

ARCHITECT OF THE FUTURE

Pic: P Jawahar



Tale to tell

Bhanu Mathi Mohan

“HELPING people is not an ‘uncool’ thing,” states Christoph. “I find it extremely enriching and part of the reason that I do things like run across the Swiss Alps and cycle from India to Switzerland is to show young people how rewarding it is to do things for others.”

The tall, fit and sun-burnt Swiss-national has just spent the past few weeks cycling from Katmandu to Nepal and across to Chandigar before taking a sojourn and flying down to Chennai. Here he shot footage for a documentary on the plight of the homeless and destitute who suffer mental illness and hopes to show his film at festivals across the world.

In 1998 he ran 270km across the Swiss Alps to raise awareness and funds for the homeless orphans of Eastern Europe and in 2004 he rode a motor bike 10,000kms from

New Delhi to Switzerland to support leprosy charities in India. All these philanthropic actions eventually earned him the title of ‘Architect Of The Future’ from the prestigious Waldzell Institute.

However, in between his adventurous travels and just prior to starting his current escapade, this charity-action-figure of a man, spent almost six years working with the International Community Of The Red Cross as a negotiator in highly dangerous conflict zones in Columbia, Afghanistan, Central Africa, Nepal and Palestine.

During his years with the Red Cross, he participated in negotiations to try to free or assist people caught in the cross fire between opposing political groups. “Although I have put myself in rather difficult and dangerous situations it is nothing compared to some of the results that we sometimes

achieved,” he says with pride.

“I managed to rescue a young boy from Maoists rebels in Nepal a few years ago by negotiating a deal with both the opposing groups. Recently I was back in Nepal on my cycling trip and I saw him again and was so taken aback by how he had grown and turned into a happy young man with so much confidence and positivity. It’s things like this that really make me want to try harder and give more to all the causes that I can.”

Christoph hails from a small and picture-perfect village high in the Swiss Alps called Buchs, which is almost at the boarder with Liechtenstein. He describes the place where he grew up as “The Land of Heidi” and when I asked him why he just didn’t want to remain there and be a “Peter.” He laughed heartily and replied with a twinkle in his eye, “Because I haven’t been able to find my Heidi yet!”

If charity works were a sport, Christoph Von Toggenburg would truly be an extreme altruist.

For more information :

www.vontoggenburg.com