

# Trip to the Antarctic

## Team "blind climber"

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## Log excerpts

Trips to Antarctica evoke big things in the minds of many people. I've noticed that quite often during my preparation for such trips. It's a magical continent that very few people ever set foot on in their lives. So special attention is certainly paid to those who actually dare to make their way there.

### Day 1 | 15/02/2016 | Flight: Lienz - Munich - Madrid - Buenos Aires.

Since yesterday I have had this feeling inside me. To call it nervousness isn't entirely true, it is more a state of inner tranquillity, of tightening. Now and then doubt, and something I don't really know otherwise; fear. Fear that I might not come back in one piece, or at all. Although that is highly unlikely on this trip, which is in fact a well-planned and foolproof project - beyond an expedition into the wild.

This fear is simply there, it warns me and keeps me awake, makes me focus and reminds me to be vigilant. And the quieter I get, the more we are currently on the place in the clouds above Madrid, the more it turns into humility, joy and feelings of love. Yes, love.

Andy and Anda are sleeping in the seats next to me. I picture briefly what it must be like for Andy to experience this in total darkness without actually being able to *picture* it at all. Check-in and a group trip to the toilet at the airport led us already to speculate just how much our roles will transform in the next two weeks. Andy navigated us through the red tape of the flight bookings, he knows each motorway junction off by heart and sorted the car parking for the team - and minutes later he stumbled onto the escalator behind me. "You have to let yourself be led to be able to lead yourself." - Crazy world.

Mood amicably great. We bumped into Frank in Munich, the German architect, who from the get go is friendly and helpful. Yet many hours of flying lie ahead, we will land late at night in 35 degrees heat in Buenos Aires. Unfortunately, without shorts, which I forgot to pack.

We've arrived safely. Roger joined us in Madrid.

### Day 2 | 16/02/2016 | Buenos Aires

35 degrees. Celsius. We are taking a peculiar route to Antarctica. A route through the city. Funny that the path to the cold goes directly through the summer heat.

For Andy, walking through the city is far more exhausting than heading through the silent wilderness. Thousands of sounds: slanting pavements, posts, lampposts, curbs, dog shit, passers-by racing passed us in the opposite direction, crossroads and disoriented teammates. Our city tour was probably, well hopefully, the hardest part of the entire trip.

The highlight was our long-planned and compulsory meeting with an 800 gram steak and beer in Buenos Aires. Then it was finally clear and official that my vegetarianism came to an end after five years, all living beings on the planet were dedicated to this stage of life. Rarely has a dead animal been eaten with such passion. My score on the karma scale was again lacking a little something at this point. But it's all worth it. Side dishes would have only distracted us from the main goal, the red wine helped some team members leave all their fears behind, loud singing in a fairly classy, well-visited bar in the middle of Argentina. We were lucky; the waiters liked us.

I'd be lying if I wrote that the different characters, strengths and weaknesses in the team hadn't become apparent today. Preferably in the cosy city as in an Antarctic ice gorge would I want to spend 45 deadlocked minutes discussing "Should we wait for the bus? Shall we take a taxi? Let's go on foot? Is there a café nearby? Let's go back to the hotel?" Decisiveness helps. A Yes is a Yes, a No is a no. This definitely applies to me, and I'm definitely not alone in coming to this conclusion.

"Some friends use each other sort of half and half, utilise each other. We do it quite differently: We take full advantage of each other" Andy uttered this sentence today by the way, as we were hobbling through the city on our way out for the steaks. That's the way it is. Only when we fully solicit and utilise the capabilities of others, can we be successful as a team. With half measures we will get nowhere, we will rot on the shelf and lose our nerve.

Indecision and misunderstood considerations! When I go with full strength, it is necessary to stand confidently by my competences. It helps no one, and is rather a drawback if you are afraid of hurting others by overruling them or offending them by keeping your thoughts to yourself, being nice and waiting on the decisions of others instead of clearly stating your own opinions and decisions.. We owe it to each other to be forthright! We use each other. Just as Andy constantly uses one of us, exploits us, to navigate. We get back a hundredfold.

### **Day 3 | 17/02/2016**

Ushuaia. Ilija Trojanow notes rightly in his novel, *Eistau*, that there is really few good things to say about the southernmost city in the world. We will stay one night here, sleep tomorrow without setting an alarm and in the afternoon set sail on the Ortelius.

