

Jacek Palkiewicz, 45, is Editor-in-Chief of "Avventura" (Adventure) magazine and an avid traveller. He also writes for the major Italian newspapers "Corriere della Sera" and "La Gazzeta dello Sport". He is a sea captain, a yachtsman with several solo cruises to his credit, a glider pilot, a black belt in karate, and, for the last 20 years, a worldwide traveller who loves to rough it. Palkiewicz prefers to travel by camel, in an old pickup truck, by train second class or on a fisherman's boat.

He's, maybe, the "last of the Mohicans", the last of those old-school journalists whose trade is adventure. Palkiewicz's not interested in covering politics or the economy. He's attracted to livelier subjects - man, his way of life, his environment. Palkiewicz is more than just a reporter. He doesn't just get the facts, he lives them. So he can tell about them firsthand, filling his stories with his enthusiasm and sense of adventure.

Palkiewicz has led several expeditions to the Amazon and the Sahara and knows South-East Asia well. He is an expert at survival. In 1983 he set up the "Survival School" in Europe. He has written numerous books about his travels and adventures.



# A'M LOOKING FOR ADVENTURE

## Italian journalist dreams of Siberia

People often ask me: "What for?" They wonder why I do what I do. I've often wondered myself. I look at how other people live - with their normal working days and routine lives, without any ups or downs. But I've never envied them: quite the opposite.

Given my experience and the situations I've lived through, which few others have, I'm often surprised at what a big difference there is between the real and imaginary value of things and situations; at how differently different people respond to them. Once one realizes the importance of real values, it's impossible to care about the interests and strivings of those who go out of their way to

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### 'MN' EXCLUSIVE

horizon becomes even broader. But deep in my heart I also feel a slight bitterness, like bitter almonds. I try to get rid of it, but it comes back. I see the eyes of my children. I set off on my trips for them, too, because they can see the same things I do only in museums or in books. It makes me angry that consumerism - like environmental pollution and the lack of ideals and of values - has taken over.

Faith in man is the first thing that should inspire us to act; instead we must learn how to protect ourselves from violence, aggression and crime. It's no longer enough to look a man in the eyes and shake his hand - now we need seals, signatures and stamps. One's word of honour, apparently, is not enough and I'm just a dreamer. But when you are buying a camel in the desert these simple values still apply. And if you need water or shelter you'll always find a man who'll hand you a ladle or throw open the flap of his tent. But such things are possible only among the last "savages".

But a stranger is not welcome in our homes - with so many amenities and

the mountains and at sea, which I learned to love as a child dreaming over books by Jack London, Robert Louis Stevenson and Joseph Conrad. I started dreaming the first night I ever camped out, sleeping in a tent: one of my most vivid memories. It was my first night under unknown skies at a time when I could touch the stars - there at the Roof of the World, when all around me I could hear the creak and rumble of glaciers and avalanches which had buried as many mountaineers on the Annapurna as had reached the summit. I prize everything. I have experienced and lived through, every gust of wind, every gramme of sea salt, every difficult step forward, all the thorns and prickles, and my heavy rucksack which has accompanied me on all my adventures.

Am I still dreaming of another adventure? Always. And the most important one is to get to those parts of Siberia, as yet unknown to Westerners - that land so rich in possibilities; in hope which has now turned into confidence. To Siberia, the very word rings with cold, despair, loneliness and suffering. But Siberia is also the place where man has yet to test himself and his strength. In boundless Siberia, where summer is so short but full of force, over 200 species of flowers bloom, and then snow covers everything, rivers become icebound and beech trees crack from the cold. The sun comes up only briefly, giving light but no warmth. But people who love the land and take pride in its majesty live in Siberia. They often say that you have to conquer the land in order to live in the nature where everything - the taiga, the rivers and the plains - are on a biblical scale.

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Given my experience and the situations I've lived through, which few others have, I'm often surprised at what a big difference there is between the real and imaginary value of things and situations; at how differently different people respond to them. Once one realizes the importance of real values, it's impossible to care about the interests and strivings of those who go out of their way to get more than they could ever use.

A man needs so little to live. I also want to ask: "What for?" What makes people choose this or that? I've met people who live in the most unthinkable and inhospitable places on Earth, who have literally nothing. And I've seen people who live in the fantastic natural conditions of the Caribbean, where man needs nothing but a hut: when he's hungry he takes a boat and goes fishing or climbs up a tree and picks some fruit.

I try to see all these things with my own eyes. Other people's stories are not enough. I must take in all the sounds, smells and tastes myself so as to reproduce them. Only when I've experienced it all myself so that I feel like a participant in this life, can I describe it for those who'd rather travel without leaving home.

When I see a plane flying high in the sky, I think of an opportunity lost: who knows where it is going and who knows what I could have seen and experienced, if I'd had the chance to be aboard, off to meet a new adventure?

