

Adventure: A way of Life *by Pierre Deroi*

Pierre Deroi, 36, is a professional adventurer. He has rowed across the Atlantic (travelling 5400 kilometres by rowing twelve hours a day for two months). He has snow-shoed across Greenland and its icebergs, from East to West, while pulling 180 kilograms of materials for forty days. He has biked thousands of kilometres from Paris to Beijing, walked and biked across numerous deserts (Sahara, Gobi, Atacama), driven from Ushuaia to Montreal (38 000 Kilometres), and has competed in taekwondo at the national level for ten years. By 36, Pierre has racked up an enviable amount of life experience. Here, he shares with us some of what he's learned- perhaps we're more prepared for great adventures than we think.

Man has never ceased to challenge his own limits. We are like Icarus, who sometimes burnt his wings to get just a bit closer to achieving the impossible. The last fifty years have witnessed rapid technological evolutions and numerous human victories over the environment. These changes have generated technical improvements in all sports and expeditions, which have allowed us to push the limits of the impossible even further.

These technical improvements have not tarnished the thrill of adventure. Adventure could be defined as a leap into the Unknown that attempts to satisfy man's insatiable curiosity with regards to his environment.

But adventure is, first and foremost for me, a confrontation with the Self, with the reactions we have in the face of danger, and with the unknown. It is this confrontation that helps us better understand our limits, and it is this understanding that can help us push our limits just that much further, to give us that extraordinary feeling of growing just a little more. There is something fascinating about our ability to control ourselves, about our ability to mobilise all the

resources of our intelligence when faced with a difficult situation.

The degree of difficulty and danger of an adventure can be calculated on a purely technical level, but for me the degree of difficulty is better calculated on a personal level since individual perceptions and capacities vary. For instance, it could be impossible for Mesner, who solo climbed Nanga Parbat in Pakistan, to imagine exploring the Kingsdale Cave in Keld Head with Geoff Yeadon. Their two exploits, though different, elicit similar admiration for the physical and personal challenges that had to be surpassed.

The thrill of risk has always exerted a powerful attraction for me because it creates a feeling of acute awareness, of awakening. Chris Barrington (mountaineer and journalist) defines this feeling as our dramatically increased ability to perceive the beauty of things, and to be alive. Having accomplished such a physical exploit raises the expedition beyond a masochistic exercise: it is transformed into a rich experience of a greater calibre despite the moments of incredible effort and unimaginable discomfort.

Today, adventure has been launched into the world of media, and has become more professionalised. It has become the privileged treat of rich societies chasing dreams and stimulation. The explorers, missionaries, and travellers of previous centuries, however, were not seeking outside stimulation but were simply trying to survive in a hostile environment.

In this sense, adventure is knocking at everyone's door: it embodies the choice to confront our own limits, making possible what we view as difficult or impossible. It is precisely because our fears underestimate our strengths that life leaves us with an infinite amount of challenges to overcome.

Of the many trips and personal trials I have confronted, it is surprisingly in the

toughest moments that I have learned the most beautiful life lessons- I learned to fully savour the incredible feeling of simply being alive. Having to face my own mortality at a very young age, one fear has not ceased to nag me: the fear of leaving this Earth, without having dared or taken a chance. I have always asserted, in all areas of life, that naïve self-confidence that allows us to at least try- often in spite of the fears of our friends and loved ones.

If, as some claim, I have not stopped living in my dreams, I argue that it is because I live in a world where people struggle more and more to find a valuable place, and that we must reaffirm this naïve self-confidence that sometimes allows us to move mountains. This may be my most important Summerhillien inheritance. And I am convinced that this self-confidence is the best gift we can offer to our children, who are forced to assert themselves in difficult social and educational environments that promote archetypes of success, and normalise life paths that we have great difficulty identifying with.



And, really, the man or woman who fights for their dream to become a reality, that dares face their fears and the fears of their loved ones, what is he or she risking? Failing along the way? Failures often feed us more than our successes, I think. No, the real risk lies in living with the regret of having let something important pass us by, in living with the feeling of not having dared. If we believe that we only have one life to live, is it not harder to sacrifice our most intimate dreams for our immediate comfort?