



Ecologia News

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Running the World for Love

ROSIE Swale-Pope plans to celebrate her 57th birthday by starting a round the world solo run. She has chosen Kitezh Children's Community as one of her sponsored charities and Ecologia Trust is honoured to support her on her extraordinary challenge. The 20,000-mile journey should take her about two years. Rosie came to running late in life. She was 48 and she fell in love with it. Since then she has run countless marathons including a 240 kilometre run in the Sahara carrying all her own equipment in temperatures of 125F°. She has run across Romania, Kosovo, Iceland and Nepal and now she wants to take



Rosie on top of the world in Nepal

on the world.

“My dearest wish is to do a complete circle of the earth, planned to keep me on as much land mass as possible. This is also the coldest, hardest, most fascinating way, and includes almost 7,000 miles of Russia and Siberia. I shall run across Europe through Holland, Germany, Poland to Moscow before hitting the Trans-Siberian Railway route. Then I shall cross

Siberia running north to the Bering Straits, cross to Alaska, then run across the US, into Canada, Greenland, Iceland, Ireland, Scotland and England to return to the start and finishing line at Tenby, my home in Wales.

“When I took up running, sometimes the snails were faster. Yet it took me on paths I would never otherwise have trodden. Because you can get sponsored it became my privilege to help others. I run for love and joy; and I run for courage.”

When she was young (and an orphan) her grandmother taught her that she could do anything she set her mind to. This belief in the possible led her, with her husband and daughter, to sail across the Atlantic, through the Panama Canal, across the Pacific to Australia. Her second child was born somewhere in the middle of the ocean. She turned an trans-Atlantic solo voyage into an opportunity to raise money for hospital equipment. There was also an extraordinary 3,000-mile trek down the coast of Chile which took her 14 months.

Now she is to embark on her biggest challenge yet. It is a huge undertaking and requires meticulous planning. As part of her preparation Rosie has just run a marathon in Omsk in aid of a hospital there, to gain knowledge of the region, make friends and investigate how best to go about the most difficult part of the journey—crossing the vast, empty and harsh land of Northeast Siberia. People she met in Omsk were very supportive and thought it quite possible. Before that, however, her route will take her to Kitezh where she will see for herself the place that her effort will help support.

For most of us, what she is planning to do may seem impossible but the things she has already done were quite impossible too and she has done them. She has boundless energy and a great love for this amazing world and its many and varied people. If anyone can do it, she can.

She feels this run is the most important thing she has ever done for many reasons not least of which is that it is in memory of her husband, Clive.

“When Clive died from prostate cancer last year, I felt such sorrow I have never known before. Like falling in love, the death of someone you love changes you forever. I was determined not to give up, but to try to do more.

“His death taught me more than anything about how precious life is. How short it can be, that you have to grab life, do what you can while you can, and try and give something back.

Rhiannon Hanfman



Rosie's route—Follow the line running from Britian through Europe, Siberia, North America and back again

A Visit to a Russian Orphanage ❧

In the middle of a Russian forest there is a sign which reads: 'Peace to those who enter the territory of Kitezh—a place where children are given a family and a home.' I entered the territory in December and found, amongst other things—peace.

In January, my routine and my peace were shaken. One lunchtime, Dmitri Morosov told me that I could visit an orphanage the following day. I nearly choked on my soup. Images I had seen on TV flashed into my head: crying babies in dirty clothes, cage-like cots with toddlers rocking back and forth... I completely lost my appetite.

Marina Maximova, the Kitezh doctor mentioned that Kitezh was preparing to take more children, and suggested that if I wanted to make the comparison between Kitezh and the orphanages myself, it could be arranged for me to accompany the adults. I immediately said 'yes'.

This was my first trip further than the market since I had arrived in Kitezh so I spent the whole journey taking in the views of the Russian countryside.

It was like a black and white film: miles and miles of nothing but flat snowy fields, which at some point on the horizon became the sky. Forests occasionally broke the monotony. The pine trees were the same colour as the road, and the birches were the same colour as the snow. Decrepit buildings, once bustling collective farms, sat eerily in the distance, the rusting remnants of their mechanical equipment abandoned in the fields.

Just before midday, we arrived at the orphanage. Earlier Dmitri had informed me that this orphanage was one of the better ones. The management are very cooperative and know that the children who go to Kitezh have a better chance of a successful future than those who stay. From what I gather, most other orphanages are less willing to 'trust' Kitezh, and dismiss it without paying it a visit. The main reason, I am told, is that as far as the orphanages are concerned the more children they have, the more money they get. It's as simple as that. The child's welfare doesn't enter the equation. Children are brought to Kitezh as a result of Kitezh's hard work and the orphanage director's good will.