15:30. Sitting alone in the hotel lobby, the others are still resting in their rooms. Roger was sitting with me, he just suddenly turned up. And asked me about my two sons. If there were just the right question for this moment - then this was it. My eyes welled up immediately. Good tears, cleansing, and for the eyes essential, sharpening tears. Suddenly and without warning. I took a deep breath and started telling him: raving on about Lukas as he is getting on with his Matura year, how careful, attentive, well-connected, sensitive he is in his thinking and feeling. He's a good listener, picks things up quickly and enthusiastically applies. And I raved on about David, my younger son. How I love the fact that he began to work with me at my company after dropping out of school a one and a half years ago. What a reliable, perceptive, courageous, eloquent apprentice he has been since the start of this school year. How great he receives feedback on what his

potential is. And how well we manage to be father and son as well as to work as a boss and apprentice together.

"Working with your father: that never works out" - oh how many times we have heard this sentence already. It's not just that - it is the most beautiful thing in the world. The most sensible, that we can currently both do something together. I pass on my knowledge, he takes it all in, and we spend so much quality time together. Time that we didn't have chance the share since the divorce 12 years ago. It is never too late. "It's not about making time last longer, but compressing it." That was in a message from Devi sent a few minutes ago. In response to my fear of not ever having enough time.

## **Day 4 | 18/02/2016 | Ushuaia - port, ship**

We met our tour organisers and guides for dinner yesterday, first sniff and one question – answer: excess. Andy and Anda bombarded him with questions, the three of us listened attentively although tired: "What is the snow like at the moment? Where will we make land? Which maps are available? How do we get in the inflatables? What equipment do we take? Where have you been? What is the food on the boat like? Who else is coming with us? When do we put on our ski boots? What rules apply in the Antarctic? Are stowaways really not allowed on board? ... "

For me as a city and forest person, I am diving a world that is still foreign to me. What strikes me is the very functional, technical language - similar to my memories of my time in the military. Questions and stories about feelings or personal things seem somewhat secondary in this mountain-man's world. That's my impression at the start, at least. I haven't been asked anything yet, which doesn't make my anxiously cautious emotional situation any better.

I'm just a bit of a wimp and a guy who knows how to read women, I need that "read between the lines", the whiff and "get along with each other". For me "letting someone in" isn't a question of trust, but the result of "heart, gut and brain." Since I am highly sensitive: Only if word, image and sense perception match, do I open myself up. Because only then can true partnership exist, because only then can guidance work well. I am then easy to guide, when I feel myself to be fully understood. It's the same force – on one occasion I use it to isolate myself so I'm not led astray. In the other cases, I use this power for committing myself to something, for opening up, dedicating myself to something. Then I am free for the nitty-gritty of what it is that my task entails. This is precisely the quality of team leadership that I mean. Then I'm happy.

Most recently when the question of the expected swell in the "Drake Passage" was asked about, after all one of the stormiest, wildest, most dangerous parts of the ocean, it all got a bit emotional for us. The creaking of ropes and the sticking of "seasickness ear patches" of course was the immediate technical solution that was on the table at the time, but it didn't help us overcome our fears and anxieties. Today, our day of rest is the answer to this tension within us. "Guys, brace yourselves for a special night on this ship" said Andy at the shared breakfast. "Give our bodies a rest for today."

And so we can enjoy the silence, drink plenty of water and do seemingly "nothing". And that's a lot. We prepare ourselves mentally prior to the next step of our journey. Andy directs Roger and Anda, who are just next to me, with the preparation of the short-wave radio antenna, the cable must be cut exactly to the millimetre.

## **Day 5 | 19/02/2015 | Drake Passage**

07.30. An announcement over the crackling cabin tannoy. Everything vibrates. We wake up, slowly. "Guys! This is all just yarn." With this definitively nonsensical phrase Andy manages to crawl out of bed half-asleep, and made a pretty good attempt at forcing us to smile. It did not matter what he said. He was concerned with something quite different: to join the group, check reactions and to see if we are all fit.

One after another we crawl out of our narrow beds and disappear into 2 square meters of bathroom. First Anda, then Frank, then Andy, and finally me. Breakfast at 8 o'clock. Ravenously hungry. Then the first briefing for the tours from the guides. "Crevasse" is slowly becoming my favourite word...

Seasickness hits when the body reacts to the loss of orientation with nausea. The sickness hits when you lose yourself in the chaotic world around you. If you lose control, just as in everyday life, only in everyday life, we take false precautions, pure and simple.

We assume that society, elected government, weddings, well-composed opinions or employment contracts are stable, static reference points. We don't question these precautions purely out of convenience. Thanks to us human's innate ability to suppress things, we succeed at doing this all too well.

