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BEYOND

THE DICTIONARY DEFINES A JOURNEY AS: "TO EXPLORE OR EXAMINE IN ORDER TO DISCOVER." LISA AND I ARE NOT THE COUPLE WHO SET OUT TO RIDE THE WORLD IN 2003. BACK THEN WE WERE DISENCHANTED WITH LIFE AND WORK AND EXHAUSTED FROM THE CONSTANT PRESSURE TO "BE AND ACQUIRE MORE." SINCE THEN, OUR JOURNEY OF ALMOST HALF A MILLION MILES HAS GIVEN US LIFE LESSONS BEYOND OUR IMAGINING, AND TODAY WE'RE HAPPIER, MORE ENERGIZED, AND MORE CAPABLE INDIVIDUALS. HERE, I WANT TO SHARE SOME INSIGHTS WE USE DAILY TO IMPROVE OUR LIVES.



Lisa takes a breath after racing a rain storm across the Mongolian Steppe.

THE **Bike**

by Simon Thomas | photography Lisa & Simon Thomas



After a week of battling the Australian Outback, it's time to kick back and watch the wildlife.



Simon was passing out 4-5 times a day from the overwhelming pain after his crash in the Amazon.

BACKSTORY

In 1997 I survived a near-fatal accident which left me bedridden for two years and in need of multiple surgeries. As I recovered, we took the opportunity to look at our lives... to ask what we were working toward and ultimately what we wanted from life.

What we realized was that we had a great standard of living but *no* quality of life. We were so busy earning success that we had no time to enjoy it. After years of running our own businesses, we were worn out, disenchanted, and desperately needed to press the reset button.

Our journey began as a means of escape, but has turned into a way of life. We've been held at gunpoint, have ridden through plagues of locusts, experienced severe dehydration, and survived tropical diseases and broken bones, but at the same time we've witnessed breathtaking sunrises, traveled through the most remote and overwhelmingly beautiful landscapes on Earth, and connected with lives around the world in a way that's changed us forever.

LESS IS MORE

You may assume we're trust-fund babies or lottery winners, but let's set the record straight: Neither is true! When we closed the door on our home and rode away in 2003 we had \$28,000. And a couple of years into our journey we sold our home. Today, everything we have in the world is carried on two motorcycles.

Take a moment to imagine taking everything you own in the world from the furniture and cars you drive, to the stuff you store in the attic... all the things that you've worked so hard to get... and then, sell it all! Without all the "stuff" who would you actually be?

FEAR

If you're a movie buff, you might have heard this Will Smith line from the 2013 film *After Earth*.

"IF WE ARE GOING TO SURVIVE THIS YOU MUST REALIZE THAT FEAR IS NOT REAL. IT IS A PRODUCT OF THOUGHTS YOU CREATE. NOW DO NOT MISUNDERSTAND ME, DANGER IS VERY REAL, BUT FEAR IS A CHOICE."

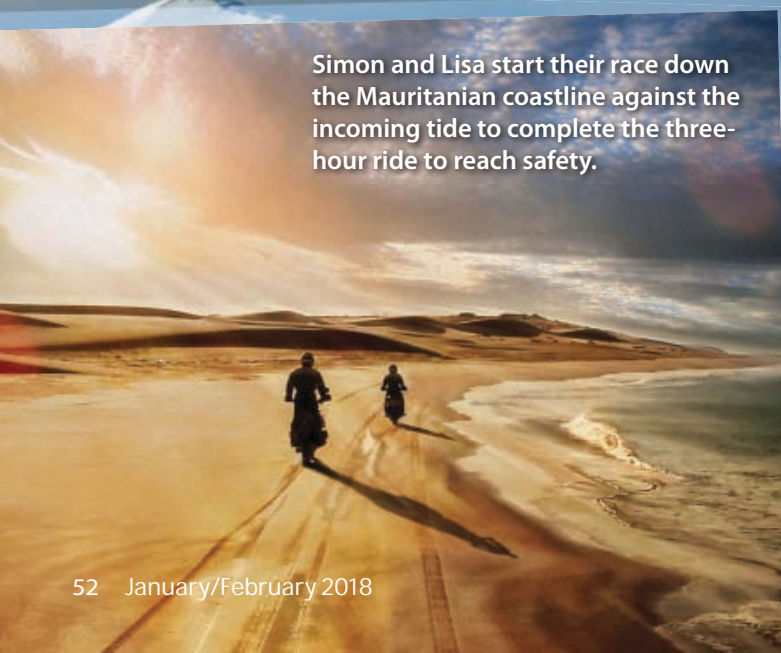
Lisa and her trusty *BMW F650GS* set out to cross the Sahara Desert.



