

A Word From Aluva

A Correspondence from a Young Adult Missionary in India

The American Family Does India!

I'd been waiting for nearly an hour when my parents finally emerged from the airport. Well, I'd actually been waiting for about five months, but it was only an hour that I had to stand outside the airport, trying to entertain myself with the not-quite-perfect pleats of my new sari. That hour could have been months, though, and as I stood there, trying not to sweat (because who wants to be met at the airport by a sweaty daughter?), I grew more and more nervous about the moment when they would appear. "Why are you nervous?" I kept asking myself. "These are your parents!" But nervous I was. When they finally did appear, those nerves were overcome by an immense joy – a joy so strong that I had to cry. At first, I was worried that those tears would ruin the makeup I'd done so nicely in honor of my parents' arrival, but then it occurred to me that the unconditional love of a mother and father means I could have eye liner and mascara smeared all over my face and they would still hug me, kiss me, tell me I'm beautiful and that they love me, and, most importantly of all, claim me as their daughter. And just like that, that's all I wanted to be – their daughter.

It was amazing to me how normal and natural it felt for them to be here with me, although I did continue to ask questions like, "Are you really here?" throughout the 10 days that they were. Now that they've gone home, I can't stop wondering if I actually dreamed up their visit. But I've got hundreds of pictures to prove that Mom and Dad were in India, and I've got countless memories that I will cherish forever.

I got to show my parents where and how I live my life in India, and I got to show off my parents to those with whom I live this life. One day the itinerary read: "A Day In the Life of Your Daughter." I took them to the college to see the computer from where I send all of those emails and post all of those blogs. I introduced them to people whose names I didn't know and showed them parts of the campus that I'd never seen. And after that, we climbed onto a crowded bus, like I often do, and headed to one of my favorite bakeries. Honestly, what would "A Day In the Life of Your Daughter" be without a bakery visit? Well, it wouldn't be a true "day in the life of their daughter" at all; that's for sure! How very special it was for them to see the places where I spend my time and to meet the people I spend my time with. And how very special it is for me to know that, now that they've seen my home, my workplace, and my community and met my caretakers and my friends, my descriptions of these places and people mean so much more.

But this wouldn't have been a vacation for anyone if we stayed in the midst of this place and its people for the entire 10 days. The rest of the itinerary was packed to overflowing with tourist events, and we hit the ground running from the very first day. We climbed a mountain, rode an elephant, and walked all over the big city of Cochin seeing the sights and spending in the shops; and this was all in the first two days. On the third day, we needed one of those wonderfully relaxing Ayurvedic massages! And once rejuvenated, we were off again, this time for a tour surrounding the history of St. Thomas's (yes, the disciple, otherwise known as "The Doubter") ministry in India. That was an interesting day, but it made us tired and hungry; so off we went to Munnar, a city high up in the mountains where the air is clear and cool. There, we did nothing at all but eat and sleep – very well, I might add. Oh, and we toured the highest tea estate in the world! Although we had to get up mighty early for that, the trip to Munnar was another chance to rejuvenate; and coming off that weekend trip, we headed into a busy Sunday. Dad preached twice – two different sermons. (Isn't he amazing?) Mom and I only watched and listened, but, at the end of the day, we were still worn out from the experience – her from meeting so many new people and me from wearing a sari for so many hours (all that material is darn heavy!). And even though we did spend part of our "day of rest" napping next to each other, we needed one more chance to rejuvenate ourselves before the difficult, tiring task of saying our goodbyes. To Kumarakom we went, to board a houseboat, complete with two stories, three bedrooms, a kitchen, and a balcony. For a full day and night, we just floated along Kerala's backwaters, with nothing to do but, well, nothing. And it was absolutely beautiful.

Now, all of these precious moments are just a whole bunch of pictures, both on my computer and in my mind. But they are beautiful pictures, and they will not soon – or ever – be forgotten. As I said goodbye to Mom and Dad, after 10 of the best (and quickest) days of my life, I would have given anything to stop time for just a moment so the hugs and kisses could last, so the moments wouldn't have to become mere memories. But, while memories they are, *mere* memories they are not. No, they are beautiful, precious, perfect memories that represent beautiful, precious, perfect moments. And they will keep me going until I get to see my two favorite people, my *amma* and *achen*, once again.