If we would all consciously acknowledge that there are no guarantees, we would ideally continue to develop our minds, fully awake, mindfully, responsively, presently and grow as thanks to these uncertainties. "Mountain climbing is just that!" shouts Andy spontaneously when I read him the text I'm writing here.

Reality unfortunately shows us the opposite most of the time: we degenerate, stagnate, project our repressed fears and become socially seasick. What I mean is that our society is actually constantly vomiting, addicted to drugs and deceptions that take our edge away and make us lie until the nausea goes away. A high price for the dullness of mind and sight. These are precisely the effects and side effects of the anti-seasickness medicine, with the active ingredient "Cinnarizine"...

Now for the really important things in life: The short-wave radio. Today we spied out the ideal place for our dipole antenna. Right next to the helipad. Now we are pressing hard on getting the captain's permission. Today, Andy and I visited the third officer on the bridge and she was thrilled with the proven success tactics for our "Lil' Radio Project". She will ask the captain on our behalf for permission for the radio.

That's enough writing for today. We will make land on the Antarctic coast sometime between Sunday night and Monday morning.

## **Day 6 | 20/02/2016 | Drake Passage, Antarctica**

Icy winds and significantly wilder seas than yesterday. Foggy. We will reach the first icebergs tonight. Still none of us seasick. Andy has been transmitting for hours at the stern of the ship.

Equipment is ready for Antarctica, induction into the strict conservation rules for that continent that has been touch so little by mankind. Making sure that our clothing is free of traces of organic matter such as plant seeds, thistle burrs and dirt, picking everything out meticulously and signing off the standards. A day shaped by organisational things as well, but not solely that.

My dream tonight. It has got me thinking. I saw a fleet of silver-grey warships crossing by the Antarctic icebergs. Silent. Threatening. I felt alarmed and aware - in the dream. As if I would had come across something that has always been there, that I would have discovered it, and would finally see it.

Perhaps the dream came about because I am far enough away from our madness of our selfish, unspiritual society, the pathologically greedy economy, from the otherwise so very present wars in Syria, Ukraine and where else that we hear about every day, the wholeheartedly unhuman attacks and contempt for life, from the European refugee crisis. Far enough away from our policy of callous stupidity. Far enough away from motorways, pollution, skyscrapers, national insurance contributions, cash register legislation and Hitradio Ö3. Far enough away from the madness of our ill society.

Perhaps since my brain, my heart and soul have been carried nearer to the Antarctic Circle and the incredibly wild seas that I am finally far enough away to see how sick we humans are. As we have become used to seeing war, the images of suffering, bombings, fences and upper migration limits day in and day out, we have accepted them as human solutions. We have *unlearned* our humanity. What this trip has already opened my eyes to is humility. Everything about me here is powerful, strong and courageous. And I as a human have only a chance to survive: Not to take myself too seriously, to adapt. To comprehend the size and strength of our earth...

The sea now presents itself like boiling water, bubbling, foaming, and swaying menacingly. We will arrive very soon. First whales sighted. Icy cold slaps us in the face.

Today I am less in the writing mood than usual. Quieter and more thoughtful, a bit sad and - just humble. The earth is shaking.

In an hour we disembark - the eternal ice is not far away anymore...

## **Day 7 | 21/02/2016 | Antarctic**

Everyone healthy. Good food. Nice weather.

## **Day 8 | 22/02/2016 | This is Antarctica**

"Everyone healthy. Good food. Nice weather."

That was my Facebook post for yesterday, day 7. Plus the photo of the roped-ski tour. When, as a child, I didn't want to reveal to my parents how I was doing on a ski course or, even worse, at the parish summer camp, I wrote these words on one of those glossy postcards. "Everyone healthy. Good food. Nice weather." That was by no means a lie. Maybe not the whole truth, but an essential part of it. And anyway, for my concerned parents it was "good news, reassuring news." That's what we were doing as children, yes: always making our parents perfectly happy, being well-behaved so that we were punished with as fewer slaps as possible, no curfew and without losing out on pocket money...

It's pointless therefore to leave our loved ones feeling scared and worried. When we were back from the glacier tour in the Zodiac inflatable boat, Frank asked me in his distinctively unique, gentle nature: "What text are you writing today?" - Frank is one of the few people I know who can say everything to me with just a few words, or even no words at all. His "Everything - good" has become the slogan of our trip.