Lisa asks for directions from a local Mongolian woman.



Simon and Lisa start their race down the Mauritanian coastline against the incoming tide to complete the three-hour ride to reach safety.



For Lisa and me, those last words resonated. Make no mistake, bad things do happen, and bad luck never has good timing—but there is power to be had in realizing that.

Here's the problem with fear: We're all to one degree or another ruled by it; fear of failure, fear of losing the respect of our peers, colleagues and friends, fundamentally the fear of consequences. And this fear of what "might be" leads to inaction. It's easy to convince ourselves that no action = no risk. Sadly, the opposite is true.

After meeting people on six continents, we've come to learn that irrespective of race, creed, and even religion, most us are frightened of the same thing: The UNKNOWN.

The fact is, the only way to tackle the unknown, and therefore fear, is to face it head on, and then learn from the experience. On the other side of experience you'll have first-hand insight and information, and the more information you have, the less fear plays a part going forward.

As newbie off-road riders, crossing the largest desert in the world would prove to be the first terrifying challenge of our long journey. The Sahara is vast, its scale is overwhelming—a singular piece of desert the same size as the continental U.S. Imagine riding from Canada to Mexico in one go without roads, gas stations, motels, food or water stops—just an endless sea of sand that rolls into the heat-blurred horizon. There are just two jobs: 1. Hit the throttle and ride toward that horizon; 2. Survive. We knew our attempt would make us or kill us.

EXPERIENCE

The reason we are driven to explore and travel is as much to see the remote parts of the world as it is to test ourselves and to understand what we're truly capable of. The Sahara is one of the most inhospitable environments on earth, but the people we met along its periphery were anything but inhospitable.

At one point, we camped with a group of Tuareg nomads and befriended Amar, the son of their chief. The eve before we were due to leave we were invited for a meal in the chief's tent—a traditional Tuareg tent made

Simon evaluates the route ahead during their first day in Tajikistan and the Silk Road.



from red goatskin and sack cloth. As we sat with Amar and his father on the floor cross-legged around a brass bowl full of couscous, fruit, vegetables, and goat, we suddenly realized that we'd not seen a single female. Meanwhile, the chief was staring directly at Lisa and smiling warmly—not something he was known for. In Arabic French, Amar explained that his father was happy: This was the first time in his adult life that he'd eaten in the presence of a woman—and he was 62!

Even the simplest new experiences can be life changing.

TAKE NOTHING FOR GRANTED

The world owes none of us a damn thing!

SMALL THINGS

We've savored incredible and exotic foods around the world. We've dined with Maasai warriors, moguls of empire, and even presidents. But one meal stands head and shoulders above the others—it was 2:00 a.m. in the Amazon jungle, in a tiny wooden hut lit by a single candle.

That morning, I'd had a catastrophic crash off a jungle bridge, and unbeknownst at the time, I'd broken my neck. The intense heat and stifling humidity had leached what little life was left from me. I'd spent the day slurring my speech due to paralysis, and passing out while deliriously battling to repair my badly damaged motorcycle. Yet, in our darkest hour, beyond exhaustion and in indescribable pain, complete strangers saw our struggle and spent the next six hours helping to pull us through the muddy, water-logged jungle to their tiny wooden home.

The remarkable meal was nothing more than gritty rice cooked in fat with an egg placed on top. It was all I could do to lift the rice with my dirty fingers to my mouth. In the dim light, I wiped tears of relief from my cheek... this meal meant everything to me. I knew, if I didn't make it through the night, that Lisa wouldn't be alone. That somehow these strangers would help her escape the jungle and see that she returned to a world we understood. I've never felt more grateful.

During our travels if we've learned anything, it's that the simplest of things can often have the greatest meaning, and in the face of adversity you realize what you most deeply care about.

