

Prayer Letter November 2011

Dear Friend,

He was born in a slum, his mother a mentally unstable labourer and his father a cycle rickshaw man who was invariably drunk. As a baby it looked as though he might not survive but, being fed on milk powder balls rolled in sugar, he gradually gained strength and began to grow. While his two sisters spent several years in a school and hostel, he attended the local village school. His father died. Their home now was a small mud and thatched hut far from the slum. Years passed, native intelligence was amazing and the young lad learnt to earn his own living, cooking, gardening, making coffee for the students and finally turning his hand to electrical work and painting.

By this time he was married and with two children he was determined to educate. The small brick house which had been built many years previously was now becoming dilapidated and the roof leaked in many places. The young man was determined to build again himself.

Now a Christian and regular member of the local church he prayed that this might somehow become a reality. In incredible ways and with the manual work of many friends in the church the foundation was at last laid and work slowly began. By sheer hard work and ingenuity he found doors and window frames thrown out by others but made with well-seasoned good wood and these were fitted into the growing home.

A few months ago I was asked to officially open the new house. It was indeed a special day as we gathered to praise and thank God for His provision before I prayed and finally cut the ribbon. As we sat sharing lunch together (all special occasions like this have to end with a shared meal) mind went back to those early days of poverty and deprivation. The years ahead will not be easy but this young man's example of faith, honesty and hard work will be a constant reminder for his children and not least the consistent care which he continues to give his deranged elderly mother



who still lives with them. I made my way home with a heart full of joy and thankfulness to God.

July and Kolkata

The first couple of weeks of July flew past as I prepared to set things in order here in Vellore before leaving for the long awaited journey to Kolkata to set up the Bone Marrow Transplant Unit at the Tata Medical Centre on the outskirts of the city. It certainly was not the Kolkata to which I was accustomed, for after leaving the airport, within 20 minutes we seemed to be almost in the wilderness, except for huge skeletons of high rise apartment blocks, fields with roaming cows, a few company buildings and the hospital. This was 'New Town' without even a coffee shop. I am sure that in a couple of years it will be a thriving community but not now.

My experience setting up the unit was enjoyable and challenging. I met some lovely people and the nurses and others with whom I had to work were all so enthusiastic and keen to work. We did work hard every day and by the time I left much of the ground work had been completed, ready for the opening of the unit. While there I had the privilege of being able to help one of our dear Mizo missionaries from Nepal and his family, enabling them to see probably one of the best haematologists in the country, instead of having to travel all the way to Vellore. I made some visits to the city where I spent a day with one of our hostel children, now married, and saw the work of Freeset, a wonderful work for helping women who want to come

out of prostitution. It was also good to enjoy worship at Carey Baptist Church. This was all in a Kolkata which I remembered and which one cannot forget. Much poverty still, people living their lives on the streets but all working, doing their washing, having a bath or the men getting their hair cut sitting on a box beneath a piece of plastic sheeting.

Back in Vellore

It was now back into the routine of life again in Vellore: visiting at hospital in the mornings (and sometimes into the afternoons), Scripture classes at school, Bible classes on Sundays at church with the youngsters and a retreat away with the teachers from the primary school. The latter was a good experience as we thought about the 'Miss India' contest and all that is involved in that and then about just how God wants us to be clothed, from Colossians 3.

Bangalore

By the end of August I realised that I was really in need of some time away to recharge my batteries in every sense. The thought of overnight train journeys did not appeal and so it was to Bangalore and the home of one of our first hostel children for a much needed rest and an easy three to four hour train journey from our nearest railway station. It was to have been for an extended weekend but with the persuasion of more than one good friend I extended this for two more days. Asha is now a radiologist and her husband Naveen a paediatric surgeon. I was at their wedding and have watched their two children grow up. It was a real joy to be with them again. I slept a lot, rested and read avidly. I was also able to meet and share a meal with another two of the hostel girls, now in their last year at school.

October

This month came with the request to preach in our hospital chapel last Sunday evening and the opportunity to take on a Bible class of new students. This year CMC has started another 12 new courses of study and the chaplaincy department is hard pressed to manage the nurture of all these students and help them to find a home here during their student days. To me this is yet another exciting challenge.

Choir practices start again for Christmas services and these provide a good relaxation for me besides expanding my lungs!

Today as I drove home from school after Scripture class and counselling, a man, probably in his 60s just walked out into the path of my car to cross the road. It was a busy road but fortunately I was not going fast. I managed to stop as he walked into the side of the car. I heard a crash behind me but was more concerned about the man. I got out and put my hand on his shoulder. He was a bit stunned but confessed amazingly that he just had not looked at all. The car behind me was of course too close to me, as sadly they always are and his right wing was completely smashed. My bumper was slightly bent but otherwise no further damage. Surprisingly he also seemed to accept that he was in the wrong and we both got into our vehicles and continued our journeys. Once again you will understand why driving is so hazardous in this country and why I ask for your prayers. People just do not obey traffic rules, use hand signals or indicators and walk into the road just assuming that traffic can stop for them, although I think this man today had his mind on other things. I just thanked the Lord that I had been able to stop abruptly and for His care of us all in that situation.

Give thanks with a grateful heart:

- For the safe outcome of this incident today.
- For renewed health and strength after my rest in Bangalore
- For the hostel children who have committed their lives to serve God here in India.
- For the opportunities that God has continued to give me.

Pray:

- For the new Bible classes starting this week.
- For Balanilayam children who are studying in college, that they will not be drawn away from God by the pressures of their studies and the values of the world.
- For the many contacts which I have with patients in hospital.
- For constant reminders that my dependence is on God alone.

May you know the Lord's joy and presence daily,
Ann