However, curiosity and the desire to get to know new people are not the only things that drive me. I also want to test myself, even though I may be "dying" of fright. I want to stretch the limits of my endurance, strength and will. I want to overcome all the difficulties. About fright – some people, posing as supermen, say they have never felt it. I think that those who have never felt fright are either liars or fools because fright is the first

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Now about loneliness. One can be lonely anywhere, even among people, but one is never lonelier than when one is in the middle of the ocean, when walls of water tower over your boat and the strangest thoughts cross your mind. You can't remember the smell of roses or the sound of gravel under your feet and you realize that you're utterly alone, because no one knows where you are. I felt all that when I crossed the Atlantic in 44 days in a 16-foot boat without a radio or a sextant because I couldn't afford them.

"But tell us the truth, how many times have you ever regretted getting involved in some adventure?" my readers ask me. I'm a man of action. I don't talk much. People often have to guess my thoughts and, maybe, I've never said this out loud: I've never regretted anything I started and I've never stopped anything midway. I've always been the stake in my own game: I'm convinced that in life one has to pay one's own way. You can't expect any concessions or gifts from fate. That's why it is so important to me to finish everything I start.

I've worked in gold mines in Africa and crewed on ships that travelled forgotten routes. These experiences have made me what I am – always curious and focused. I always want to see, to discover and to learn. When I crossed the island of Borneo – 2,500 km of jungle, rivers and mountains where no European had ever set foot – I studied the headhunters with curiosity and respect. I admired their

way of life, in such harmony with the jungle, their ability to survive in one of the Earth's most inhospitable places. The Amazon Indians also live in harmony with nature, a harmony which is upset only by the white man, who acts as a predator on this land where he has no right to be.

I don't even notice the moment when I begin dreaming of a new journey. It may be the smell of cinnamon, the sound of exotic music, or some image that won't leave me, that has gotten into my soul and then gradually takes me over to the point where I have to set off. If I start talking about it, my friends tell me I'm a dreamer and not a serious man. My wife looks at me and silently shakes her head. She's already tried everything to dissuade me and knows it's useless. But when I come back, she always hopes it's for the last time, that I've had enough. "Are you pleased?" she asks me nervously. "Yes," I tell her, "but you know someone told me about a mountain... or a river... or a tree." "But that's difficult," she says. "That's right," I answer. Because difficulties don't stop me, they inspire me to try a new adventure, to tackle a new challenge which many would never dare attempt.

What are these challenges like? What can I say? Everything is so subjective. Some people would not be able to handle the conditions, others might find they were capable of more than they thought. For myself, I can say that even the most daunting situation has never kept me from my goal. When I finally reach my goal – having used every drop of sweat – my

so much wealth, which must be guarded – he might be dangerous! Thinking of these values which are disappearing and which I've rediscovered for myself with so much difficulty, I decided to start a school for survival where I could teach precisely these values. My students, people of all ages and walks of life, fend for a week in the wild. They learn to find their bearings in a forest, to find water, to send signals for help and, most importantly, to use their inner resources, willpower, stamina and confidence – so necessary in daily life. One must never stop struggling, never give up hope – no matter what.

Since the urban jungle may be even more dangerous than the Amazon jungle, the new knowledge, which teaches one how to behave in case of nuclear, chemical or environmental disasters, in case of earthquakes, floods or attacks, is of great importance. Also how to protect oneself from too much noise, from smog, how to behave in case of fire, never panicking or losing self-control.

At my "Survival School", the fieldwork is supplemented by theory – on the basis of my books. "This school teaches you how to live," says one of the students who has returned to repeat the course. Another adds: "I never knew I was capable of such things. Now I'm full of confidence and prepared for everything."

The goal I set myself and the other teachers is to exercise maximum caution lest an adventure turn into a mishap. Everyone must be able to assess his own strength, to cope in

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To cross this vastness one has to first overcome the boundaries of one's own conventional thinking and break into another dimension, where everything is at the limit, where the very climate drives man out. Each and every day, you must convince yourself all over again to stay and to go on living in a place where life is impossible. It is impossible to live in Siberia: to live there, you must give all it takes (and it takes a lot), but also absorb everything that it gives back (and it gives even more).

If I manage to fulfil my dream, I'll live through this adventure, just like all the others, three times: the first time when I "dream it up", the second when it becomes reality, and the third time when, upon my return, I sit down in a comfortable chair and look through my pictures, and the ground I've covered seems incredible even to me. How did I manage to get through here? How difficult that passage was! Here – waist-deep in dirt and swamp! There I nearly fell off a rock. While doing all these things, it wasn't just that I felt shivers up my spine. I discovered that I could survive on my own. I saw new horizons and met people who are no better or worse than I am, but are simply other people, who are not like me. I suffered from hunger, thirst, heat and cold. I lived and I have no regrets about that.

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