And now once again from the start: "First trips - ski tours in Antarctica" - we booked. By ship, the Ortelius, to Antarctica to go on a ski tour organised, approved and secured along the route of the ship, arranged by the organiser. The ship: our floating hotel - and once or twice a day we head to specific locations on the coast in the Zodiac. A little worn, very useless - and therefore just right for us. "From all these so meaningful, well-

intentioned, reasonable and more than anything serious acts, the world has become a worse place rather than a better one. Now I'll do something completely pointless, expensive and selfish. "

My new hypothesis: the more I work myself up, the more I enhance my own joy and the more curious I am, the less damage I do to this world. That's why I'm here.

Our mountain guide ties us up in a six rope formation to this small island that is covered by huge masses of glacial ice straight after the crossing. He is leading the way, Andy six metres behind, me another six metres behind him, then Frank, then Roger and the last after another 50 metres of rope, Anda. After a few tying issues, we head off with our cross-country skis uphill past the penguins and seals, the air filled with the stench of bird shit, the snow coloured red and green from the excrement of the wildlife. The scene to me was, said gently, a little bit strange. The first of our ten planned trips has finally begun. Everyone healthy. Good food. Nice weather.

Our journey uphill is going well, this is what we've been looking forward for so long. I keep getting a little dizzy when I look up to the right. Up to this giant wall of ice, interspersed with cracks and full of bright blue ice, just as I recognise it from those sweet and sour glacier mints as a child. That's what Antarctica is like. We cross over snow-filled crevasses - so the mountain guide tells us. Always with a taut rope. Man to man to man perfectly secure. Even if one of us would fall - the ropes would hold us. I orient myself in a way that I can focus on Andy. We let each other know what we're thinking now and again. And yes, I was scared. That feeling when you inevitably squeeze your butt cheeks together when you can only hope and believe, that whatever is under your feet keeps what its promise.

"Only the fearless will fall", says Andy. The sentence I know well, hearing it from him for the first time during our climb back in the East Tyrolean Dolomites. Keeping wide awake is the answer. Being mindful and fully aware at any one time. Fear warns us. Fear is not a stop sign.

Summit in sight. A broad white edge at the end of the snow field marks the summit and our victory. The mountain guide will get there first. "Follow me. Here's a good viewpoint. We will come this far but no further, otherwise it will be too dangerous", he calls to us. Andy follows, puts himself on the right-hand side of him with a slack rope, then I'll follow too, and put myself next to Andy.

"**BERG HEIL**" I say, and after the "L" has hardly had time to leave my lips, a firecracker, a glacial blue-white circle flares up on the ground around where the mountain guide is standing - and "crash bang whallop" collapses in on itself. Andy could sense that I saw it. I grab Andy's upper body and we throw ourselves backwards. The rope is running away from us, the spans of rope between us are suddenly huge and Andy is the first to begin the six metre drop with his harness, with his clenched legs only 20cm from the cracked hole in the snow floor. It only took a millisecond for Andy and I to realise what's happening. Frank, Roger and Anda realised a few seconds later what is going on.

It took us an hour to retrieve him. With dislocated shoulders, he was finally able to be brought back up after several attempts thanks to Anda and Andy's mountain know-how and our cohesion as a team.

This one hour. I won't describe here any details that relate to the others; too intimate, borderline and trustful was this shared experience. What we experienced a few days ago at the bus stop in Buenos Aires, when I wrote that, we gained this team experience in the safe city rather than in the dangerous Antarctica - all that really happened. Each in its greatest power. Each one in the present. All of us courageous and focused. All five of us fulfilled our responsibilities. Consciously.

There was this one moment when I made the sign of the cross. When I ended up with my mittens to my heart, down to the base of my ribcage, left to breast and reached right to the other side. Without thinking, without knowing what I was doing. I made the sign of the cross.

The guide contacted Tanja, the ship's doctor, who has everything available here on the ship. Today, on the 8th day, he was back on his feet. Our accident and emergency report is with the captain.

For us, it now means schedule changes and some tough negotiations with the expedition leader - without a mountain guide there is a legal issue with letting us go ashore and on the glaciers...

In the evening, Andy radioed a couple of short waves out into the world to relax, I drank three cans of beer, the other a few colas. We talked a lot about it. That's what team building looks like when there are no flipcharts and climbing frames.

I am sitting now, on the afternoon of day 8, alone on deck of the Ortelius, around me the sea and around a 500 metre radius pure white icebergs and mountains. The other four have set out on a tour, I wanted some peace. Although we all have seen the images of Antarctica, it's like a dream here. A continent of primal power. The extent to which has just struck me now

Everyone healthy. Good food. Nice weather.

