

I'll Travel Anywhere

By Lucy Benyon

- 1 MANY women experience a moment of clarity that inspires them to make a life change. For Linda Cruse, the flash of insight occurred 15 years ago during a terrifying incident. Since then the 53-year-old former sales representative has transformed her life. The mother of two has become an aid worker in some of the most extreme places on earth.
- 2 Linda became a single parent in her late 20s. She once shared a family home in Bristol with her children, Gail, 31, and Graham, 29, but now Linda owns nothing but a battered blue suitcase and a few personal possessions. Yet what she lacks in material goods she makes up for in conviction. "I have absolutely no regrets," she says.
- 3 Energetic and passionate, Linda embodies optimism and strength but she has not always been like that. "I used to be pretty negative," admits Linda. She had a job as a sales representative in a pharmaceuticals company. The money was good but she felt 24. Then late one night she was driving on the motorway when she suddenly lost her sight. Luckily she made it to a layby. "I thought I might die and I made a vow to myself if I survived, I would change my life," says Linda. After a couple of hours her sight returned as unexpectedly as it had disappeared. She has since discovered that temporary blindness can be caused by stress. From that moment on she banished all negative influences from her life.
- 4 When her daughter went on a gap year to work on an aid project in rural China, Linda went to visit and wanted to get involved. A year later, when Linda was 40, she got in touch with a charity called Project Trust. She was sent to southern China as a volunteer teacher. Before long she gained a reputation for creating strong links between big businesses and small local charities. After China she moved on to projects in Nepal and Tibet where she was granted a private audience with the Dalai Lama. Later, Prince Charles visited a project for Tibetan refugees that she had pioneered.



- 5 The real test came in 2004 when the Asian tsunami struck. Linda travelled to a refugee camp in the beleaguered Thai region of Khao Lak but the first few hours were so horrifying she wondered if she could bear to stay. “There was a smell of destruction with grief and fear everywhere I looked,” recalls Linda. “The mood was of mass hysteria.” Her first priority was to break the chain of misery in the camp so she arranged for a magician and circus to come over from the UK to give the children the chance to feel joy again. Linda stayed for two years, helping launch new businesses and organizing for Thai fishermen to learn how to build new boats.
- 6 Spending her time amid such hardships and suffering made it harder for Linda to visit the UK. She says: “I try not to be judgmental but people here do take a lot for granted.” Her own family, which includes two grandsons, is still important to Linda. She tries to visit her children every three months and stays with her parents in Bristol when in the UK. Not everyone understands why she has chosen such a nomadic lifestyle. She has suffered from dysentery, exhaustion and been forced to live without running water or shelter. Yet she has forged the most incredible friendships and feels intense satisfaction from helping people in dire need. She now wants more people to get involved in international projects and has launched her own organization, Be The Change, to bring business leaders and charities together.
- 7 As for her own future, Linda has no desire to return to the life she left behind. “I will go wherever I am needed,” she says. “I have told my children I will keep going until the day I die. I want a traditional Tibetan burial and for my body to be left on a mountainside.” Until then, this amazing woman will continue to fly high.

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