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The Suzuki Diaries: Sustainability in Action

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The Suzuki Diaries Sustainability in Action

2008
Distributed by Bullfrog Films, PO Box 149, Oley, PA 19547; 800-543-FROG (3764)
Produced by Tina Verma and Terry O'Neill
Directed by Kenton Vaughan
DVD, color, 45 min.
Jr. High - Adult
Environmental Studies

Reviewed by Tom Ipri, University of Nevada Las Vegas

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Highly Recommended

Given the number of gloom and doom environmental films flooding the market, the more optimistic approach of The Suzuki Diaries: Sustainability in Action is refreshing. David Suzuki, geneticist, environmentalist, author and broadcaster, takes his daughter, Sarika, around Europe to investigate some of the more proactive approaches various countries have take that lessen their impact on the environment. Suzuki is quick to note that many of these projects were not done to help the environment, per se, but done for practical, economic and quality of life reasons.

Suzuki points out that Germany, the first stop of their trip, is the third largest industrialized nation and is working toward a future where all their power comes from renewable sources. In Berlin, for example, they visit the Reichstag, which has been retrofitted to get all of its power from renewable energy, including being fueled by vegetable oil. Suzuki and his daughter also travel to Denmark, where they visit a wind farm in Jutland and experience bike culture in Copenhagen. In France, they visit a biodynamic orchard that rejects the modern notion of monoculture and supports a variety of crops and animals that can be sustained in a closed system. This type of agriculture uses less energy to produce food and emphasizes the role of humans as being part of an ecosystem and not of being in charge of it.

Finally in Spain, they ride the high speed train in Madrid. Spain is developing a train system that, by 2020, will be so well-connected that 90% of its population will be within a few kilometers of a train station. They also visit Abengoa Solar, in Seville, where they use solar power to heat water and supply electricity.

The film portrays concrete answers to some of the energy issues the world is facing. Suzuki and his daughter are energetic and engaging and their dynamic adds an extra dimension to the film. Suzuki’s point that the answers are out there and we just need to change our mindset is very convincing, although it does implicitly raise some question as to how renewable some of the resources are in the bigger picture. For example, what is the environmental impact of growing the fuel for the Reichstag? Or, how are the trains in Spain powered? But overall, the film excels at showing how solutions are possible and emphasizes how behind the curve North America seems to be.

Awards

- Chris Award, Columbus International Film and Video Festival