## **Day 9 | 23/02/2016 | Antarctica**

A barbecue. On the Helipad. Two smoking grills. Free beer. Mulled wine. 500 Watt sound system. Beer tables on deck. Sun is perfect for the zero degrees - even too warm for the Antarctic summer. Paradise Harbour. Panoramic, eternal ice. The ship's diesel engines hum. A Spanish tourist, who has probably never seen an iceberg in her life, dances with a Canadian to "One Night sleeping in Antarctic Camper" and other mainstream songs. The newlywed newlyweds from the US drink champagne, she wanted to propose where the monogamous penguins live. A white, backless dress, an Iridium satellite phone for the direct line to the Pastor, a cameraman also there – their wedding night amid the camper group.

Russian divers celebrate loudly, the Philippine kitchen crew are finally allowed out into fresh air and serve the barbecue. Roger is the first to leave and just wants some peace. The ship chugs along idly in a circle. The sun beats down, cascading ice cracks, a sea lion huffs past, making noise. If I weren't not sure if this were real, it would look like a very bad or an extremely good film. It's all a matter of perspective. Is that all? In Antarctica, something like ketchup and jelly babies going well together. From bad to worse: "Modern Talking. Cheri Cheri Lady". It falls under serious injury. The already slightly tipsy lady from Spain joins us: "why don't you dance?"

I would so like to keep it a secret. To only tell you about untouched crevasses, the savage Drake Passage, the elemental force of unspoiled nature, whales, walruses, seals and millions of happy penguins. To tell you about an adventure between life and death, the discovery of the essence of things, here at the southernmost tip of the earth. That is also true. Also. But not *only* that...

If a hundred passengers pay good money for them to discover Antarctica - then there are 100 different stories and topics here. To bring this all under one umbrella is difficult, but not impossible. The organizer is a hardened man. It's a good business to bring people safely over here. Everything is paid here in a mixed currency of curiosity, vanity, joy of life, self-search, futility, and pride.

What I, however, would not recommend to a shipping company is: mixing 'Entertain me, I have paid a lot of money paid for that' tourists together on the same ship expedition with 'Take me safely to the Antarctic, the rest I will take care of once I get there' athletes and explorers. And then to have them lumped together. The pushiness of the Australian expedition leader trying to incessantly force this "Club Med atmosphere" on the five of us wound us all up, which is painful on the surface of it, pressing on us his activity plans and unfortunately not managing a single sentence without joking about Penguin poop. Whereby "banter" is greatly exaggerated. Had he even some basic individual service and crisis management skills, he would have certainly been the last to become our best friend after the accident and failure of our (single) ski tour guide. The opposite is the case. We help ourselves out, and a feeling left in the lurch.

The fact that we are growing from the unexpected difficulties and certainly having the most fun of all here on the ship, we owe it to our basic attitude: we establish our home. Improvise well. We keep looking forward and only briefly back. We know our limits. We communicate well together. We say what we think and stick together. We have now become five true buddies...

All is good.

## **Day 10 | 24/02/2016 | Antarctic**

Sunset. The Earth burns, the sky glows. 22.10 local time.

I'm standing with Andy at the bow of the Ortelius, we're heading west. Icebergs. Glaciers. Orcas. This trip is having an effect. Even now. Our Antarctic trip is coming to an end. The sea isn't expected to be as gentle as it was on the way here. From tomorrow we embark again across the Drake Passage towards Argentina. Ushuaia - Buenos Aires - Madrid - Munich all at once. Then by car to Vienna. The morning after I have my first appointment with executives. Meeting topic: responsibility, sustainability, safety and leadership. Fits like chalk and cheese.

The accident of our mountain guide changed everything. Our plans were history and useless theory from the first day in the ice. We've had much more water underfoot than ice and snow, much warmer than expected, experienced wonderful ski tours. Wildlife overwhelmingly beautiful; Like Schönbrunn without the fences: penguins, seals, albatrosses and whales - just without polar bears. Ice, glaciers full of tension and cracks. Pure nature. Being right in the middle instead of being a spectator from afar.

"Is this what we actually hoped for?" Andy asked me this evening. Is there a quiet, mindful, well-organised boat trip around here at all – other than just tourist traffic? We aren't sure. Either you do it like this, or you risk going it all alone, alone in the wilderness. But not both. "He who prefers safety to freedom deserves to be a slave." - Aristotle is supposed to have said that.

This continent is wild, unsafe and priceless. Mankind would have to melt it to tame it. Indeed we have long since been working on this, self-destructively. As long as water dominates in all its forms, Antarctica will remain overpowering to us. I, now that I'm currently surrounded by it, am against all forms of touristic commercialisation of this continent. Crowds have no business here. "Organised ski tours do not fit in here in reality" I just thought to myself. True expeditions - always welcome. Antarctica is in front of us, as it was originally created: Roaring Silence.

