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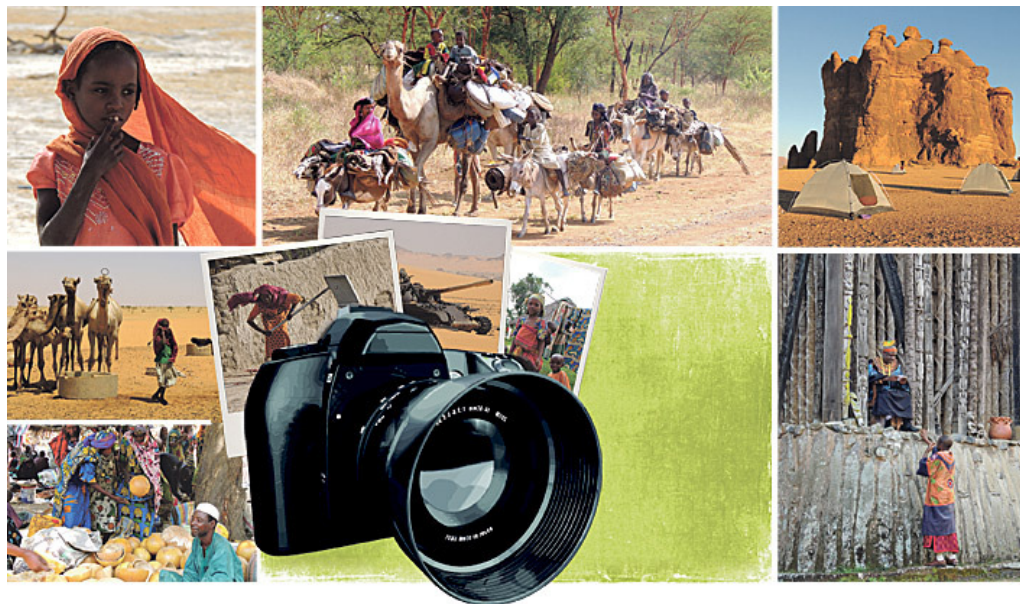
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Mapping out a new career



A selection of photos from Dane's recent travels. From Chad: bottom left to right: the Dougia Market, pumping a well, a young girl, nomads on the road, camping in the Tukul Massif. Bottom right: The 11th Fon(king) of Bafor, Cameroon, holds audience. Around camera: more images from Chad and Cameroon.

Photos courtesy of Amy Dane

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Lifelong wanderlust fuels 'second act' as a travel lecturer and photographer

By Debbie Gardner

debbieg@thereminder.com

Amy Dane is a modern traveler with the soul of an old-fashioned adventurer. At midlife this lifelong Longmeadow resident has already visited more than 90 countries, yet still thirsts to see and do and experience more, then share that knowledge with others.

"If you want to understand a people and a country, you have to peel back the layers and get into the streets, into the back alleys and get into where people live and work," Dane explained. "You can't just get on and off a bus (tour)."

Her latest journey, a two-week visit to the land-locked country of Chad, had her crossing endless sands wedged between other travelers in the back seat of an enclosed jeep in 130 heat. Her nightly accommodations consisted of a sand-whipped tent and a bowl of water to wash up in. The first meal of the day was stale French bread, "we called it croutons," Dane said. One afternoon, they stopped at a well and she was able to wash her hair. On another, they had the opportunity to take a swim at an oasis.

Camera in hand – "I use a good point and click with a good zoom," she said, Dane recorded the trek in a series of stunning images and videos that could rival the work of any photojournalist.

Back home those images became fodder for her next exhibition, talk, and website post.

Since 2008, Dane has been channeling her passion for this intimate, hands-on style of travel experience into an encore career as a travel lecturer. The former education coordinator for the Mount Holyoke College Museum now offers multi-media presentations of her journeys to armchair travelers at libraries, museums, senior centers and retirement homes.

She's also become a sought-after exhibitor, loaning her photos for showings at local galleries, museums, libraries and hospitals. In February 2012, one of her images was chosen as "Best in Show" at the Friends of the Agawam Public Library Second Open Juried Photography Show. In 2013, she took second place for photography at the Monson Arts Council's 2013 art show.

Self-taught behind the lens, Dane likens her style of travel photography to the type of work done by photojournalists on the scene of an event.

"There's no time to set up, the moment is there and you shoot," she said. "Many times, I'm trying to take photos I'm not supposed to."

Her favorite shots are of people. "Their faces tell stories," she said.

In addition to her photos, videos of her trips are available on her website, Amy Dane Adventures (www.amydaneadventures.com/). A certified travel agent since 2004, she's also helped other would-be adventurers plan their own far-flung treks through her agency, Great Dane Travel, which is a Travel Companion affiliate.

Born to travel

Her lifelong wanderlust, Dane recalled, was fueled by her first solo trip at 13, a cross-country trek to attend summer camp. As a student at Northfield Mount Herman in the 1970s, a teenaged Dane took advantage of travel opportunities offered through the school.

"I had a German professor with a French wife who ran trips to France," she said. In addition, from 1977 to 78 she spent a year abroad studying French at the University of Geneva and "really getting to travel throughout Europe."

By the time Dane got married, she said she'd had enough of Europe and wanted to "travel the world," a desire she's pursued with gusto ever since.

"Travel is an addiction," Dane said. "It's something inside you that grows."

An eye for art

Despite her avowed "fascination with the road less travelled," Dane didn't focus on that aspect of her life in her initial career plans.

"My two loves in life are art and travel," she admitted. She pursued a bachelor's degree in art history from Smith College and a master's degree from Williams College. She relocated to New York City after college, but returned to western Massachusetts to marry a man she'd met in high school. Her first art-based job in the area was a temporary publicity position with the Springfield Museums, covering a maternity leave. After the birth of her second child she went back to work part-time and part year at Mount Holyoke College, serving as education coordinator for the college's museum.

For 11 years Dane helped develop outreach programs for the Mount Holyoke College museum, meeting weekly with volunteer docents and training college students to go into public school classrooms to talk about the museum and its collections.

"The town didn't even know there was a museum on [the campus] or that they were welcome [before the programs]," Dane said. During these years, she continued to indulge her passion for traveling when time and family commitments permitted.

A turning point

Dane left the Mount Holyoke Museum in 2006. "I needed to think about what I wanted at this point in my life," Dane said, adding she wavered over the decision to pursue another job. Her husband was still working full time, and her children, though no longer living at home, are both affected by autism and still needed her help and guidance.

She thought about what she truly loved – art and travel – and began to explore how to "share what you love, and make it fulfilling to yourself, and educational to others."

Around the same time a friend suggested she turn her carefully written personal travelogues into presentations she could share with others.

With time on her hands, she started to "develop Power Point [presentations] which would be informative and have a bit of humor and market them to places such as libraries, senior centers and retirement homes."

Her goal with the presentations was to have people "leave asking questions and perhaps debating whether or not they agree with me" when it comes to her interpretation of the culture she is presenting.

However, it wasn't a perfect transition, and Dane said it was a good two years before she felt comfortable promoting herself as a travel lecturer.

Dane now offers 13 of these travel talks featuring her own photos, and two talks that include combine history with her photography.

It was at one of her early presentations, at the Springfield Museums, that Robert Kadis, one of the organizers of the Friends of the Agawam Library photography show, approached Dane about entering photos in a juried exhibition.

"It would have never occurred to me," Dane said, adding that experience introduced her to another potential travel-related business, marketing her photography.

Today, Dane is focusing on her vast collection of photos and her website, which will soon include an online photo gallery with a Drop Box containing images from more than 50 countries. Website visitors will be able to purchase her photos for personal, and for stock image uses.

"I look at this as a resource as well as a little business," Dane said.

She's also planning her next adventure, an autumn visit to South Korea with her husband, whose work commitments only allow him to travel once a year.

In retrospect, Dane said the process of creating Amy Dane Adventures has not only given her a new career avenue, but also provided an opportunity to "share and enjoy my memories . to have gone through everything, sorted through everything, and have my [travel] life in one place."

Dane said she's joked with her webmaster that if anything should happen to her, he should keep the website going.

"I've put so much of myself in to this," she said.

