

A Word From Aluva

A Correspondence from a Young Adult Missionary in India

What Lies Ahead

As I send this out, I have just one month to go on my journey in, around, and through India. I have come to the understanding that my leaving India does not mean that my journey will end; it simply means that my journey must continue in, around, and through another part of the world – that part so lovingly thought of as “home.”

As the people around me watch as I prepare for the next part of my journey, they are all curious to know what lies ahead on my path. And although I’ve learned to give up much control to the One who knows all and knows better, it is necessary to begin to formulate plans for the future. And so, while I continue my struggle to live always in the present, I find that I am also making plans for the future that awaits me.

I do hesitate to call them plans, though. I’ve learned that the world has a funny way of changing our plans to fit the way it is spinning, and, since that makes it impossible to ever be sure of anything but the present moment (and sometimes not even that), I shy away from talking too much about plans. But it doesn’t stop people from wanting to know. So, to cure your curiosity and to give the world some warning, here’s the probably incorrect and incomplete version of what lies ahead for this young adult:

On August 15, I will begin my homebound journey, which is likely to take about 36 hours. I will gain many hours as I travel west, though, so, not even one full day later (if all goes according to plan), I will arrive in Chicago. After hugging my parents so they can barely breathe and wiping my eyes of the happy tears that seeing them after so long will certainly bring, I will instruct them to find me the biggest, juiciest, mouth-watering hamburger within driving distance of O’Hare. And with my appetite thus appeased, my life will go on...

I’ll be with my parents in DeKalb for the first few months, and I do not plan to do much more than catch up with my family and friends, visit my supporting congregations, and educate myself on all that I’ve missed in the year I’ve been away. I purposefully planned to have this downtime in order to properly process my past year. But I know me, and I can’t stay down forever, so...

Sometime in the middle of November, I will pack my recently unpacked bags and take them with me to Florida, where a certain someone has been patiently waiting for me while I’ve had my adventures on the other side of the world. Please note that, together, this certain someone (who I’m sure you’ve guessed is a man) and I decided to relocate to Florida long before I relocated to India, so I am not going there *for* a man, but simply *to* a man. And now that we have that possible discrepancy cleared up...

Once settled in Florida, where the similar climate to Kerala’s will surely suit me, I will begin my search for my first real job. This part of the “plan” is still rather fuzzy, but having gained the understanding while here in India that my two greatest passions are travel and writing, I plan to look for a job that allows me to do both. I do have some long-sighted career goals, but I also have an understanding that life’s path is bound to take some turns that I cannot predict. And I don’t want to strain my eyes by looking too far ahead. My time in India has taught me that I have only to take the step that is right in front of me, and, although I still can’t see it clearly, that next step is slowly coming into focus.

For now, my feet remain on Indian soil, and, as much as I look forward to my first hug and my first hamburger (probably equally), my first priority for the moment is to live in it. And it is with that attitude that I continue to walk my road. Yes, I look forward to what lies ahead beyond August 15, but I also look forward to what lies ahead in the last month that I have to live here. I plan to live it fully.



After living in this paradise, could I ever be happy without beaches and palm trees?

Reflection: The Road Ahead of Me

As I walk the road that leads to my future, I’m full of questions and doubt. Where am I going? Which way should I turn? How will I know when I get there? And the questions go on and on. But along with asking these questions, I’ve also begun saying this prayer, written by Thomas Merton, which calms my questioning mind and reminds me that, although I cannot always see what’s on the road ahead of me, I am being led down that road by a very able hand.

My Lord God,

I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does, in fact, please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.

I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.

And I know that if I do this, you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore, I will trust you always, though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death, I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

Amen.

Recipe: Vegetable Korma

I have only one month left to fill up on Indian cuisine, and, although I don't know if I'll want to eat another grain of rice as long as I live, there are a few dishes that I'm sure I'm going to crave when I get home. It won't be nearly as easy or nearly as cheap (did you know I can go out for a really nice dinner here for \$2 or less?) to cure those cravings, but it's a comfort knowing that, with a recipe in hand (and perhaps a good Indian grocery store nearby), it will be possible. This is the recipe for one of my absolute favorites:

Ingredients:

1 tbsp vegetable oil; 1 medium onion, chopped long; ½ tsp mustard seeds; ½ tsp garlic; ½ tsp ginger; 2 tbsp coriander; ½ tsp turmeric; 1 tsp chilli powder; 1 c water; 1 medium tomato, chopped; 2-3 carrots, cut into small pieces; ½ c peas; 1 c cauliflower; 1 c green beans; 1 large potato, cut into small pieces; 1 tsp salt; 1 can coconut milk; ½ tsp curry masala powder (available at an Indian grocery store)

Procedure:

Sauté the onions in the oil. Add the mustard seeds, and let them pop. Mix together the garlic and ginger, and add to the pan. Mix together the coriander, turmeric, and chilli powder, and add to pan. Add ½ cup of the water and the tomato, and cook the mixture, stirring continuously, for 5 to 10 minutes. Meanwhile, boil the rest of the vegetables with the salt. Add the vegetables and coconut milk to the mixture. Continue to stir, and cook for 5 more minutes. Add the other ½ cup of water and continue to let cook. At the very end, add the curry masala powder. (And if you don't have it, just don't worry about it 'cause this will be Americanized Indian food at its best!) Serve over rice.

What I Miss Most...

As I prepare to bid farewell to the life I've lived in India, it is difficult not to ponder whether I really did live it to its fullest. I've had many incredible experiences, and I've learned lessons that I will not soon forget. But have I seen, done, and learned enough this year? I ask myself this question every time I cross out one more day on the calendar, and, with that day over, I crawl into the bed that won't be mine much longer. Lying there, waiting for sleep to overtake me, it occurs to me that, with one month to go, what I miss most is having a whole year of adventures ahead.

...and What I Like Best

This thought that my year of adventures is coming to its end has the potential to be quite a depressing one. But when I feel the lump swelling in my throat and fear that the tears stinging my eyes might spill out onto my cheeks, I remind myself that, while this might be the end of one great adventure, it is only the beginning of the next one. As I look back on India, I realize just how much my experiences here have changed me, grown me, and equipped me for what might lie ahead. And as I look forward to home, what I like best is that, as a changed, grown, and much better-equipped young woman, I still have a whole lot of adventures awaiting me. They just happen to be on the other side of the world...at least for now.

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

*When I see my life as a
series of unfolding miracles,
I will always sail forth with hope,
tranquility, and joy in my heart.*