

A Word From Aluva

A Correspondence from a Young Adult Missionary in India

Home

By the time you read this, my twelfth and final issue of *A Word From Aluva*, I will no longer be in Aluva. I will, in fact, be on my way home. Or perhaps I will even have reached home already.

It's a funny thought – going home. After a year spent away from what I have always considered home, I am no longer sure that I know just what the word means. This year, whenever I have thought of home, I have thought of the small beige house with the dark red shutters and the soft carpeting on the living room floor. I have thought of the pink bedroom, the soft bed in the corner, the bookshelf standing on one wall, and the full closet that I'm sure my mother has taken over. (You now have mere hours to move your stuff, Mom.) I have thought of our quiet street with its matching houses and our sweet town with its mixture of college culture and suburban safety. When I say I am going home, it is to this place that I am going. But once I am there, will it truly be home? I can't say for sure, for just hours ago, I was thinking of Aluva as home.

I had just arrived at the Cochin airport, after a small trip to Nepal and Tibet (see insert). I had been away for 12 days, and, as I picked up my bags, hired my taxi, and pointed him in the right direction, all I could think was how good it was to be home. And then I stopped to wonder whether I was home then or whether I'd be home in a few days.

What is home? Where is home? Who is home?

When I was a small child, my family moved from Cleveland, Ohio, to Chicago. I don't remember much because I was so very young at the time, but I do remember that, at night, when my mother tucked me in for bed and kissed me goodnight, I would cry, "I want to go home." And all she could say was that I was home. But it didn't feel like it then. Home was Cleveland, which I remember nothing of but the bright red door of our house and the walk-through closet from my room to my parents'. Six years later, we moved again, and, although I didn't react the same way (because a 10-year-old is bound to react differently from a four-year-old), I remember it being just as difficult. Once again, I was leaving my home – the home that, six years before, I could not even consider calling home.

Well, it hasn't taken six years for Aluva to become home. It hasn't even taken this full year; I have thought of Aluva as home for most of the year. It did not take long for home to become the small bedroom with the striped blue bed sheets on the bed and the multicolored cards, maps, and pictures on the walls. But it didn't stop at my bedroom either. Home was the dining room where I took my meals, the courtyard where sat and read when the bugs were sleeping instead of biting, the rooms of my neighbors where I went for watching TV and eating snacks. Home was the bus that took me into Aluva town and the bakeries I used to stop at for samosas, milk pedas, and five-rupee coffee. Home was the college hostels and the dalit colony. Home was the office where I sat day after day, doing my work and sometimes thinking of that other home, far, far away.

My definition of home has changed. Home is not necessarily where one lives, for I have lived here all year and talked about my home in DeKalb, and I will surely reach DeKalb and talk about my home in Aluva. Home is not necessarily where one spends most of her time, nor where one keeps all of her belongings. They say "home is where the heart is," but is it possible to break your heart up into pieces and leave those pieces in many places, with many people? That is what I believe I have done.

If home is where my heart is, then home is in Aluva and in DeKalb. Home is with my "grandparents" at Chacko Homes and with my biological parents in the small beige house with the red shutters. Home will soon be in Florida, as well, but that does not mean that I won't still refer to DeKalb as home, that I won't still talk about Aluva as home. In time, perhaps this will change. Nearly 20 years after leaving, I no longer consider Cleveland home. But who is to say that, 20 years from now, I won't still consider Aluva home? I might, because it is a great part of who I am and who I will become in the years that follow.

I guess the point is that home cannot be defined in the limited terms of one specific house or one specific town or even one specific country. I have a home here, and I have a home there. I am going home – going home to DeKalb, Illinois, USA, to that pink bedroom in the small beige house with the red shutters. But it is my sincere hope that, in not too long a time, I will return home to Aluva, Kerala, India – my other home, on the other side of the world.