At Cherai Beach (Arabian Sea)



Reflection: I Love You Have you ever hesitated to say "I love you" to someone? Have you ever heard those words and not known quite how to respond? Eight little letters and three little words make up this little phrase. It's so simple, but it can be so hard to say. Why is that? Perhaps it is because "I love you" is a small phrase with a big impact. We know the words well, but we do not always know how to say them. Sometimes it's easier to show them: send flowers, give gifts, make cards. Those things say "I love you," don't they? And how 'bout spending several thousand dollars and even more minutes to fly halfway around the world and hug the child you haven't seen in months? Nothing could say "I love you" in a bigger way. Except perhaps, the words themselves. I am blessed with parents who have many ways of showing just how much they love me. They send emails, cards, and gifts. They offer advice, encouragement, and support. They give great hugs, and they went thousands of miles out of their comfort zones to make sure I'd get one. Yes, they have countless ways of showing it, and I have countless ways of knowing it; but my favorite way to get the message is with the words themselves. No matter how they've shown it, "I love you, Char" is something my parents never fail to say. And it is something I never tire of hearing. If only everyone got to hear it as often as I do. What bad could come from spreading a little more love around the world, one little phrase at a time? Think about it. And, by the way, I love you too, Mom and Dad.

Language Lesson

I did not give my parents a language lesson before setting them loose in Kerala. Most people do understand English and do not expect us to understand Malayalam, but there are a few words I wish I would have thought to teach them:

Venda (ven`-dah): This literally translates as either "Don't want" or "Don't need", but it is also appropriate to use the word as a way to say "no" to anything. This is especially useful in keeping away those vendors and their cheap souvenirs.

Mathi (mah-dee`): This word means "enough", but I have found that, unless you say it several times in quick succession while raising your hand in a "stop" motion, nobody really believes that you don't want anymore rice on your plate.

Ahh (ahh): The use of this sound in Malayalam can be likened to the use of the sound "uh-huh" in English, and I've learned no other word for "yes" in this language.

Finally, not another word, but a gesture - that funny way Indians are always bobbing their heads from side to side: This is simply their form of the nod. It looks a bit strange to us, but imagine how we must look to them when they see us all wobbling our heads from front to back!

How To Entertain Your American Parents

This section is devoted to some of the very important lessons that I have learned living in India. Without this knowledge, I probably wouldn't get through a day, let alone an entire year, or, in this particular case, 10 days with my parents. In honor of their recent visit, here are some dos and don'ts for hosting American visitors in India. I must say, however, that they are as much for the sake of the hostess as the hosted.

- Don't give them silverware. If the young American adult (as well as over one billion Indians) can go without it, surely her American parents can too. And they did!
- Do give them toilet paper and antibacterial soap.
- Don't let them go out without approving their choice in clothing.
- Do praise them for their willingness to get into the culture by dressing the part.
- Don't forget that they are over twice your age, as well as new to this hot, humid climate, and will, therefore, go slower but sweat more.
- Do remember that it is their support that got you here and their love that will keep you going, even after they've gone back home.

What I Miss Most...

I know that what I miss most about home is sometimes surprising; I often surprise myself, in fact, with the foods that I crave and the things that I think about. But this month, what I miss most should be surprising to no one, and you've probably already guessed that it is not a particular American comfort, convenience, or craving that is making me miss home. Rather, it's the two people whom I was lucky enough not to have to miss for 10 wonderful days. But now that they've gone back to being thousands of miles away, I miss my parents most.

...and What I Like Best

Saying goodbye to Mom and Dad was difficult, but when I got back to Chacko Homes, I had not even a moment to dwell on that difficulty. I was received back into the open arms of the people who share my home like a long-lost child. It happened the same way at the college and in the community where I work and play. (Who knew the owner of my favorite bakery was keeping track of the days I spent without any of his sweets?) And so, even as I deal with the pain of saying goodbye all over again, I know I am surrounded by immeasurable and unconditional love - much like the love of parents. And it is that love that I like best.



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: 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>

You can also view some of my pictures 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

If you do not have access to email, you can reach me by post at: Charlotte Erickson; The Union Christian College; Aluva - 683102; Kerala, India

One of the best things about love is that it's bigger than the globe, and I send you mine all the way from India!