I'll leave it at that for now, I have the feeling that there will soon be a song made about it...



"Are you from Germany too?" Asks the friendly German beside me as I wait, sitting on rocks, for the boat to collect us. "More a neighbour" I reply. They want to know what I am doing. I gladly explain to her the three aspects of my professional life: coach, consultant and songwriter. "Are you a doctor by profession?" asks Andy, joining the conversation. Regardless of what brought him to the question. "I tell people my profession rather reluctantly. People always look at me in the wrong light then" she says.

"You must be a banker" it occurred to me, but she is quicker, "I am a politician. I was in the German Bundestag. But now I'm retired. I couldn't stand the politics anymore." Then followed a great conversation on "politics, war and peace." Sobering. Frightening. Awakening. Touching.

"If you were the most powerful leader of the world: what would you change?!" was one of my many questions I posed to her... "I would explain to people that there is no final peace in the world, but that there must be a process that has this goal. I would ensure clear boundaries. Limits protect people; without clear boundaries, there is always conflict - especially inside. I would particularly invest in education and economic development in the countries, where war is most prevalent and dangerous. Education is still the best protection against baiting and seduction. Now we are getting to the point. And lastly: I would have current, deeply muddled wars "dealt with" without external interference until all parties are exhausted. Even if that appears very very inhumane - it is the only way for a peaceful new beginning on the ground."

"Are there people in the world who definitely want war? What is behind the refugee crisis? What is it about "Refugees as weapons"? Do you know Angela Merkel personally? What is she like in person? Why did you stand down from politics? How important are Turkey's objections to the refugees? Why is Turkey's EU visa freedom so important? What affect do the IS attacks in Europe have?"- Tomorrow we're meeting up again, I still have dozens of questions.

Glad that I came on this trip after all.

## **Day 11 | 25/02/2016 | Antarctica - Drake Passage I**

Yes - there are people in this world who are in favour of war. Those who deserve it. It's that simple. The unscrupulous. "Because of you, I doubt the human image of the good; you earn millions, because millions bleed." an excerpt from my song "Arms Dealer".

There was definitely this dream there. The fleet of warships off the Antarctic coast. Our humanity, sickened by egotism.

And now this encounter, as if from nowhere. It isn't up to me to find out insider facts on international military policy from the travelling ex-politician. Analyses that I would so love to be dismissed as conspiracy theories. To preserve my last spark of an "ideal world."

"The strategies of IS attacks come from highly educated, academic circles. Psychologically sophisticated. They are aimed at the major flaw of the West: its decadence, its worship of football and rock gods, its mockery of religious symbols, its consumerism, its laziness, its greed, its fear and vulnerability. Terrorists sacrifice their own lives and those of their children. And they hit us in places where we ourselves are not willing to die for something."

The way she says it doesn't sound at all like terrorism - justification, but rather as unruly efforts to conceive. To understand why there are conflicts, wars and contempt for life in the first place. She is one of those people who go far beyond the norm for peace in the world.

She continues her explanation: ""Refugees as weapons" is a long established term in military circles. A weapon for social destabilisation of the opponent to enforce one's own political objectives against their

opponent. Turkey now gets its EU visa freedom; it has struggled in diplomatic circles for a long time to get this."

Do I want to know from her how the refugee crisis is going to be dealt with from the European perspective?  
She takes a deep breath...

Andy starts broadcasting again. We remounted the dipole antenna on the other side of the ship, so that frequencies in the direction of Europe are clear. He immediately makes contact with Germany, the Falkland Islands and Italy. As I watch Andy on the radio, I understand more and more why it is so important to him. I also see the parallels to his bordering on obsessive enthusiasm to cast off on the entire relief of the earth. To measure, to pace, to radio - what he cannot see. But to experience it nonetheless. An important aspect of our trip.

I caught myself several times today, not for the first time, completely forgetting Andy's blindness. I just went off, without waiting for him to put his hand on my shoulder. Then we stood together on this windy platform on the stern of the Ortelius, the new mast swaying, the OOOM flag and the 4 antenna cables. I climbed the ladder back down alone - and then I remembered, terrified, "I've left Andy up there!"

Andy thinks ahead. Always, in every situation. Not just one step ahead, but two, three, four steps. And he thinks of solutions, combines perfectly his broad general knowledge. If he weren't wired like that, he could go through life with seeing-eye dogs and other assistance.

"It is necessary," he says, "from my situation to be nimble." His being constantly a few mental steps ahead of us astounds me, teaches me. Being so close to each other for an extended time as on this trip, we are ourselves for the first time. I begin to understand Andy.