BE STUBBORN ABOUT YOUR GOALS BUT FLEXIBLE ABOUT YOUR METHODS

Always keep your eye on your long-term goals and ambitions, but use your peripheral vision to make sure that on your journey, you don't miss out on rare and incredible experiences.

PERSPECTIVE AND PROBLEMS

We are often asked how we deal with borders, officials, and the corruption that everyone presumes we encounter daily. Funny thing is that we've learned that most potentially problematic officials are just regular people in badly fitting uniforms who've often not been paid in months.

Lisa and I have developed a dozen ways to handle situations that we once thought were intimidating. For example, in northern Argentina, we were stopped by a highway officer expecting to make an easy \$20. We started by playing dumb, but the cop wasn't frustrated into leaving after 20 minutes, so we switched to the "candy game." A sweet tooth in South America is not unusual, so while the cop was grilling me, Lisa sauntered over and in her best Mary Poppins voice, offered him some candy. Odd, right? Well, let me tell you, it's impossible for anyone to lay down the law with any authority while chewing on a gummy bear!

So, if you're facing a problem and can't see a solution... move sideways! You'll see the problem from a different perspective and probably discover a solution that you didn't know existed.

CONNECT, ACKNOWLEDGE, INSPIRE

Mongolia is raw and untamed, and for much of our time there it was bitterly cold. The riding took us past our limits more than once, mentally and physically. However, those moments, when we doubted our sanity for attempting to cross this often desolate and lonely country, are always pushed into the back of our minds when we think of



KEY POINTS

Here are a few things we've learned along the way:

- Less is more. Have a look at the things and the clutter that make up your life. Evaluate and decide what adds real quality to your life... and anything that doesn't, discard, sell or give it away.
- Fear. Look at the decisions you make and choose how much fear influences them. Danger is real, fear is a choice.
- Experiences. Seek out new experiences. They can be small experiences but seek out new things.
- Take nothing for granted. Take it from us, the world is not a fair place and owes nothing to anyone.
- Notice the small things. It's important to acknowledge even the smallest of kindnesses.
- Be stubborn about your goals but flexible about your methods.
- If you're looking head on at a problem that can't be solved, move sideways and change your perspective. Think on your feet and be flexible.
- Connect, see, acknowledge, inspire. Connect with new people, really see them and what they're doing. Understand their problems and inspire change.



The Amazon jungle immediately provided challenges from Day One.

images of the warm yurts, the foaming milk tea, the soft autumn light and its kind, hospitable, and generous people.

Mongolia's culture couldn't be more different from our own. We'd set up camp early after a brutal day's riding on the sandy tracks of the Gobi Desert. Nestled into our warm tent, sleep came quickly. But startled awake by the tent being unzipped, we laid absolutely still. Seconds later, in crawls a smiling and nodding Mongolian horseman. His front teeth were missing, and the smell of hot horse was strong. In dirty clothes fringed with fur, he quickly settled himself between Lisa and me and simply fell asleep! We had no idea what to do, so we stayed still while holding back giggles. Forty-five minutes later, and after a few snorts to clear his throat, our new friend awoke, nodded his thanks and left.

What just happened? Well, Mongolian nomadic and communal lifestyle means that homes are absolutely "always open to anyone!" Property belongs to everyone along with the principle: Alone I'm strong, together we're stronger—something that's proven itself out over thousands of years.

So, go and connect with a different culture, learn what makes us all different and what unites us and then go inspire others to do the same.

ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE

If you've enjoyed the tales shared here and take anything away from this article today, I would urge you to believe that if a regular Brit couple, horribly naive and woefully under skilled, can spend a decade and a half riding around the world, **anything is possible.** **ADV**



Regular contributors to **ADVMoto**, **Simon & Lisa Thomas** are considered by many to be the world's foremost adventure motorcyclists, with more real-world experience than anyone on the road today! They've ridden their way into a life that most of us can only imagine. Since setting out on their journey in 2003, the duo has so far amassed a whopping 500,000 miles on their ride, through 78 countries on six continents. Along the way they've traversed 27 deserts, survived a broken neck in the Amazon, cheated death, and are still traveling today. It's easy to say that Lisa and Simon helped define what we now call "Adventure Riding." As explorers, writers, photographers, and public speakers this pair inspire adventure. **2RidetheWorld.com**