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The Road East to India

Diary of a Journey of a Lifetime

Written by Devika A. Rosamund

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The Road East to India

Diary of a Journey of a Lifetime

Devika. A. Rosamund



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Dedicated to all those of an adventurous spirit who are ready to risk everything to go into the unknown.

“India has been for centuries the symbol of the inner journey. It is not just a political entity – it is a spiritual phenomenon. As far back as we know, people have been coming to India from all over the world in search of themselves. Something is in the very climate, something is in the very vibe, that helps.”

The Rebellious Spirit, Ch 15, by Osho

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Preface

This is the authentic diary that I wrote in 1975 and 1976 as a twenty-two-year-old girl travelling alone overland from England to India. I started my journey in Amsterdam – where I worked for a few months – and there boarded the famous ‘Magic Bus’, as it was called in that era. I travelled as far as Iran on the bus and then continued my journey alone on local transport through Afghanistan and Pakistan until I reached India. I travelled all around India.

Nowadays it is sadly not possible to travel this route overland through so many countries anymore, because of the many political upheavals and disputes in the last thirty-five years. In those days it was the dream of many young travellers to make this journey overland and many of us were students. I went through these countries to make friends with the people, not to make war, as so many governments did afterwards. Everywhere I went, with very few exceptions, I was treated with friendliness and kindness by the local people.

My journey was also a spiritual quest, as it was for many of the people that I met on my travels. I am publishing my diary with the hope that it will inspire others to go on a journey both inner and outer, and explore this beautiful world and also their own world within.

Chapter One

First Stop – Amsterdam

Kent, England

Thursday, 7th August 1975

Ever since I was eleven years old I have known that I am going to travel to India and that I am going to find something there – something that will enrich my soul. I don't know what it is yet.

Recently I saw a television documentary about a place in Amsterdam in Holland called 'Cosmos' where yoga and meditation are taught. I am going to go to Amsterdam, work in any job I can find, and try to learn yoga and meditation in the evenings. There is a bus that goes regularly overland to India from Amsterdam. It takes six weeks to get there and journeys through many countries. It is famously called the 'Magic Bus'! If I manage to save enough money in Amsterdam, perhaps by next spring, I plan to get on that bus and go on my journey of a lifetime.

I have just finished a year of teaching in a primary school in the south of England. It was my first year of teaching after college. I loved the job and the children, but now I yearn for adventure. Now I want to travel the world and be free and experience new things. I want to live every day spontaneously and see what life brings to me.

The other night while I was lying in bed, I felt as though my spirit broke free from my body and touched the heights of Heaven. I was filled with a limitless peace and joy and love of all beings. It was so wonderful. I sat up in bed and looked in the dark at my body to see if I was still alive. I thought perhaps I had died and gone to Heaven! If Heaven is like that then I think I should never, ever be afraid to die. I shall not be afraid to travel the world no matter how dangerous it might seem.

Tomorrow I am going to enquire about the ferry that takes passengers over to Holland. I'm going to start the journey soon.

Amsterdam, Holland

Sunday, 7th September 1975

Yesterday I got off the boat and now I am here in the heart of Amsterdam. I can hardly believe it. A friend of mine called Pat who shared a house with me and some others when I was teaching, decided to come with me. We just checked into the first place we found when we arrived in this city. It is a rather crummy hostel – however it is a place to sleep! I have decided I don't want to travel like a wealthy tourist. It is much more of an adventure to travel cheaply and take what comes from day to day.

I went to the Van Gogh museum with a girl we met in the English Pub last night. Pat went with Jim to see a houseboat which we might rent on one of the canals. Jim is an Irishman we met on the boat from England to Vlissingen. We made friends with some other people coming across on the boat too. We have all been out looking for jobs.

Wednesday, 17th September 1975

I am feeling more settled now that I have been here for a while. We have moved into the big youth hostel in the centre of town. It is much nicer than the other hostel where we stayed at first. We are still waiting for the chance to move into the houseboat – that will be fun.

Each day feels like a fresh, open page ready for me to write on as I please. I feel more free than I have ever felt, yet I realise that it was only my state of mind when I felt tied down before. Life is always like an empty book that we can write on as we please if only we realise it.

I have obtained a job as a chambermaid at the Marriot Hotel in the centre of Amsterdam, and the hostel where we are staying is just around the corner. I want to do ordinary jobs now. My whole life has been just school and college, and then school again as a teacher. It is wonderful to let it all go for a while and take any job that comes my way. I want to have new experiences.

I am meeting so many people from different countries every day, both working in the hotel and staying in the hostel. Amsterdam is very international. None of the maids are Dutch – there are girls from Australia, Sweden, Poland, Italy and Portugal. It is a lot of fun but quite hard work.

I was thinking of staying here for a few weeks and then travelling on somewhere else for a while – perhaps to the south of France to pick grapes. There is an advert for that in the hostel. There is a yearning inside of me to keep on travelling. However, my friend Pat wants to stay here longer. At least we are earning good money here – almost twice as much as I was earning as a qualified teacher in England – the wages are so much higher here on the continent these days!

Pat and I had a couple of days off work and travelled north to the Dutch islands and visited Edam, Van Helder and Texel. Most of the way we hitch-hiked and met some interesting people. We stayed in the most beautiful house in Edam right by the canal. The houses look like dolls' houses – all shapes and sizes.

Saturday, 20th September 1975

I am sitting in Vondel Park which is close by our youth hostel. It is a beautiful park with many trees and is very peaceful here. Amsterdam is such a beautiful city but I wanted to be amongst nature so I decided to come for a walk after work. I don't want to write much – just to look at the beauty in the nature around me.

Tuesday, 23rd September 1975

This week we had two days off work again and went to Madurodam, the miniature model village which is near The Hague. It is beautiful, and shows important and picturesque buildings in Holland. We also went around the porcelain factory in Delft and saw a demonstration of the painting of the china. This is something I have always desired to do and I enquired about working there but they have no vacancies at the moment. However, we were told that we could do an apprenticeship there for six months if we liked. I would enjoy doing that but I am too restless to stay here for that long. I want to carry on travelling.

Wednesday, 24th September 1975

I love the numerous windmills that we see on our journeys around Holland. The canals in Amsterdam are full of houseboats and the buildings next to the canals are very picturesque. The houses there are tall and narrow and many of them were built in the 1600's. Amsterdam is such a small city that you can almost walk from one end to the other. I like it so much better than London.

Wednesday, 15th October 1975

The weather is getting colder. It even snowed on Monday morning. It was my day off and I was waiting in the queue to go on a tour of a brewery in Amsterdam with a group of friends from the hostel, Canadians and Australians. It was a strange experience to see snow in October. I enjoyed going to the brewery in spite of the cold wait. After a short tour of it we were led into a hall with tables and everyone sat around and drank beer – as much as they could drink in an hour! It was quite good fun and everyone was very merry afterwards. I had three beers and felt quite drunk as I am not used to drinking beer at all. I could barely walk home straight afterwards!

Sunday, 19th October 1975

I have now the best room in the hostel! Manfred, one of the wardens in the hostel reserved a two bedded room for Pat and me. He left red roses for me in the room with a note asking me out for dinner.

Wednesday, 22nd October 1975

This is a fairy-tale world – or so I felt yesterday as I wandered through the trees in Vondel Park again, amongst the autumn colours in the early morning. How beautiful it looks with the leaves changing colour all around me and lying like a carpet spread out upon the grass. So many delicate, feathery leaves like patterns around my feet and above my head as I looked up into the branches. I sat in meditation and gazed at the trees.

All the patterns of the leaves of each tree are the same; all of the same design, so perfectly symmetrical and yet not too perfect – that is what makes them so beautiful, I think, because they are the same and yet still all different. Each one is unique, as though they were cut out with nail scissors from the same pattern by someone who was not compulsive or obsessive – who did not worry if one leaf was slightly more pointed or more rounded than another. Neurotic exactness is not a characteristic of nature, of the mind of God – that is the perfection of it.