Despite Dmitri's positive comments, the scene as we pulled up to the building was grim. There are slums in most cities in the world, but this was a small town in which there was very little else, let alone anything better. For a child living and playing on these streets, there isn't anything to aspire to.

Inside, we entered a dark corridor and were taken to the director's office. The men from Kitezh discussed the children who would be transferred, and gave news of the children who were already there. The woman director listened with quiet pleasure as she was told of the progress of her former protégés. The staff in these institutions are not only discouraged, but forbidden to make personal attachments to the children. If the authorities

think that a director has overstepped the professional mark, he/she will lose his/her position and in some cases, whole orphanages will be shut down. Despite this fact, this particular woman obviously cared about her children. I saw that the shelves were full of objects that the children had made.

Then we were taken to see the children. We walked along corridors which smelled of cleaning products. Contrary to my expectations, this orphanage was so clean that it was sterile. All it needed was the men in white coats to make it feel like a hospital. There were some of the children's pictures on the wall, and typical Soviet-era decorations: cartoon or fairy tale characters or shapes in the metal railings on stairs or gates. Decorative and functional but also cold, rigid and sterile. A far cry from the beautiful wooden carvings in Kitezh.

The aim of this visit was to check up on the four children we wanted to bring to Kitezh whose three older brothers were already there. Bringing them to Kitezh would re-unite this family of seven. In the Russian system, the word 'orphan' refers not only to the children whose parents are dead, but also to those who are taken out of the parental home. This is the case of the Sinko children, whose parents are alcoholics. The eldest,



Dena with the four younger Sinko children

Volodya is 13. He has taken on the parental role and spent most of his childhood looking after his younger siblings. We were taken into a room and there were the children, lined up on a sofa, waiting for us. I asked for permission to give them some sweets. I was told to sit down with them and Dmitri came and sat too. I gave them sweets and Dmitri used the wrappers to play a game with them. The three girls were quite shy, but the youngest boy,

about five years old, figured out where the sweets were in my bag so he played with the zips and I dished out some more goodies. Then the Director came over and asked the eldest girl to recite the poem she had learned for the school's Christmas performance. At first she was too shy and wouldn't do it, but then with a bit of cajoling, she recited it beautifully. We congratulated her, and gave her a bar of chocolate and a letter that one of her Kitezh brothers had sent. She sat in silence and read it. She would read the letter to the others later, she said.

I was struck by how much the children looked like the three boys I knew. It really brought home the fact that three of them were living in beautiful surroundings, with families and friends and foreign volunteers teaching them English, while their younger brother and sisters were living, under-stimulated and under-loved, in an orphanage. They all belonged together. It dawned on me how hard it must have been, especially for Volodya, to leave the little ones here. They had to be re-united in Kitezh. Luckily, everyone agreed that. This had been used as a bargaining tool with Volodya, in order to get him to leave them in the first place.

We said good-bye to the children. As we left I caught a glimpse of a dormitory, in which the younger children were taking an afternoon nap. It was probably straight where our four were headed. It was a long room with beds down both walls. The walls and curtains were different shades of yellow, and there were no toys. The toys, old and shabby, were lined up on shelves in the room we were in. Again, neat and functional, but not a lot of fun. I gave the assistant a big bag of the sweets for the others when they woke up.

In the dining room we were served with soup, fried eggs, tea and biscuits. It turned out to be a good opportunity to speak with the director and her assistant on a less formal basis. They told us of the difficulties they had in trying to attract support from local businesses. She complimented her staff for their hard work and attention, but criticised the authorities for their inadequate funding and support. She was obviously trying to do her best for the children against all the odds.

In the car on the way home, we spoke of the arrangements which would be made for the new children's arrival. An existing Kitezh family had been chosen, and the summer was set as a realistic transfer date. A house would need to be renovated to accommodate the needs of such a large and young family, for which the funds had been found, but were not yet guaranteed.

I left with a heavy heart, but thankful that the experience hadn't been as traumatic as I had expected. It was enough to firmly ground my belief that Kitezh and the model it provides, is a healthy and truly beneficial alternative to the existing system of residential orphan care. It is by no means perfect. Inevitably, when people are working and living together in such close quarters, unexpected tensions and pressures appear. But I was glad to return that afternoon. This time I read the words on the sign at the gate, with a very different understanding of what they meant. 'Peace to those who enter the territory of Kitezh— A place where children are given a family and a home.'

