

# A Word From Aluva

*A Correspondence from a Young Adult Missionary in India*

## I Even Sweat in the Shower

Before saying a hearty "YES!" to a yearlong assignment in India, the program coordinator warned his future volunteers about Kerala's seasons. There are three of them, he told us: hot, hotter, and hottest. When we got here in August, it was hotter, and we were relieved, as December and January approached, and we found temperature going down – to hot. But now, summer is here. March, April, and May are hottest, and my title is not an exaggeration.

In February, some of my colleagues started to worry about the heat. How would we deal with the increased temperatures and humidity? I, the only one who actually likes the tropical climate here, said something to the effect of: "It won't be so bad; hot is hot, and it's always hot here. Period." But I realize now that hot isn't hot when it's really hottest. I had no idea what I was in for, and, while I sweat incessantly, I find myself craving snow, ice, and subzero temperatures. OK, I can't really go that far; I hate cold weather and everything that has to do with it, and I always will, no matter how hot it gets here. But I have to admit that I would give just about anything for the sun to take it down a few notches. Unfortunately, the sun is a ruthless bargainer.

In the scope of life in India, the heat and humidity of the hottest season isn't *that* bad. I mean, at the end of the day (and that's every single day, whether hot, hotter, or hottest), we poor, unaccustomed Americans (who happen to be mainly from the Midwest) have sweat right through our churidars. August to August, that is our fate. But now we're sweating even more. From dawn until dusk, I sweat in my pretty Indian outfits, and throughout the nights, I sweat in my bed sheets. Three times a day (at least), I try to relieve myself with a cold shower; three times a day, I walk out of my bathroom drenched, not in refreshing shower water, but in sweat yet again. I stand under the fan to dry, but when the sweat is gone, the stick remains; I don't know what's worse.

I only go out into the sunshine when I have to – for work or errands. I rarely go out for fun anymore, simply because it is not any fun to go out, walking down the street dripping with sweat and smelling like you haven't showered since you got here, when, in fact, you've already showered twice (or maybe more) today. I can't remember the last time my curtains were open. See, I don't want anything to hinder me from quickly undressing and throwing my clothes in a big heap in the corner the very moment I walk out of the sun and through my bedroom door. And that is exactly what I do. The second my door is shut tight and locked (because I have been surprised by some friendly (and surprised?) faces who have forgotten to knock on occasion), I frantically yank off my clothing – every last piece of it. And I leave it in a heap while I rest for a moment on the bed. Only, the bed isn't directly under the fan (I can't make the room fit together with the bed there), so I've taken to lying on the floor, which is nice because it actually stays quite cool. When I get enough strength five, 10, or 60 minutes later, I go into the bathroom to take that pointless shower. Ahh, summer in South India...

Do you remember when the cold showers bothered me? I used to long for hot water to emerge like hot rain drops from my showerhead. Now I can't believe I complained about the water being too cold; it's absolutely not cold enough. I used to dread the shock of a cold morning shower; now I stand in the water, wishing it would simply freeze to ice as it hits my overheated body. But somehow, the water falling down on me feels warm now.

And so it goes, summer in the tropics, Kerala's infamous hottest season. In June (or maybe, hopefully, even sooner), the monsoon will come, and heavy rains will wash away this terrible heat. Then I'll have something else to complain about, I'm sure. For now, we're stuck in hottest, and there is no getting out of it. So we simply live it. We get up in the morning, sweating, and enjoy that cool shower. We walk down the streets, sweating, and hold our umbrellas high against the assault of the sunshine. We fall into bed at night, sweating, and pray that the power will not go out and the fans stop. Then we get up to do it all over again, sweating, of course. And when we find the energy, we pause for a moment to contemplate what it's all for. "Good God! Why is it so hot here?" I want to shout to the heavens. And then, through my sweaty eyeballs, I see that gorgeous coconut palm standing proudly right outside my bedroom window. I look around me (slowly so as not to sweat anymore than I already am) and take note of the beauty of the Lord's creation – the sights of the green trees (and who knew there were so many shades of green?), the smells of fresh fruit (mangoes, pineapples, and everything else tropical and wonderful), the sounds of children playing (yes, it's hot, but they don't have to go to school now!). Summer is hot – or hottest, I should say – but it is also so much more.



