

## **Impressions of Paul, Brigitta & a Circumnavigation Tour Stop**

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The unique SUV parked across our stream immediately caught my attention and I knew some interesting people must be driving it. As I watched its roof pop-up from our bedroom window, I knew a “hello” was in order. In the seven years living in a remote Himalayan Valley, my wife Kamla, and I had never seen a camping vehicle quite like it. In fact, we’d never seen any camping or recreational vehicle, RVs as we call them in the US, in our travels in India.

We walked across the bridge from our house and introduced ourselves, thinking also to alert them that vehicles might disrupt the table and chairs Paul was setting in the middle of new road that was in the process of being built. Paul’s bright smile was quite open and we chatted for a bit, not expecting the next few days would be spent enjoying each others company. We learned about their arrival in India just a week or so before coming through Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. I thought that was pretty risky and wondered how they fared. Kamla invited them to come by for late afternoon chai to tell us more. As walked back to our home, I remarked how they must be a daring couple to drive through such unstable and dangerous countries.

Paul and Brigitta (P & B) not only came by for chai, but we spent the next three days learning of their remarkable five-year Circumnavigation Tour through more than forty countries and the three years left that they were still planning to see a good chunk of our Home Planet. As Paul and I were the same age, and from different countries, it also turned out we had a lot in common with shared values and vision. This further cemented our friendship and we ended up talking for hours and hours about numerous topics, from history, politics, religion, cultures; about the world and where it might be heading in these tumultuous times.

Kamla and I were also extremely impressed with Brigitta and the enthusiasm and sense of adventure she had to leave a comfortable Swiss middle-class life and profession to join her husband on this incredible journey. We could not imagine ourselves spending that much time in such close quarters, especially when we heard that they spent three weeks in the Amazon in a huge rainstorm, virtually trapped in the 70 square feet they called home! That was a sign of their great equanimity with each other and the rare ability of a couple to share everything!!

We went for a few long hikes in our pristine old deodar (cedar), oak, and Horse chestnut forest and then sat around eating fresh organic salads from our garden and especially drinking strong Espresso coffee (with the pot brought from California), which was a rare treat for them. The story of their journey, to date, is best told by them and one can only marvel at the red lines on the map of the world that outlines their travels. They plan to write a book when the traveling ends, three years from now, and we can only hope they succeed for it will be quite a tale.

What I’d like to share is another level and impression of these modern explorers (Marko Paulo, I call him), which is more a remarkable feat for two successful Swiss professionals dropping out and setting sail in their land boat, *Mahangu*. The pressures of modern life, especially with the 24/7 demands of our digital, social networked life are both exciting and enslaving. As they say: *even when you win the rat race, you’re still a rat*. Not only did Paul (at 66) and Brigitta (at 48)

chuck it all for a four-wheel drive magic carpet tour powered by diesel fuel, but they offer all of us another image of what is possible when you live life fulfilling your dreams.

Today, most dreams are manufactured by other forces: branding us with the rewards that we think have value (from home, to car, to clothes, to job, to even packaged tours selling “adventure”). The dream weavers of Hollywood and international ad agencies are all pushing global corporate products and seductive, illusory lifestyles into every country on this planet through satellite TV and multimedia cell/mobile phone connectivity. In a world where excessive consumption is threatening the sustainability of our Earth for human life and ecological biodiversity, with global warming impacts having commenced, P & B offer an incredibly scaled-down version of life. They are applying the philosophy that the great alternative economist, E.F. Schumacher called *small is beautiful*.

Granted few can do what P & B have accomplished these last five years (check out their website, Brigitta’s wonderful photos, and the maps). But they also offer a deeper message and symbol in their journey. Perhaps it’s even one that they are even not fully aware of: a spiritual dimension of being here now and living in the absolute moment not quite knowing what the next curve in the road might bring or where to spend the night. This takes a courage and trust that most of us never will experience in such a sustained, daily, yearly life of unknowing adventure. But in fact, that is what all of us face, if we truly allow ourselves to feel the ultimate human truth: *tomorrow is promised to no one*. P & B know the deep truth of *being here now* (as the American mystic, Ram Das called it). Furthermore their open, smiling, attitude when meeting strangers from so many different, even alien cultures, is an expression of great trust in the positive commonality that binds us all as human beings.

Their circumnavigation of the globe is not only a physical trip over bumpy trails and paved super highways, forging streams or crossing gleaming steel bridges, it is an inner journey than lets us understand who we are in the timeless moments of our essential being. As the Italian poet, Cesare Pavese (1908-1950) said:

*Traveling...forces you to trust strangers and to lose sight of all that familiar comfort of home and friends. You are constantly off balance. Nothing is yours except the essential things – air, sleep, dreams, the sea, the sky – all things tending towards the eternal or what we imagine of it.*