

RETRACING AN EPIC JOURNEY

ANIKA HOSSAIN

In May 2011, 47-year-old Sandy Robson set out to become the first female sea kayaker, to paddle 50,000 km from Germany to Australia. This epic journey was first undertaken by a 25-year-old German electrician, Oskar Speck, who was looking to escape the Great Depression in 1932. Now, 84 years later, the same journey brings Robson paddling to the Bay of Bengal.

"This trip will take five years to complete, and this is probably the most famous kayak journey ever made and no one has retraced it, till now," says Robson, who is an outdoor education teacher from Australia. "Oskar Speck paddled this journey from 1932 to 1939, and he made the trip because he was out of work in the 1930's because of the Depression," Robson tells us. "He thought it would be a good time to explore the world. At first he thought he would just go by the kayak to Cyprus and look for some work there, but once he got there he had such a good time that he got a Kayak company to sponsor him, so he could take a kayak all the way to Australia."

Robson has divided her trip into different stages, taking some time to return home in between. As the world has seen many changes since Speck's journey, Robson has encountered several issues while following his nautical trail. "Stage one was from Germany to Cyprus. I had some problems going to the Middle East because I couldn't go into Syria due to the war," says Robson. "In Iraq there are mines in the river where he paddled, from Saddam Hussein's days. Iran would let me in as a tourist but didn't give me permission to kayak there. So in the end I just decided to start from the North West of India, and this was Stage 2," she tells us. "Then Stage 3 was going around Sri-Lanka. Speck hadn't fully circumnavigated Sri Lanka, so no one had paddled around that island completely. I decided I would set the world record and be the first person to circumnavigate Sri-Lanka."

Since then she has paddled up the East Coast of India. "When I got to the north of the Bay of Bengal in September 2014, the weather was pretty bad, so I took a break there and went home to do some work for a little while, and came back recently to start from here," says Robson. "This section I'm doing now, is the longest stage, it's 8000km from here in West Bengal all the way to the far east of Indonesia. I think it will take me about 12 or 13 months to complete this journey, at the moment I am waiting for Myanmar to give me the permission to cross the border."

During her journey, Robson has made contact with local organisations to help with logistics and information. In Bangladesh, she has partnered with SAFE (Simple Action for the Environment). "They have helped me deliver the various travel documents I need, to the right organisations," says Robson. "They have also provided land support, and have made arrangements for food and lodgings, which makes it a bit easier because I arrive late at night sometimes and don't know the language," she elaborates.

"Countries that I really liked paddling through have been Serbia and Turkey, and India was definitely the hardest and craziest place I've travelled through," says Robson. "Overall I've had a positive experience. People have been helpful. I'm expecting to reach Australia in 2016 and I'm hoping to write a book afterwards about my journey," she says. "I also want to set up something so I can help people I've met along the way, to have access to training in water sports," says Robson. "In India and Bangladesh I have met people interested in water sports but they don't have access to training courses and professionally run activities. I want to arrange for instructors from Australia to come and teach some courses here- not just kayaking but other sports like surfing etc too."

PHOTOS: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO



Inspired By Words

NAZIBA BASHER

Aaraf Afzal was well on his way to becoming a writer at very young age, when he was still a student in Sunbeams School. Years later, he is now studying in Boston University's College of Arts and Science, still to decide a major, but still with the love of writing set deep inside his heart.

"I started writing when I was young and never stopped," says Araaf. "Like drawing, I think writing is something that all children try out. There was a point when a lot of my friends were into it too, and we had this little series of books circulating the classrooms," says Araaf. Eventually, the hype had died out among his friends, but for Araaf, storytelling is and always was a powerful thing. Having obsessed over books and movies and TV for a large part of his childhood, Araaf believes writing is not just inspirational, but magical. "I love creating my own worlds and exploring worlds created by others. I kept pursuing it, and I kept creating new worlds that held meaning for me," says Araaf. His first published book is called "Re: Revolution". It was officially released on August 14, 2014. "I have the kind people of Anyapokash to thank for it. They've been distributing it across their



PHOTO: COURTESY

Onnomela outlets across Dhaka, and online too!" mentions Araaf.

Re: Revolution is a post-apocalyptic story, which is less about the post-apocalyptic setting and more about the people who dwell in it. "A key part of my process when I worked on it, though, was avoiding some of the other dystopian stories that have come out recently," says Araaf. With the coming of "The Hunger Games" and other titles, it has become a very popular genre, and he made sure his didn't seem like an imitation of those stories. He says, "I avoided a lot of that. At the same time, it's also a genre I love, and I drew a lot of inspiration from Cormac McCarthy's "The Road", and the videogame "The Last of Us"."

Writing is definitely a long-term plan for Araaf. "I want to keep telling stories. I'm definitely going to keep writing books and short stories, but I have plans to look into other mediums as well," he says. Araaf believes every form of media has a very specific voice. And there are definitely things in his mind that he wants heard no matter which medium is used to do so. "I want people to read or hear stories about heroes and villains and feel something; feel like they're not alone. I want to have the effect on people that the works of great storytellers have had on me," says Araaf, with high hopes for a successful future as an inspiring writer.

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A Post-Meal Delight

APURBA JAHANGIR

After eating a full fledged meal, most of us Bangalis still hold the tradition of eating a well made paan which perfectly sits as the cherry on top of a perfect feast. All though the current generation are not much into this delicacy as the older generations, paan still holds a special place as an after dinner delight in parties and weddings. A crowd of people can always be found around the local paanwallah (sellers). One such joint which is already immensely popular among the city people is located at Nazimuddin road and goes by the name 'Javed Mamar Mishti Paan'. The man behind this famous shop is none other than Muhammad Javed aka Javed Mama.

Existing right beside the famous Nirob hotel for nearly a year, Javed's paan shop has grabbed a lot of attention. After studying till the seventh grade, he has been a part of the paan community of Old Dhaka. "I have been in the paan

business for almost 27 years. I started off with just a cart, like every other paan sellers but never in my dreams had I imagine that my paans would be so popular among my customers," says Javed. Other than his friendly attitude, the reason behind his paan shop's success is his famous Sachi Shahi Paan. "As this paan has no acidic taste, the shahi paan is recognised as the last piece of the puzzle for a satisfied tummy."

Other than the Shahi paan, Javed also serves the well known Rajhahi paan with areca nut (supari) which is mostly for the hardcore paan lovers. He buys most of his ingredients from Sham Bazaar and Thatari Bazaar which Javed hand picks first thing in the morning. "I prefer quality over quantity which is why I just sell only two kinds of paan. But as you can see, by the grace of the Almighty, business is getting on pretty well. I am able to feed my family and send my children to school, and that is good enough for me."



PHOTOS: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO