



Looking for Goodness

What I like best about our cover story, “Seeing the World from the Seat of a Bicycle,” is that nothing earthshaking happens. It’s just a good story. It’s like seeing an intelligent, uplifting movie that has no gunplay and no car chases.

Rachel Irvine and Mason Cassady, two young people from Bloomington, travel through several countries in Europe and Asia — mostly poor ones — hoping to get to know local people and see how they live. They go on bicycles even though they are not cycling enthusiasts; in fact, they take the everyday bikes they use to get around town. They choose bicycles because they figure that’s the best way to engage with people and their surroundings.

I was having lunch at The Uptown Café one day when I first heard about their trip. Michael Cassady, the owner, is Mason’s father. He came over to the table and told me what his son and Rachel had accomplished. I thought it would make a nice little story, never imagining we’d devote 12 pages to their trip and make it our cover.

My feelings began to change when I met Mason and Rachel and heard the account of their travels. The two have an iridescence about them that conveys innocence, honesty, and idealism. It reminds me of something Gregory Peck said long ago about Audrey Hepburn: “She has an inner glow that could only come from an inner glow.” Mason and Rachel have an inner glow.

What I heard from them were mostly stories about the kindness and generosity of the people they met on their journey. At a time when the news from Europe and Asia is so bleak, it was refreshing to hear the stories of two people who went out into the world expecting to find goodness, and found it.

Their story is timely because several of the countries they visited, including Slovenia, Hungary, Serbia, and Croatia, are in the news as hundreds of thousands of refugees flee war, deprivation, and persecution in the Middle East and Africa. At this writing, the governments of those countries have turned their backs and closed their borders to this heartbreaking sea of humanity. Images of armed guards, barbed wire, and detention camps fill our screens.

Yet despite what their governments have decreed, we also see ordinary citizens handing out food, water, diapers, and other necessities, reminding us that the way politicians act is not always how their constituents feel.

Rachel and Mason’s story reminds us, as well, that down at street level, most people everywhere are kind, generous, and welcoming to strangers. In these gut-wrenching times, we can’t get enough of such reminders.

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