

Dear Journey Freewheeling



Manas Dewan

Humorous, Turbulent and Inspiring Memoirs
of a Road Trip Across 18 Countries

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Prologue: An Ancient Prayer

I was born and raised in the small town of Guwahati, in the north-eastern corner of India. The only world I knew back in those days was home, my little brother and parents. It was on my eighth birthday when I got a very special gift: 'The Illustrated Book of Fairy Tales'. Thick, heavy and colourful, within this book were hundreds of stories—other worlds waiting to be discovered. As an eight-year-old, it was indeed a struggle to carry it from place to place—but I was absolutely inseparable from my first book.

You see, I had known all along there was magic—but now I finally got the keys to magical kingdoms. Over the next few years, each night I would make new friends; kings and princesses, gnomes and elves, fairies and unicorns—and all sorts of fantastic creatures. I knew the dragons intimately, understood giants well and despite my fear, I studied closely the ways of sorcerers and witches who capture little children and imprison helpless people. Many a night

Prologue

I jumped around in silent celebration when the evil folks were subdued by my heroes—the heroes who travelled across far lands, whose adventures I knew in every detail.

Together with my friends—the birds, animals and beasts from various kingdoms, I went on amazing journeys. I travelled on horseback and deciphered cryptic messages, I learnt about truth and beauty, friendship and honour—but above all, I realised that the world of magic and adventure opens up only to those who seek it. Often at night, they would whisper in my dreams: “Magic needs to be pursued.”

I had just finished reading yet another beautiful story when I looked around—the world was asleep, the stars hung low and bright and the trees made mysterious silhouettes. It was a night of beauty and magic—and I could hold back no longer. My tiny heart beat like a drum and I suppressed a silent shiver, but gathered my courage and made a small prayer: “Someday, when I grow up I want to go on my own adventure. Travel far lands—make new friends—and learn about magic and beauty.” That was indeed a night of magic: because the stars had heard my secret prayer. Thus, on a bright starry night, my wish was born.

It took nearly 35 years since that magical night, for my wish to come true... but I did live this fairy tale. I travelled far lands, made new friends and learnt about magic and beauty... the long road did call out to me.



Chasing the Distant Horizon

I was your regular corporate guy—working a regular job, playing hide-and-seek with bosses and colleagues and working towards the proverbial pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. We were in Oman in the capital city of Muscat where I was on assignment. Anu (my wife) and I would go off on annual vacations—a few days to breathe free, away from the rat-race. Upon our return, we would dive headlong into the game of life again—and try to keep ahead of the pack. Then came the New Year and carried us along its current. The world was a whirl—and soon another month passed.

Winters at Muscat were beautiful. There was a nip in the air and that evening, the moon hung sullen and low in the night sky. Anu and I stepped out of our villa onto the beach. I had recently completed 20 years of working life—and what did I have to show for it? Endless hours and late nights did not count. A few good friends collated

over the years of course did. A modest bank balance also offered some sense of relief... but what rankled was that our dreams were still far from being realised.

We both harboured dreams of distant horizons—of exploring this big bright beautiful world, of experiencing nature in the raw and of bonding with fellow humans across the planet. But reality spoke a different language—and it was not very tolerant towards such dreams. “Are we going to die one day, without ever making any serious attempt at realising our dreams?” I ruminated... and Anu replied, “Sometimes, life throws a golden cage at you. Stay in it long enough and you will soon forget your dreams.” That was the moment of reckoning.

We walked in silence—but our wanderlust dreams that lay dormant all these years, now regained its hold upon us. It spoke when we looked into the far horizons, it enticed us with visions of distant lands and mysterious smiles of strangers. Should we live an old age of regret knowing well we did not chase our dream: or should we take a plunge and live the life we so dearly longed for?

Our dream called upon us to give up everything we held dear: a stable life, our carefully-hoarded savings, a promising career... everything that we had worked towards these past years: and all for the sake of satisfying our gypsy dreams. They say—beware of the eyes of the dragon: if

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you stare at it too long, its fire will engulf your soul.

A few weeks since that fateful evening, we boarded a flight for Mumbai. Anu and I peered out of the window as the aircraft turned a circle over our home beach at Muscat. From the air, we looked at our little villa by the sea. Perhaps our friends would be down by the beach now. I watched the tall minarets as we flew over Muscat for the last time, soon there would be the call for prayer—when the gentle Omani folks would huddle in the neighbourhood



Manas and Anu, ready to embark on the adventure of their lives

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mosques. I remembered our lonely nights in the deserts of Oman, the snows upon the Jebel Akhdar mountains, the windy beaches of Sur and the desolate salt flats that stretched endlessly. "Goodbye Oman. You will always have a piece of my heart," I whispered.

The die was cast: we had put a pause to life as we knew it—now we were headed back to India to prepare for our gypsy dreams. Anu and I were going to get us a motorbike and ride—across countries and continents. We would explore new horizons, make new friends and learn lessons from the Book of Life. It was time to script our very own story.

Years ago, I had made a wish upon a falling star... now that wish was near!