Reflection: Who I Am

*I am no what I ought to be,
I am not what I wish to be, I am not what I hope to be;
but, by the grace of God, I am not what I was.*

My journey to India has taught me a lot about who I am. It has given me an opportunity to ponder where I fit in to God's great scheme and what I am meant to be and to do as one very small part of His vast world. I still have a lot to learn. I am just as full of questions about life and the part I should play in it as I was one year ago. But I believe that I was placed here for a reason. I believe that I am an asset to the earth that we live on and that the roles I play while I am here matter. And I believe this to be true for all who are alive today. But I also believe that the figuring out of one's purpose is a lifelong process. I will have as many questions when I am 83 as I do now, at 23. But the questions no longer scare me. The uncertainty no longer makes me uneasy. I don't have to have it all figured out, because there is One who has figured it out for me. I will never be all that He wants me to be, for the perfection He requires is not possible on this earth. But the impossibility of reaching the goal does not mean that I won't strive for it. Yes, I still have a lot to learn. I still have a long way to go and much height to grow. But I am not alone through any of this, and I have the assurance that, as each new day dawns, I will be closer and closer to the person God intends me to be. And with that assurance, I will continue to

strive for the goal He has set before me.

Instead of a Recipe...

Instead of giving you something to put in your recipe box, this month, I'd like to give you some things to put on your calendar. As a thank-you to the congregations that have supported me with finances, communication, prayers, and love throughout my year of service, I will be presenting at five churches throughout the months of September and October. Following is a list of where you can find me and when. (If you require more information, please contact the churches listed.) I look forward to seeing you on one or more of the following dates:

Tuesday, September 6

Fall Salad Supper, Bethlehem Lutheran Church, DeKalb

Sunday, September 24

Welcome Home Celebration (including lunch), Immanuel Lutheran Church, Compton

Sunday, October 8

Forum, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Amboy

Saturday, October 14 and Sunday, October 15

Presentations at Resurrection Lutheran Church, Bloomington

Sunday, October 22

Presentation at Our Saviour Lutheran Church, Normal

What I Will Miss Most...

When I am home, there will be much to miss about India. I will miss the palm tree outside my bedroom window that waved to me each morning when I opened my eyes; frequently seeing elephants sauntering down the road; riding in auto rickshaws, especially those times when we tried to put five in what's meant to be for three; beautiful women in beautiful saris; small children yelling "Hi!" from across the street; being called "Auntie"; not having to learn anyone's name because "Auntie" always does the trick; always knowing how to dress for the weather because it never really changes; Sudha, my laundry lady, who took care of all mud and sweat throughout the year; the salamanders on my wall; inexpensive pharmaceuticals; five-rupee coffee and 12-rupee masala dosa for a good, hearty breakfast that will last you all day; Royal Bakery for its Banana Chips, Everest Bakery for its milk peda, Home Bakers for its samosas and cakes, and Goodday Bakers for its sweet owner, Elias; trying, and sometimes succeeding, to read a different language with a different alphabet; the incredible sense of accomplishment that could be felt after very small successes (like crossing a busy street without any mishaps, getting onto the right bus, and correctly pronouncing a word); and, of course, the people who have made every past moment one worth remembering.

...and What I Will Like Best

I'll miss a lot, but I'm looking forward to just as much. At home, I will like making my own coffee (or, in other words, letting Dad make it and then drinking the last of it while he's not looking); falling asleep in the world's softest, most comfortable bed; hot showers and bubble baths; toilet paper; cold milk, boneless meat, and seedless fruit; carpeting; soft, clean feet; air conditioning; church services said completely in English; an entire congregation showing up for church on time (among other events to which we scheduled Americans always show up on time); driving a car when I'm going far and rollerblading when I'm not; wearing jeans and tank tops; the *Food Network* and *Travel Channel*; Granny Smith apples and M&Ms; in a case where I can't find those apples or M&Ms, being able to ask someone whose mother tongue is the same as mine where the items might be; and, of course, the people (including that English-speaking Wal-Mart employee) who will make every future moment one worth living.

For More Information...

I came to India via the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's (ELCA) Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) program. This year, there were 37 volunteers serving with YAGM in eight different countries. Most are now home, but more will soon begin their journeys. To learn more about the amazing things that YAGM does, please visit their web site at: www.elca.org/globalserve/youngadults

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: <http://pcusa.org/msr/youngadult>

If you would like more information on what I am doing here in India from day to day, please read my blog: <http://ckerickson.blogspot.com>

Note: I will be updating my blog for a short time after my arrival home, so keep reading!!!

You can also view some of my pictures (and there are some great ones up of Nepal and Tibet!!!) at <http://ckerickson.myphotoalbum.com>

If you would like to contact me (and I certainly welcome this), you can do so by email: chester110105@yahoo.com

See you soon!!!