this wonderful reminder. What a gift! Your journey will now become a part of my story telling in my class - thank you for memorializing it in such a wonderful way - it just sent chills!

Cheers to you and happy traveling!

Theresa Padden
San Francisco