

## **Bruce Magid's speech at the Circumnavigators Club Foundation**

Thank you for that kind introduction. It is truly an honor and privilege to speak on behalf of the Circumnavigators Club Foundation Scholars.

Jules Verne, who wrote the classic *Around the World in Eighty Days*, once said, "Travel enables us to enrich our lives with new experiences, to enjoy and to be educated, to learn respect for foreign cultures, to establish friendships, and above all to contribute to international cooperation and peace throughout the world."

My story actually begins almost fifty years ago. I remember the event as if it was yesterday. It was 1961 and I was 10 years old. The snow was falling outside our modest home in Massachusetts. I pressed my forehead against the living room window and looked out across Bay Road, which separated my town, Sharon, from the neighboring town of Stoughton.

I thought to myself: it must be a big, wonderful world out there with a lot to see and do. The thought stayed with me throughout high school. Sure, like everyone growing up in Boston, I eagerly devoured news of the Boston sports teams, especially the Celtics and Red Sox. However, I really got excited when Time magazine arrived each week. I would eagerly follow international events, such as the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962) and the 1967 Six-Day War in the Middle East, and I just knew I would someday see the world.

But how? My parents were the children of immigrants, and their goal was to live the American dream: own a house, a car, a dog named Happy, and send their sons to college.

With their encouragement and a generous scholarship, I was the first in my family to go to college, Georgetown University School of Foreign Services. I plunged into my studies and devoured every course I could on international relations, comparative politics, religions, and cultures of the world. I became especially interested in learning about countries that at that time were called 'less developed countries.' Today, they are known as Asian Tigers, BRICS, and engines of global growth!

Some of my fellow students were from overseas and went home on vacation. Others were more affluent and traveled abroad. I worked during the school year and summer and dreamed what I thought was my impossible dream: to travel the world.

Then the impossible happened. In my junior year I heard about a new award: an around-the-world research grant sponsored by the Circumnavigators Club Foundation.

And best of all, it was designed for students like me: students with the passion and energy to experience the world who had never had a chance to venture far from the United States.

Filled with enthusiasm and excitement, I spoke with my parents, but with a gnawing sense of anxiety. What if I did not get the award? And what if my parents would not let a 20-year-old travel alone around the world?

My father told me, "Just be positive and let them see how badly you want it." My mother, was a bit more practical. She noted that this was the second award and asked if the first trail-blazing awardee, Greg Rider, had made it home safely.

I assured her that he had, that it had advanced his education at Georgetown, and that I knew this trip was going to be the foundation for a great career and life for him! And, if only someday I could be like Greg.

That's a long introduction to the day of the award; a round-trip ticket on Pan American World Airlines and \$1500. My parents and I met Ray Dinsmore, and we all felt blessed to get to know him. I also think he charmed my mother, who was having second thoughts. What was there to worry about? I had \$750, no credit card, no cell phone, and a phone number to dial when I arrived in for my final installment.

A stated purpose of the Around-The-World travel-study grant program is to conduct research, and indeed that is an important component. My research topic was to study other countries' perception of the United States.

Now, remember this was 1972: pre-cable news, internet, let alone Facebook. Movies were a primary vehicle for visual communications; to many, the United States was Hollywood. They imagined the streets were lined with gold. Big billboards for Coca-Cola represented the United States global commercial clout.

However, the research topic is just one small part of the around-the-world travel experience. All of the awardees have our tales of adventure that make an indelible impression on us. Allow me to share four brief vignettes:

First: upon my arrival in Kabul, Afghanistan, I met a young tour guide who was about to lead the inaugural Afghan tour into the interior. I visited the Band-e Amir lake region, saw a game of Buzkashi, and shared a meal of roasted goat. And during my time, I learned about the multiple invasions of Afghanistan and the will of the tribes' people to never accept foreign rulers.

The people were stoic and said they had been invaded in the past and expected future invasions. However, they were adamant that history would demonstrate that each and every attempt to impose an outside form of government and values would fail.

Keep in mind, this was 1972: the Russians invaded Afghanistan in 1979 and were kicked out in 1992.

Second, when I arrived in Tehran, Iran, I was impressed with the beauty of the city, the modern buildings and infrastructure and the cosmopolitan attitude of the privileged. They spoke of Iran as an emerging economy, pro-west and cultured.

For the elite, Iran was politically stable, prospering and the shah beloved by all. Yet, when I traveled into the countryside to cities such as Shiraz and Isfahan (the old Persian capital), I could sense disconnect. Outside the capital there was abject poverty, and whispers of fundamentalism and a growing divide between the elite and the masses.

Again, this was 1972. The shah was deposed in 1979.

Vignette 3: paper and pen in hand, I was busy interviewing students at Sofia University, located in Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria. I meandered a bit into a question related to how the Bulgarian culture was consistent with a communist government. At that moment, I was literally scooped up by two heavy-set individuals in trench coats and taken to the Bulgarian Ministry of Information. After a stern lecture on the virtues of communism, and the Bulgarian people's unwavering love and commitment to communism, I was placed under house arrest. The next day, I was put on a train to Romania and reminded that communism in Bulgaria is alive and well, and I am "persona non grata".

This was 1972. The communist government was swept out of office in 1989.

The fourth and final vignette takes place in Morocco. I was at a casbah, a marketplace in Marrakesh. By this point in the trip, I had moved away from discussing politics and was interested in the role of women in different societies. The young student I was with led me to an underground chamber where young women from the region and around the world had been captured and were sold as slaves. He whispered to me that democracy as we know it could never blossom in the Middle East and women will never gain equality with men.

Again, this was 1972, and the Arab Spring of 2011 gives us hope for democracy... let us hope that it is a truly inclusive democracy that promotes and protects the rights of all citizens regardless of gender and religion.

So, fast forward almost 40 years. This award transformed my life. I went on to receive my PhD in international law, comparative politics, and economics from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. I lived in Venezuela and worked for the minister of planning on the fifth national development plan of Venezuela.

I spent over 20 years with Bank of America, living in Caracas, Venezuela, São Paulo, Brazil, and California. It was a fulfilling career; I traveled on business throughout Latin America and the Caribbean and throughout the world on vacation. And I must confess I had come to realize: "it's a small world after all."

The Circumnavigators Club Foundation had emboldened, enabled, and empowered me to pursue a career in international business and finance, but it had also stirred a desire in some small way to inspire students the way I had been inspired. Thus the start of my second career: higher education leadership. I have one fundamental unshaking belief: exposing young people to each other around the world, to other cultures, sets a foundation for mutual respect and understanding. We try to capture some of that circumnavigation foundation "magic". At my last university, we took our top honors students for a 10 day immersion program to a different country each year. The concept is for students to successfully conduct business across borders and cultures.

At my current business school, we have students from more than 70 countries – a mini-United Nations. We celebrate the cultures from around the world. And yes, we take our best and

brightest to emerging and frontier markets for an in-depth look at business, culture, religion, and history.

My circumnavigation experience has evolved into my signature educational initiative.

Let me conclude with a quote by Apsley Cherry-Garrard, one of the first explorers of Antarctica and author of *The Worst Journey in the World*: “Exploration is the physical expression of the intellectual passion. and I tell you, if you have the desire for knowledge and the power to give it physical expression, go out and explore.”

Thank you for fulfilling my dream to explore, and thank you for the opportunity to reflect on my around the world in forty years, and thank you for your generous support of the Circumnavigators Club Foundation.