## Reflection: Prayer

I have been praying like crazy for a drop in the temperature, a slight breeze, or even just a few small clouds to calm the sun down for a little while. Unfortunately, the temperature has remained ridiculously high, the breeze is still nonexistent, and the sun is shining like it's going out of style. I know these prayers will be answered in time, and waiting for that time to arrive, I've begun to pray for patience. All this recent pleading with God got me thinking about my prayer life overall. These words, once again from Max Lucado, gave me a bit of insight:

Most of our prayer lives could use a tune-up. Some prayer lives lack consistency. They're either a desert or an oasis. Long, arid, dry spells interrupted by brief plunges into the waters of communion. Others of us need sincerity. Our prayers are a bit hollow, memorized, and rigid. More liturgy than life. And though they are daily, they are dull. Still others lack, well, honesty. We honestly wonder if prayer makes a difference. Why on earth would God in heaven want to talk to me? If God knows all, who am I to tell him anything? If God controls all, who am I to do anything? Well, our prayers may be awkward. Our attempts may be feeble. But since the power of prayer is in the one who hears it and not the one who says it, our prayers do make a difference.

It's a comforting thought, isn't it? Our prayers do make a difference, but only when we allow God to have the power.

## Recipe: Tofu (or Chicken) Curry

Although it is dreadfully hot in Kerala this month, I know that other parts of the world could use some heating up. April's weather is pretty unpredictable at home in the Midwest, but it's never a surprise to have cool, rainy days this time of year. If you find you are wishing for more warmth, here's a recipe that can heat things up a bit:

### Ingredients:

2-3 tbsp vegetable oil; 1 tsp mustard seeds; 2 onions, chopped; 2 small tomatoes, chopped; 1 can coconut milk; 2 tbsp Kashmiri (not hot) chili powder; 3 tbsp coriander powder; 1 scoop ginger/garlic paste (made with 2 tsp ginger + 2 tsp garlic + 2 tsp vinegar); ½ tsp turmeric; a 1-inch cinnamon stick; 2-3 cardamom pods; 2-3 cloves; 1 tsp aniseed; water; 2 c tofu, cubed (can substitute chicken or any other type of meat you desire); 1 medium potato; ½ c plain yogurt; 8-10 curry leaves (can substitute coriander leaves)

### Procedure:

Put oil in a pan over a medium flame. Fry the mustard seeds in the oil. Let them pop. Then add onions; cook, stirring, until the onions become transparent. Add tomatoes and coconut milk; stir. Add all spices (chili powder, coriander powder, ginger/garlic paste, turmeric, cinnamon, cardamom, cloves, and aniseed). Cook, stirring continuously. While the mixture cooks, you will want to add water so that it does not burn to the bottom or sides of the pan. Continue to cook and stir until the oil separates and you can see it on the top of the mixture. Next, add the tofu (or chicken) and potatoes. Then add the yogurt. Continue to stir. Allow the mixture to boil. If the sauce is too thick, you can add more water. When the mixture has boiled, add the curry (or coriander) leaves, and stir them in. Serve over rice.

## What I Miss Most...

I have put off saying this as long as possible, and I have even tried to make myself believe that it's not true. But, as heat and humidity take over the world I am living in, I just can't deny it any longer. Life in Kerala has always been hot, and I have always accepted that and dealt with it (with the support of my ceiling fan, of course). But April in Kerala is beyond hot. It is ridiculous, and my ceiling fan is no longer the face of solace that it once was. It's summer in Kerala, and as this hot month drags on, what I really miss most is air conditioning.



*My "summer look" –  
hot, sweaty, and tired*

## ...and What I Like Best

A while back (October, to be exact), I wrote in this section about how much I miss hot showers. I said that "what really keeps me committed to [exercising] is the desire to get as hot and sweaty as possible before I step into that cold flow of water." Well, now I don't need to exercise to get as hot and sweaty as possible; breathing is enough. And due to this current state of things, I have come to regard my shower as my very best friend, moving my fan into second position. In the heat of the summer, I am eating those words I wrote in October (it's too hot to have an appetite for much else anyway), and I am realizing that what I like best about India in April is the refreshingly cold water that shoots from my showerhead now three times a day.

## For More Information...

I have come to India via the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's (ELCA) Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) program. There are currently 37 volunteers serving with YAGM in eight different countries. To learn more about the amazing things that YAGM does, please visit their web site at: [Hwww.elca.org/globalserve/youngadults](http://www.elca.org/globalserve/youngadults)H

The ELCA's YAGM program is a partnership with the Young Adult Volunteer (YAV) program of the Presbyterian Church (USA). These two programs work together to make this year of service the best it could possibly be for the volunteers. To learn more about the YAV program of PC (USA), please visit the web site at: [Hhttp://pcusa.org/msr/youngadult](http://pcusa.org/msr/youngadult)H

If you would like more information on what I am doing here in India from day to day, please read my blog: [Hhttp://ckerrickson.blogspot.com](http://ckerrickson.blogspot.com)H

You can also view some of my pictures at [Hhttp://ckerrickson.myphotoalbum.com](http://ckerrickson.myphotoalbum.com)H

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*Since I can't send you my weather,  
I send you my love, and pray that it warms you.*