His manner is contagious, through the constant being together, interdependence, such a thing constitutes as an overarching consciousness in team. In all directions. At the moment of recovering him, it showed itself the most: We are all wired in the same way. I see changes in my mind, in my attitude, in my actions. The need to always communicate with Andy in a solution-oriented and non-visually way. Phrases like "Over there," or "look here" or "Frank is there," etc. don't work. Likewise, it isn't enough simply to wander off or to point at the iceberg with your finger. We had to develop a very precise, descriptive style of language as well as communicating through touch.

For that, the base competences are: mindfulness and forethought and a culture for never-ending feedback. Immediate, direct. Friendly.

Our journey away from the ice has already begun.

## **Day 12 | 26/02/2016 | Drake Passage**

"Tell me: What is the Good, the Hopeful in the current world political situation?" To me, the assessments of military expert were too pessimistic, too depressing - I refuse to believe in the "decline of the good" and the "victory of evil".

"The Good is the world peace that we having been maintaining, as measured by a global scale, for 70 years. Although there are hotbeds of war, we are free from the World War. Europe has managed to be fundamentally and economically sound in keeping jobs and preventing serious crises" To be free of great war – is that a success?

Yes. To be "free from suffering" is a part of happiness, "free for a good life," being the second part. "Humility and responsibility is what we lack. Out with the "One must at least" and in with the "I will take care of it" appreciating what is there, instead of complaining about what is missing...

The Ortelius has set course for Ushuaia. All are somehow exhausted and overexcited. We're heading home.

After dinner we went to the bar. The Austrian Chef, Christian, also drinking his evening beer, asks me if he could take a picture with Andy and his kitchen team tomorrow. I say: "Wait here, I'll ask him for you." Of course, Andy says yes - we all loved the food on the ship. And Andy nudges me – to see if I could ask Christian if there is a guitar on board.

There is.

Minutes later, the boat is *rocking*. Andy crafts the music in a way only he can somehow. Anda, Roger and Frank follow suit, unrestrained, with "Dalalalalabamba" and "Let it be" and "Hotel California" and "Argentina" and and and then a duet with me of "Bergwerk", then my new song "Ka way Z'ruck"... Right in the middle of a song he clowns over to me: "now let's play our concert in Antarctica...!"

The expedition leader is visibly suffering, lonely, frozen to his bar stool and having to endure the fact that we are also very good entertainers. I cannot say whether the Ortelius has rocked so much because of the dancing, roaring masses or the swell in the Drake Passage. It actually doesn't matter: She swayed! Spaniards, Australians, Dutch, British, Americans, Indians, Germans, Russians, Argentines, Poles, Austrians, New Zealanders, Swiss, Chileans, Israelis, Filipinos, Hong Kongese. All getting along well together.

The Russian diver gets the guitar - together with his two friends, he sings a melancholy, Russian song. It blew my mind. Then it's my turn again with a love song. One of the Russian ladies who is no longer quite sober begins crying. Perhaps because of my song, maybe just because. The Spaniard, Andrez, has his birthday as of midnight. We sing as a surprise for him. We hug each other.

An hour later. Frank, Roger, Anda and Andy are in their bunks - I was in the bar. Three beers would have been enough, but I wanted five. I take the guitar back to the barman, going silently past the expedition leader, I stumble the three decks down and get in bed with my iPhone.

In the cabin three men are snoring.  
01.56. Good night.

## **Day 13 | 27/02/2016 | Drake Passage - Cape Horn**

Everyone healthy. Good food. Nice weather.  
Really.

Today is a quiet day at sea. Navigated Cape Horn, three miles off the coast. Our expedition bags packed again, Andy's dipole antenna dismantled. Tomorrow morning we will wake up in the port of Ushuaia, have breakfast on the boat and then get a transfer to the airport.

We are going back and forth - between unclassifiable, enormous natural impressions and frustration that after the breakdown with the official guides, we weren't allowed to do any other tours.

"We couldn't dive deep into this landscape - that's too bad" – This is how Anda summarised it to today. "Oceanwide Expeditions" indeed carried us to Antarctica safely, with impeccable service and top cooks - the tour management on board was unfortunately subject to every criticism. As always with companies, the quality of leadership is critical; this tour was, at best, tourism from the Seventies. This downer remains with us.

"The trip was for Friendship" mentions Anda in his typical style.

The 13<sup>th</sup> day of our trip is over. 00.20. Argentina.

Solid ground under our feet once again.

Lots of love from Ushuaia, Thomas, Frank, Anda, Andy and Roger.

