

A Word From Aluva

A Correspondence from a Young Adult Missionary in India

Walking My Road

A few days ago, I had quite a shock. I was walking down the road, minding my own business (a bit too intently, I suppose), when I nearly got hit by a bus. I have a tendency to exaggerate some of my writings to make them more interesting for readers, but this time I exaggerate not. That bus really almost hit me. See, the roads here are quite narrow, and I guess I was taking up more than my fair pedestrian's share of the road. The bus literally had to slam on its brakes to avoid squashing me beneath its wheels. But this is not what shocked me. In fact, what shocked me was that I was not shocked. I simply let the bus go by, then went back to walking down the road, completely unphased. And as I continued my walk, I got to thinking about just how far I've come on the road I am walking.

As each New Year approaches, we all have a tendency to contemplate how far we still have to go down our various roads. Looking into a bright, new future, we make resolutions hoping to improve our bodies, our minds, and our lives. We contemplate what we ought to be doing to make ourselves better, and we vow to ourselves that, this year, we will do those things. But, in honor of the (too-quickly) approaching halfway point of my time in India, I want to look back rather than ahead. I want to contemplate not how far I must go, but how far I've already come.

I remember the first time I walked down the busy streets of Aluva all by myself. I was scared of the countless motorbikes whizzing by and absolutely terrified of the big Tata trucks that take up most of the narrow road. The first time I ventured out alone, I really thought I was going to die along the side of the street. And look at me now – nearly getting run down by a bus and thinking nothing of it. It's not that I don't realize the danger; it's just that I've overcome my fears. I have overcome other fears too: I am no longer afraid of using a squatting toilet, for instance, although I haven't yet grown to love the process. Neither am I afraid of wearing my Western clothes in public; I stand out no matter what I wear, so why not be comfortable?

These were little fears I had in the beginning, but I've overcome bigger fears too. I am no longer afraid of attempting to speak in Malayalam, although I continue to receive looks of utter confusion. I am no longer afraid of marching right up and introducing myself to students on the college campus, although I still endure a few awkward moments now and then. I am no longer afraid of asking for the things that I want and need, although this particular task continues to test my patience every time. That brings me to another point – patience.

I've never been a particularly patient person, and I would argue that very few of them exist in the United States; patience interferes with the values of efficiency and productivity that so often tend to run our country. But India, as a whole, does not place such a high value on these things. Projects will get done when they get done, efficiency and productivity not required, but patience expected. In the same way, while people in the United States value punctuality, people in India actually seem to scoff at it. Just today, I attended a 10:00 event that began at 11:30. I must admit that I had checked my American wrist for the time about every five minutes while I waited, but while I did that, I didn't let my American mind grow too upset. A few months ago, I would have. I'm still walking the road toward real and true patience, but, looking back, I know I've come a long way.

And patience, I have noticed, opens up the doors to relationships. When you have to sit around for an hour and a half waiting for a program to begin, what else is there to do than make friends with the people sitting next to you? And if you can't be efficient or productive, what better way to use your energy than by being friendly? I won't lie to you and say that I never get frustrated with the very different pace of life that Indians live by, but I can honestly say that I've learned to walk down my road just a little more slowly; and, as I decrease my speed, I find that I increase my opportunities to build relationships and form friendships. And it is through these relationships that I witness the biggest changes in myself.

As the clock chimed 12 times to alert me that 2006 had arrived, I knew that I was not quite the same Charlotte I had been in 2005. Sure, you'd still recognize me if you saw me on the street, and you'd probably notice many things that have not changed; after all, I will always be me. And you might notice that I still have quite a long way to go on this road I am walking. But, as I mentioned before, my focus for the moment is not on what challenges still lie ahead but on those that I have already overcome. And, if you were to look back with me, I think you'd notice that I've come a long way. But from now on, I'll really watch out for those buses because I absolutely want to keep walking down my road.