It is now June, and renovations are underway. Typically, another project has been put on hold in order to pay for this one. We expect the children soon.

Dena Fisher



Do these kids deserve to go to university? Of course they do! Your donations make it possible for them to reach their full potential. Please help us to help them.

On the backpage see how their talents and initiative are blossoming at Kitezh. Such enthusiasm shouldn't go to waste. We want to send five of them to university this year. Your support is invaluable so please give generously.

I cannot find words to express
Everything my soul cries about.
I get breathless with my tears
When I try to muse

I was so shocked and bewildered by
The depth of my story.
I asked you to take me with you, to take me higher,
And I saw neither adult nor child in you.

Oh, for how long have I not looked for stars!
Now my heart is bursting with tears.
But I do not think it will be easy.
I do not know if I can trust you.

You are somewhere and you might be nearby,
My path will not miss you.
I am determined to overcome all difficulties
To join the Circle as an equal.



Valya came to live in Kitezh when she was 11 years old. She had lived in an orphanage in Kaluga, and used all her determination to persuade the authorities and her grandmother to allow her to join the Lukyanov's family in Kitezh. Valya is a bright shining light, and by far the best English student in Kitezh. In spite of this, she struggles with self confidence. Her poem expresses something of her yearning to regain the self that she lost as a small abandoned child, with the help of her peers and the loving care of the adults around her.

Valya Kanukhina, 14

Businesskids

IT is difficult to say how and when this word combination appeared. It was decided that we would do business. And since we are all children, we decided to use a combination of two languages, English and Russian—'Business-dyeti' ('dyeti' means children in Russian). But it felt inharmonious to us, which resulted in a new word combination 'Businesskids' without any Russian origin. Maria (Masha) Pichugina, heads the project. Why? She is strong, resolute and the most consistent among us.

Businesskids is a game with real rules and real money. Our starting point could be typical of any family. We, like everyone else, are short of money. In Kitezh parents do not give children pocket money. In Moscow, some parents play an absurd game: their children get money for services to their own parents, i.e. tidying-up, washing dishes etc or for high marks in school. It's a



Masha Pichugina as Eliza
in My Fair Lady

funny game but in our opinion, this leads to damaging children's souls. It is absurd to make money from one's relatives.

Besides bringing up orphans, Kitezh grows potatoes using a Dutch method. Our Potato Programme aims to make a profit and to enable the Children's Community to live independently, and survive in our wonderful and beautiful world. Andrey Stepanov heads this programme. He was a navigator of an atomic submarine before he ran his own successful business in Moscow. Since 2000 he has lived in Kitezh and he manages

the economic projects here.

In spite of the fact that KitezhAgro is a separate company, we still feel responsible for it. So we sort and pack potatoes. And we get paid for our work because it is a business. Thus, our summer work gave us enough money to start our own business game in which we all decided to participate rather than be paid individually. We made that decision at a children's general meeting. The game aims to teach us the economic laws of managing a company (it would be unfair not to mention that it was our teachers' idea).

At the next stage of our game, we learned how various types of enterprises differ from each other, how they distribute profit and loss, what a charter should carry, how to write contracts, etc. Denis Orlov, former Deputy Director of the Moscow Satire Theatre, taught us. The teaching process seemed dull and useless to us. We were eager to make real money and work on real projects; we wanted to set up a real company.

Ecologia Trust
The Park, Forres IV36 3TZ
Moray
Scotland
Tel/Fax: +44 (0)1309 690995
email:all@ecologia.org.uk
www.ecologia.org.uk

Now I realise that we should have devoted much more time to those subjects. But we have plenty of time ahead of us. Even during our classes, we did not waste our time. We started to participate in the cattle breeding programme. At the moment, it sounds very serious but in reality, we simply bought two bull-calves, which we are going to sell in the autumn. Of course, we will not profit much from two, three or four bull-calves but our herd will grow and in some time it will consist of 20, 30, 100 and even more bull-calves.

We have a lot of plans for this summer. Money has to work. By the way, Kitezh is ready to receive guests! The 'Guest House with 12 beds and all modern conveniences was finished last spring.

Businesskids take part in the programme: we take care of our guests, organise walking tours, sporting and other events for them. Come to see us! Firstly, you will see Kitezh, which is great; secondly, you will help our Businesskids Company to earn more money for development.

We are still small, and our progress is slow, but where is a will, there is a way!



Yegor Lukyanov as Professor Higgins
in My Fair Lady

Alexander Surakhyan, (17)

My Fair Lady (In English), directed by Marina Maximova and Dena Fisher, was a smash hit! A real accomplishment!

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