## **Day 14 | 27/02/2016 | Ushuaia - Buenos Aires**

Getting off the ship. Shaking hands with the expedition leader. Head to Ushuaia airport, drop off the luggage. Flight to Buenos Aires. 5 hours. Stayover. Then overnight flight. To Madrid.

Now I feel empty, with regards to writing. A good empty. And I am enjoying the memories, especially all of those that I have not written about during this trip. I want to keep them my silent secrets...

## **5 days later | 05/03/2016 | Anninger – Gumpoldskirchen**

Yesterday, during the lunch break in the workshop, my iPhone mail inbox made a noise. A message from our mountain guide. He is far more seriously injured than the ship's doctor, Tanja, had diagnosed on the ship. Vertebral fracture, torn ligaments and a humerus fracture. One and a half weeks after the accident in the mountains, he is finally in Germany and in good, medical hands. Something runs down my spine - the shivers. What a blessing in disguise.

Other ideas also come to me: Was it all a mistake? What role and responsibility did the organiser have? Which did I have? Is it really wise and legitimate to let tourists and sportsmen embark to Antarctica - without offering appropriate emergency medical care? Is this the right high price, or even the decisive risk-rush, to tackle such adventures? Was I aware of these dangers? Were the good 70 nature tourists on board of the Ortelius aware of the risks that it entailed, when they trudged merrily along the melting glaciers with their gaping deep holes, covered by thin snow? We had vociferously protested and warned the others after we were told that two people from the Mountaineering Group were up to their bellies in holes, having lost their shoes. Or after we saw inexperienced tourists like ducks waddling along an icy, 45-degree slope, directly above us. And we stopped our ascent.

On the first morning in Antarctica. Our climbing accident. That image before my eyes. It always comes back to me. He was only a metre away from me, Andy between us. Then this crack, this white blue light from the ground around him. This millisecond, this moment where everything stood still. Where there was just space for one thought - no, not a thought, it was an awareness:

"Now is the moment," the moment that determines everything. The moment in which it becomes undoubtedly clear to you that it might be - or even is so... that there is no going back, only moving forward. This image is there. Followed by vague memories of exactly what happened after, in the fraction of a breath:

Hug Andy. Hold tight. Cling or hold on. I do not know anymore. Throw myself backwards. Cry out something like "He's falling!" Feel your own body electrically. Feeling the jolt through Andy's body. Body to body. Breathing making hissing noises. Being spun around. Realising that we are still 'here'. Hearing the "rope tension". Crawling five metres backwards, knowing that Andy has to hold on alone for those few seconds. Tensing the rope. Pressing your feet into the snow, breathing again for the first time. Andy wondering if I should unbuckle my skis. Interpreting the lack of response as an answer. Hearing "Guys, put some warm

clothes on immediately!" Taking the backpack from my back. Taking the down jacket out and putting it on. Hat on. Unbuckle the skis - because I think it is the right thing to do.

Sitting there. Feet forward. Kicking the hole in the snow. Thighs tensed. Tingling. Torso back. The man behind me shouting: "Pull on the rope" - enduring his relaxedness. He stands and looks. Quiet. Good. Checking my breathing.

"What are you doing here, you bastard?" I ask myself. This is the end: Antarctica. No helicopter. No help. No radio. No sound to be heard from the fallen. A hazardous location. Snow slab visible. My intuition was here before. "Birgit died just like in their ski tour" runs through my boiling brain.

Why haven't I dared to look at the slab above and on the right when I was ten steps away from the big bang, and I felt the cautionary fear? I wanted to remain intuitive but I trusted the more experienced in front of me more than my inner voice. Like the time when diving. When the "black man" was ruthlessly keen on the depths and darkness. And I didn't want to spoil the dive for him. After a 35 meters emergency surfacing and inexplicable happiness.

Days before I wrote about it. No more fear, now healing from it. What was before? The fear and therefore the accident, or matured mindfulness and therefore the "good ending" of the accident? I tend to the latter.

Everything was marked by mindfulness. If I am responsible for a share of the accident, then for the "not having believed my intuition a few seconds before the accident". Not having trusted my eyes - though my eyes had also the task to look out for Andy in front of me, going along on the ropes. I had seen it coming. However, I didn't believe myself.

I'm currently sitting at the foot of Anninger, my Gumpoldskirchner home mountain, near the Spaetrot Heurigen. White wine spritzer. Hiking shoes on. Here, where my Antarctic training began months earlier. In the forest with crampons through the deep valley ravine. Ski tours over hills and dales with little snow.

I'm back. But not the same.