Reflection: New Year's Resolutions

Has everyone made a new year's resolution? What is it you want to do in 2006? Do you want to get in shape? Are you finally planning to read that really big book that's been collecting dust on your shelf? Should you spend more time with your family and less with your coworkers? Are you intent on taking that much-needed and much-dreamed about vacation this summer? You may have a whole list of new year's resolutions just waiting to be tackled, but here's one you may not have thought of (thanks to Max Lucado who did). I've added it to my list.

Anyone who comes to God must believe that he is real and that he rewards those who truly want to find him.

Hebrews 11:6

One translation renders Hebrews 11:6: "God...rewards those who earnestly seek him" (NIV). I like the King James translation: "He is a rewarder of them that *diligently* seek him." *Diligently* – what a great word. Be diligent in your search. Be hungry in your quest, relentless in your pilgrimage.... Step away from the puny pursuits of possessions and positions, and seek your king. Don't be satisfied with angels. Don't be content with stars in the sky. Seek him out as the shepherds did. Long for him as Simeon did. Worship him as the wise men did. Do as John and Andrew did: ask for his address. Do as Matthew: invite Jesus into your house. Imitate Zacchaeus: Risk whatever it takes to see Christ.

Language Lesson

Last month we learned the Malayalam words for some common animals, and I promised you we'd learn even more this month. Here goes:

Lion = *simham* (sim`-hahm)

Elephant = *ana* (ah`-nah)

Tiger = *nari* (nah`-ree)

Monkey = *kurangu* (koo`-ran-goo)

Deer = *man* (mahn)

Fox = *kurukkan* (koo-roo-kahn`)

Wolf = *chennaya* (chay-nah`-yah)

Crocodile = *mutala* (moo-tah`-lah)

Wild animals = *kattumrigangal* (kah`-toom-rin-gahn-gahl)

Now that you know how to say these words,
I just hope you don't run into any of these animals.
They can be quite dangerous – especially monkeys! ☺
(If you don't get the joke, read the blog!)

How To, uhh...

..."Go" Without Toilet Paper

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. In honor of my mother's humble questions, which she asked in preparation for her upcoming trip to India, I'd like to share with you the secrets to "going" without toilet paper.

- Get over any fears you have of getting your hands dirty. You'll be able to wash them when you're done.
- Carry hand sanitizer at all times, just in case it turns out that you actually can't wash your hands when you're done.
- When you're ready, find the small bucket, and fill it with water. Pour with your right hand, splash with your left hand, and just be careful not to get your clothes all wet. It's as simple as that!
- If all else fails, carry toilet paper in your purse (or your pocket).
- And if you forget that toilet paper, just drip dry. (Heaven knows I've done it a time or two!)

What I Miss Most...

I've always been a big football fan – American football, that is. Of course, I can't watch the NFL here in India, so I haven't been following it the way I would if I were at home; but I do know that the playoffs are on and the Superbowl is approaching. Now, I've always liked Sundays, especially during football season, but I would argue that Superbowl Sunday is, by far, the best Sunday of the year. Wouldn't you agree? Anyway, I can't watch the big game this year; I won't be eating all of the yummy, fattening snacks, judging the commercials, or experiencing the excitement. And, although I never anticipated this, I am sure going to miss the Superbowl this season.

...and What I Like Best

Although I can't watch the NFL, I have found an interesting new sport with which I can entertain myself. It's not cricket, and it's not the other football (soccer), but it's a little game I like to call it "How many more people are you going to put on this bus?" During peak bus-riding times, they really pack them in there like sardines, and, although it can be frustrating when, inside the bus, sweaty bodies are pushing tightly up against you from all directions, it's mighty fun to watch from the street below. And my favorite part – what I like best – is when the boys (never, ever girls) who don't fit in the bus simply hang out the door as it rattles down the street. Dangerous? Yes, but so is American football.

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://ckerickson.blogspot.com](http://ckerickson.blogspot.com)H

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

If you would like to contact me (and I certainly welcome this), you can do so by email: [Hchester110105@yahoo.com](mailto:chester110105@yahoo.com)H

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Happy New Year!!!