

Aren't You Afraid?

"Aren't you afraid?"

"What about bandits?"

"How will you protect yourself?"

These are the three most common questions we receive from Americans when they learn about our travels. In fact, in the typical conversation with Americans about our travels variations on the themes of murder, mayhem, death and disaster predominate.

I view this as a direct effect of the extremely limited amount of information Americans receive about the outside world, and the rigid filters applied to everyday news.

"If it bleeds, it leads" is the absolute #1 rule of journalism in America, so death, violence, murder & mayhem dominate local and national news. In the case of international news, the only stories the typical American hears about the outside world run through that filter, so the only information you will ever hear about non-strategic resource areas of the world must have those components.

Add in a healthy, nightly dose of violent television programming, weekends of violent movies and a nearly societal wide, 24x7 addiction to extremely violent video games by the young and you've got a cultural filtering and bias system that guarantees that Americans are simultaneously desensitized to, and incredibly fearful of, crime, violence and death. It's as if the entire society wears violence, mayhem and death goggles and is incapable of seeing their nation or the world in any other context.

What we have found in our travels is that contrary to this indoctrinated view, the outside world is an extremely safe place. In fact, of all the places we've been, only South Africa has a level of violence, crime and murder that deserves anything near the level of fear and trepidation Americans tend to apply to other countries. (Ironically, South Africa is the darling of Western media due to its human rights oriented constitution, so honest reporting about the incredible violence there is off-limits. The one place on the planet we've been that people actually need to know about the crime will never be exposed due to this media Political Correctness filter.)

And before Europeans and others jump on the America Bashing Bandwagon and use this as another reason to demean the lowly, unworthy Americans, this fixation on fear is not an American exclusive phenomenon.

In his book "One Man Caravan" Robert Fulton Jr. (yes, of that Fulton family) tells a wonderful anecdote of his encounter with two tribes in Central Asia.

As he pulled into a dusty village in the middle of nowhere on his Douglas Twin motorcycle in 1933 the locals greeted him with a mixture of awe and trepidation. After the usual greetings, exchanges and a ceremonial meal they asked where he planned to venture to the following day. Robert informed them that he intended to ride over the next mountain range and continue his journey around the world, the first solo circumnavigation by anyone on a motorcycle.

The entire tribe recoiled as one. The women wailed and threw themselves on the ground. The men pounded the ground. The elders beseeched him, "Do not go there! Those people are all thieves and murderers! They will steal what you own and then kill you!"

Somewhat taken aback by the intensity of their message, Robert thanked them for their advice, but gently insisted he would continue his travels. The tribe begged and cajoled, but he persevered.

The next morning he was treated as a dead man walking, with women in mourning and men looking deeply into his eyes, all believing his fate has been sealed.

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Robert rode over the mountains that day into a new territory, occupied by a different tribe.

As he pulled into another dusty village he was greeted with great curiosity. The locals asked him "From where did you come?" When he pointed behind him to the mountains and replied "From there, over the mountains," they were incredulous.

"From there?" they asked, "From over the mountains?"

"Yes," Robert replied.

"But that is impossible!" their wise men exclaimed. "No one can come from over those mountains alive! Everyone knows that the people there are all thieves and murderers! They would have stolen everything you own and then killed you!"

As Robert Fulton learned in 1933 and we are reminded today, we all fear the unknown, we all fear other people that we know little to nothing about, we are usually sharing the same fears about each other, and are usually mutually unworthy of those fears.

In our travels we have met, mingled with, broken bread with, visited the homes of and shared adventures with people of all stations in life, from the poorest of the poor to the richest of the rich. We have spent time with people of all walks of life, from most of the corners of this planet.

So far, we haven't met a single one who was worthy of the fears that most of us harbor towards the unknown people of unknown lands.

So, are we afraid? Of other people? Not very often. In fact, probably only once so far.

"What about bandits?" We haven't met any yet. If we do, we'll probably do the same thing we'd do on a street in any major American city, give them the material things they are after. It's just stuff.

"How will you protect yourself?" We haven't had to worry about that yet. And don't anticipate that we will anytime soon. In our experience the only thing we've had to worry about protecting ourselves from is the sometimes overwhelming hospitality of the people of this world.

And what if it all goes to pieces someday?

Our friend John Kretschmer recently wrote a book, *At the Mercy of the Sea*, about the death of his good friend Carl Wake in a hurricane. John helped get Carl started in sailing and played a key role in helping him select and purchase his first sailboat and get out on the water. They were both sailing towards the same port where they planned to meet for a celebratory dinner after Carl's first major offshore passage when Carl was killed. As such, John felt a huge weight of personal responsibility for Carl's death.

When John asked me what I thought of the book I replied:

"I found myself and my tribe of maritime dreamers well represented by Carl and your perceptions of him.

As we swim by en masse, twisting and turning with the currents of our lives, ever pursuing our unfulfilled dreams and un-fulfill-able longings, we are the foodstock of the sailing industry. Our economic culling provides the biomass that preserves and sustains the thousands of bankers, builders and brokers.

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Along the way the dream machine of the glossy magazines and glitzy boat shows produce a few of us who achieve a piece of the dream. A few who feel the serenity in the ultimate loneliness of solo night watch, the companionship of bow wave surfing dolphins and the once-in-a-lifetime, chosen-few witness to the Green Flash.

Very few in the swimming school of dreamers escape the seine net of the daily grind, the red tide of the treadmill of existence or the carnivores of unattainable materialism.

Carl was one of those few.

Mourn not the few who escape. Mourn instead for those who do not.”

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