Friday, 24th October 1975

The other evening I had an interesting conversation with a Canadian guy at the bar about the ‘Mind Dynamics’ course he went on, and also about meditation because he saw that I was reading a book about meditation – *The Inner Reality* by Dr. Paul Brunton. I always bring my books down to the bar with me to read. I read an article recently which quoted a paragraph from a book called *The Shoes of the Fisherman* by Morris West. The quotation is very beautiful – I am going to paraphrase it here:

Morris West says that it costs so much to be a whole

human being that only very few have the enlightenment or the courage to pay the price. He says one has to abandon utterly the search for security. One has to be prepared to risk, and embrace life and the world with both arms like a lover. One has to be prepared to accept pain as a condition of existence and be open to doubt and darkness as the cost of knowing.

I love the idea of embracing life like a lover and abandoning the search for security. It does take courage to live life like that.

One of the books I am reading at the moment is 'The Primal Scream' by Arthur Janov Ph.D. which is about releasing repressed memories from childhood. It is very interesting.

I am writing this while waiting in the police station to have my passport stamped with a work permit. I have been waiting for ages! This morning I arrived at work late and my rooms had been given to someone else. They seemed to have too many staff today, and the housekeeper was having a problem finding everybody work, so I offered to take the day off. It is a good opportunity to come here and get my passport stamped.

Wednesday, 12th November 1975

I have found out where the 'Cosmos' centre is. That is the place I saw in the documentary on television that drew me here. Today I went up there and painted a picture. Cosmos is a lovely place – a meditation centre with an art room, library, yoga and meditation classes, and lectures especially associated with mystical subjects. I like the type of people who go there. I would like to start learning yoga and meditation soon.

Saturday, 15th November 1975

Last night I went to Cosmos again and joined the Vipassana meditation class. I have never done Vipassana meditation before. It was wonderful. I felt that my mind became very still and when I came out of the class I felt silent, and everything in the world looked more vibrant – colours were brighter and I was more aware of everything around me. Usually my mind is so full of thoughts, but I was free of them for a while.

I have made friends with a Portuguese girl called Lenny (short for Helene), who works with me as a chambermaid in the hotel. She is going to leave the hotel soon and go and work in a vegetarian macrobiotic restaurant called ‘Mother’s Milk’ which is run by two American artists who are identical male twins. She is also brilliant at art and writes the most beautiful poetry in English. (She once studied in England.) I love talking to her because we have the same idealistic views about life – she is interested in mystical subjects like me. We go to Cosmos together to the yoga and meditation classes.

Lenny and I have both agreed that we would like to go to India on the ‘Magic Bus’ in the spring. We are both longing to travel east.

Saturday, 22nd November 1975

I was invited by the meditation teacher at Cosmos, who is called Bruno Martens, to go and stay for a few days in a communal village that is being built on an island down in the south of Holland. I went on the spur of the moment, but I am so glad I did for it was such a wonderful experience. It is a Buddhist community. They are vegetarians as I am, and live very frugally, working and living

in the spirit of meditation. They practise Vipassana meditation every day. Every morning they go swimming in the freezing cold sea – I went with them and it was an exhilarating experience. I found the sea water warmer than the air outside!

I loved meditating with them every day on the island. We also did some construction work in the open air. I never really understood before what benefits can be derived from meditation, but now I have discovered it for myself. It is positively a healing process, especially beneficial for anybody suffering from stress.

I have found, in practising meditation with these Buddhists, that meditation empties the mind so that all there is left is a clear, clean, weightless space, and I feel freed from tension, weariness and worry. In meditation, my thoughts no longer envelop and overcome me like a fog, and for a while I can have a distance from them. I think that a mind tortured by too many thoughts is mental illness.

In Vipassana meditation, when we see thoughts within us, we observe them, like a movie being watched by someone else; we do not judge them or criticise them. As soon as we become aware of them they disappear, as a dream disappears in the morning. Meditation is like deep, dreamless sleep – it makes one feel calm but also very awake.

Now I am going to pack up my things and take them to the houseboat. Finally we are going to move in. Lenny and I will be sharing the houseboat with other friends.

Thursday 27th November 1975

I have now lived in the houseboat on the canal in Amsterdam for nearly a week. It takes quite a bit of getting used to! It is damp but we have two gas fires so it is not too cold.

The houseboat consists of three rooms; one is a sitting room and kitchen combined. We have a little gas stove and a sink with cold water – until the tank on the roof runs empty. It has to be filled with a hose from the furniture shop opposite. The hose has a hole in it so it is quite a job. Bill, one of the guys sharing the boat with us, usually fills the tank. Lenny and I sleep in the sitting room on a double mattress – it is warmer like that! Our blankets are sleeping bags unzipped and an old blanket we found here. I wear thick socks in bed and a jumper on top of my night dress! There is a little ladder down into the second room. Bill sleeps there on another mattress. In the third room are two other guys – one Scottish and one South African. Both are nice – we went out with them a few times for drinks.

The boat is not very clean inside. We sweep and shake the carpets, but everything is in a sad state of disrepair.

Now the summer season has finished we are no longer needed at the hotel and all this week I have been doing the rounds of the agencies trying to get work. At last I have found myself a temporary job in a nut factory – I start on Monday. It should be an experience anyway!

Saturday, 6th December 1975

I have worked four days in the nut factory now, packing nuts into boxes. It is very tedious and the hours are long, but there are other young people working here too and we are allowed to eat as many nuts as we like. We laugh together in the breaks and that makes it bearable.

I realise now that this is a strange existence for me – so different from my secure and respectable teaching job last year!

I am living a 'hippy-like' existence now, but this insecurity is more exciting, more spontaneous than my life before. I have given up that safe security in order to move into the unknown and travel the world and find myself and discover some truth within myself about my own being and about existence.

However, because I am trying to save money for my trip to India I feel as though I am not really living for the present moment any more, as I intended to do here. I am looking forward towards the future, doing jobs I don't really like. I wonder, is it right to sacrifice the present moment for something one wants in the future? I had decided before that it was not.

Friday, 12th December 1975

The other night on the houseboat I had a strange dream. It was quite beautiful. I saw the world in my dream as a huge brown rubber ball, not quite blown up. I was searching all over it.

In the dream, a voice spoke to me, and asked me: "What are you searching for?" I replied, "I am searching for the hole in the top of the world, because I know that when I have found it, I will be able to penetrate to the centre of the earth and from there I will be able to fly to the ends of the universe."

The voice said to me, "There is no need to search for this centre – it is possible to fly to the ends of the universe from the surface of the world." I pondered on this but decided to go on searching anyway, so I said to the voice, "I know that, but I just want to try anyway to see if there is a place."

Eventually, after what seemed like many days in the dream, suddenly, unexpectedly, I found the place and penetrated to the centre of the Earth. I was very surprised and overjoyed because

I did not really know whether such a place would exist. Then the dream ended with music like at the end of a film.

I know that this dream was influenced by my reading about meditation and my search for myself which is deep within me. I want my life to be such a quest. Nothing else is important to me. I know that if I could reach to this deepest inner part of me, my real self, then I would experience limitless freedom – hence the idea that I could soar to the utmost edges of the universe, of space.

At the yoga class I met an American guy who is training to be a yoga teacher. He told me he had lived a luxurious, extravagant life in America, but because he had never found happiness or fulfilment, he had come away to seek for it and discovered that happiness can only be found within oneself. He said he had found what he sought for in yoga. He advised me; “Give up the struggle, the fight against life. Let go and flow with the river of life.” What he said touched me deeply.

I wish I could, I pray I could.

I am sitting in the library at Cosmos writing this. The books here are so interesting and the room has such a cosy, peaceful atmosphere.

I want to go on and on learning and discovering all my life. There must be no end, no point in time when I shall say, ‘Now I have nothing more to learn.’ Everything and every experience in life has to be a learning process.

Amsterdam is really beautiful now with lights and decorations in the streets and a big Christmas tree in the Dam Square. I wandered around the shops today. I love all the little souvenirs: especially the miniature paintings, blue Delft pottery, musical boxes and model windmills. I have bought a musical china windmill for my parents for a Christmas gift. I shall visit them at Christmas.