

August 11, 1979

Francoise, my dearest:

That you have doubts about yourself is the healthiest thing that could happen. It proves that you think, want to learn, and care about the world and your place in it. You are a wonderful human being.. and you should realize that all that anxiety you have is right, silly and yet so very very productive. Bravo. If you didn't have doubts about yourself you wouldn't be normal... or it would show that you are too unintelligent to be aware of things. Heavens, Francoise, you are right on target. That you had the courage to go off by yourself to Asia... there where ~~you~~ you know no one... and even less about the culture..proves that you are a terribly courageous young person. Make the most of it; speak up; ask questions; tell people what you feel; ask their advice; don't look back! think of what you are learning, feeling and take it all in. In a few years you will look back on this experience and wonder how on earth you had the courage to do it, feel it, digest it... and say, Wow, What a wonderful experience.

That doesn't mean that it is always easy. When I went off on the trip to do the interview three years ago I began to get the same anxieties that you are feeling now. AND I was forty years old. So you think you shouldn't have them??? Relax. No one expects you to change the world... they only want to contribute to opening your mind and ideas to life's realities in another part of the world. You have much to offer them. Remember in Sri Lanka, they don't have much information from the rest of the world. You are begining them a whole new way of looking at and percieving things.

Four days ago the Director of Peace Corps and I had an early morning meeting.. Why? Because I had asked to see him; I wanted to know how he (very new on the job and my new boss, thus) percieved my place on his team. I was ready to ask him whether or not he wanted ~~me~~ to stay on with the Peace Corps. But, before I could ask him My question, he said, " Since I'm going to be travelling in Asia for two weeks, Perdita, I'm making you the Acting Director of Peace Corps while I'm gone." Yup, he left today and I'm in charge of the Peace Corps worldwide. Now, you see, I had doubted his confidence in me... yet he chose me over all the others — who know more about Peace Corps than I do, by the way — to replace him and take charge while he's gone..... I think that holds a lesson for both of us. Our doubts are often our worst enemies!

Culture shock, sure. You SHOULD have it. That's the whole point. If you didn't have it you wouldn't be normal either. Talk with Nalin and Marina... they know the States better than most people and they will understand what you are going through. By the way, the reason Nalin is talking about articles, is that he knows that in Sri Lanka, they will give you a car and driver if you are a foreign journalist and he wanted you to be able to get around. It is no obligation,, just an idea for having some fun. But, in the meantime... if you wanted to do an article about what you did for the summer... for the Year of the child... and your perceptions of Sri Lanka... do it, send it and we may be able to place it in a UN publication... but again, you are under no obligation to do so. By the way, a word on your writing capabilities. You DO write well. WHY because you write with feelings and with no pretensions. And that is very precious. Many people try too hard, write esoteric junk and touch no one's heart or soul or innards. Relax, do your best, write if you want to, don't if you don't want to and , for heavens sake, ENJOY yourself. Don't take everything so SERIOUSLY. I think you get that from me, damn it, and I hope you will learn that it isn't worth it to torment oneself a longjour de journee et d'annee.

I don't know if this is any help to you, but don't think that you have to DO anything, CHANGE anything.... just be yourself, look around you, observe, think, and remember that this whole summer adventure is a part of your education... Give of your feelings and of your intelligence and you will have given those around you the largest gift they will have recieved in years. For crying out loud, Francoise, just be YOU and all will be well. You are a wonderful, bright and courageous person. What more can you expect of yourself?

Write me, please, when you receive this letter.... I want to know that you have a few less doubts about your "role" there. Meanwhile I have sent a telegram to tell you you are a special person whom I love dearly regardless of the fact that you happen to be my wonderful, beautiful and intelligent daughter. Hugs, hugs and more hugs.