

Born in 1974

Now that I am learning more and more how to shape my own life, I realize that the baby I was definitely showed some characteristics of who I would become. I would grow up to be a dreamer, an adventurer and a thinker. As there are choices to be made in one's life, I left school at the age of 19 and decided to study film. The turbulence that entered my life made me decide to try out another direction. After a short period of philosophy studies, certain thoughts began to be important. I started working as an international truck driver. It gave me the opportunity to travel over the world a lot. Gradually, but not without difficulty, I realized that this decision was not bad at all. Not wanting to learn from books any more, I left the academic world for what it was, and is, and started learning about life from all I encountered and was confronted with. Not that I do not take the academic world seriously; on the contrary, but there is a difference between learning from books, and learning from life, and it is an important one!

On my first trip through Europe, one particular encounter in Paris made me realize that life sometimes isn't what it seems to be. I was sitting on the square in front of Centre Pompidou, when one of my bags got stolen. An African homeless man helped me to retrieve it, because he vaguely knew the guy who had stolen it. I decided to stay with him for a few days, living the life of a homeless person in Paris. His story was different than what you would expect when you see such a person roaming the streets. He was an Ethiopian studying in France, and during summer vacation he did not return to his country. He'd rather stay on the streets for a few months. It was an encounter that gave me the opportunity to have a small inside look at his life. In a short period of time, a kind of friendship I'd never had before was built. It was one of the encounters in my life that made me realize that there really is a lot more to learn about life than the things you can learn from books.

Many travels followed, at first through Latin America. Cuba, built on its specific political ideals, showed me a world of successes and failures. Although very poor, and quite restricted in expression of ideas and movement, all Cubans have sufficient

food, and the possibility to study, which makes it the only “underdeveloped” country in the world where illiteracy is almost zero. There, I've met people who were happy with what they had, and very warm and helpful in their interactions with me.

On a trekking trip in Peru, I got really sick in the stomach once. Trying to find a place to rest, I ended up in the middle of almost nowhere, with only a few farms nearby. Driven by feelings of empathy, and probably also loneliness, an old woman took me in her simple home. My room was an old small stable in which I could set up my modern lightweight tent. She treated my illness with chicken soup and coca tea. After two days I found back my strength and I left her. I had never been able to talk to her because I couldn't speak Quechua. Many encounters in my travels taught me that life shows its beautiful and ugly faces in many more ways than I could have ever imagined if I would never have travelled.

One encounter in one of my earliest trips through Europe had a huge impact on me. Together with a friend, I hitch-hiked from Italy back to Belgium. One of the towns along the way where we decided to stay for a while was Avignon, during the summer theatre festival. We ended up in a very cheap camp ground where a lot of street artists and beggars stayed. There, I met a British ex-marine officer with whom I had a few long talks. His main possessions were a tent, a sleeping bag and a bunch of books. He told me that when he divorced his wife, his whole family had turned against him. He had always tried to be a good example of what a man in an upper class English society should be, but when the situation in his family went bad, he became socially isolated. He did not want to cope with it any more, so he decided to leave everything behind and started a life on the streets, roaming around. And so, that's how I met him. What is it that makes the life of a man an accepted, fulfilling and happy one? Such an encounter confronts you with all that you take for granted, if you open yourself up to it.

In September 2001, I returned from a six-month trip through India. I was sitting on the couch at home, when I turned on the television. The live footage of the 9/11 attack entered the room. Having obtained some knowledge about OECD reports

dealing with the subject of the ageing, developed societies, I began to think about what the future might have in store for our world. The need to express my thoughts made me decide to make a film concerning these problems. The project turned out to be too huge for me to realize. In my opinion, everything influences everything. Because of these ideas of interconnectivity, the content took an enormous form. I still think that everything influences everything. It means that to have a sharp view of the future, you have to take as much as possible into consideration. So, with a certain amount of disappointment I dropped the idea, although I stayed eager to keep on learning more. The seed of my passion of picking up a camera and going out to film was planted.

Almost two years of work seemed to have been in vain. They were not. Many of the ideas that took form during that period are taken into this present project, a project done in complete independence!