



'I was desperate to do a big journey, to use my sketches to do some good'

Karen Neale, 35, from Islington, won a Churchill Fellowship in 2000. Her five-month trip in 2001 took her from France to Nepal via Italy, Greece, Turkey, Iran, Uzbekistan and India. Since then she has given up being an architect to pursue her dream of being an artist. She says:

I'VE kept a sketch-book diary ever since I was a schoolgirl. Although I trained and worked as an architect, once I turned 30, I was desperate to do a

big journey, to maybe use my sketches to do some good, maybe raise money for charitable projects in the countries I visited.

My application to the Churchill Fellowship went in on the closing date. I'd contacted other organisations for sponsorship and been rejected. But I was so determined to do it, I'd virtually decided to go anyway. I was about to go on bended knee to my bank manager.

The idea was to travel and sketch what I saw in diary form, in Biro and water-colours, writing around the sketches. I'd already worked out an itinerary and budget, so when I heard that the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust was prepared to let me have a grant of £7,500 for a five-month journey, I was ecstatic.

I left London in April 2001. I spent over a month in Italy and two to three weeks

everywhere else. I used mainly local transport to get around and stayed in guest houses or with friends of friends. Initially I was nervous about being a woman travelling solo. But I quickly realised that someone who is up to no good isn't likely to be interested in a woman with a sketch pad. I was a bit apprehensive when I arrived in Iran — but I needn't have been. Everywhere I went, people were friendly. India was a

bit of a culture shock; I arrived in Delhi with a stomach bug. But I stayed with a lovely local family and once I'd recovered, everything was fine.

For me, everything I saw, every place I visited and drew was inspiring — even ordinary places seemed to have something to offer. Bam, in Iran, was probably the highlight.

I arrived back a week before September 11. Since then, I've been able to pursue my art through my sketchbook diaries: I'm now a full-time artist.

Having a Churchill Fellowship on your CV really opens doors for you. I've recently exhibited my work at the Houses of Parliament and later this year I'm going to be the Lord's Cricket Artist for 2005 at the MCC.

I'm incredibly grateful to the trust for seeing the potential in what I wanted to do. The journey itself was fantastic. And I learned a lot about people. We may do things in different ways. But we are all quite similar underneath.