

September 4, 2008

Dear Friends,

Thank you so much for your prayers for our trip to Hong Kong and India last month! We had a fabulous time! Now that we're starting to get over jetlag, and I've got all our pictures up on Shutterfly <<http://nelsonmissionphotos.shutterfly.com/>>, it's time to write and tell you all about the trip. You might as well print this out, grab a cup of tea, and sit down to enjoy all our adventures!

When we arrived in Hong Kong (HK) on August 5, the #1 typhoon signal was up, and to our surprise, by the next morning the typhoon had gotten much closer and the #8 signal was up. When that happens, everything in HK shuts down! We didn't mind at all, since we were worn out from the 13+ hour flight. Since no one could go to work, we were able to contact a lot of friends and figure out when to get together. By that evening, the storm was past, and our busy schedule of eating out with friends nearly every lunch and dinner from then on began. It was great to find out how the Lord has been working in the lives of our friends, and to see their children growing up to love Jesus too. On the two Sundays we were in HK, we attended the two churches we'd been most involved with - Shatin and Tsuen Wan.

When we got back to HK after India, on Aug. 21, again the #1 typhoon signal was up. Would you believe it? The next day the #9 signal went up, and that typhoon passed right over HK! So we got another day of rest :-). The second typhoon messed up some of our meal plans, but we were able to reschedule most all of them. We were also able to see most of the opening and closing ceremonies of the Olympics on TV while we were in HK, and it was fun to experience the excitement of everyone around us.

We flew to India on Aug. 11, and arrived to find it cool and very rainy. Before the trip, I had dreaded the expected heat of India, but the Lord kept impressing on me that I shouldn't complain, but choose to rejoice in Him. Well, the entire time we were there, the hottest it got was 82 degrees F! Although the humidity felt like it was 100% the whole time, as long as there was a breeze or a fan going, the temperatures were very comfortable!

Because the price of an air conditioned hotel room in Mumbai was more than we wanted to pay, we had reluctantly agreed to stay in the hostel where everyone else was for the APFMMA (Asia Pacific Free Methodist Missions Association) Missions Congress. That turned out to be such a blessing, as all the meals and meetings were at that location, and it would have been a big hassle in the rainy weather to get back and forth from a hotel!

The first couple of days in Mumbai, Jim was busy with the APFMMA Executive Committee meetings, so Sherrill Yardy and I inquired about doing some shopping. One of the Indian pastors said that we could ride along when the driver took him on an errand, and then we could shop after he was dropped off. What we didn't know was that the errand was clear in downtown Mumbai, and that with the awful traffic, it would take us 2 hours to get there, and 3 hours to get back! We got quite the tour of greater Mumbai, didn't do very much shopping due to lack of time, and missed dinner completely.

As everyone arrived for the APFMMA Missions Congress, it was exciting to see old friends, meet people we'd heard about for years, and make new friends. We all praised the Lord that the Philippine delegation got their visas at the very last minute and arrived in time! Included in that group were Jonathan and Maryjane Engalla, who are planning to go to Cambodia as APFMMA missionaries as soon as their support is raised. We really enjoyed getting to know them.

It was also great to see Daniel Sar from Cambodia. He told us that his father is recovering well after the brain surgery, for which we praised the Lord. We also found out that the mission team is still waiting for the permit to begin building the multi-purpose building at the Phnom Penh Thmei property, so the Canadian team in July was not able to do any of that work. Instead they did a lot of painting and repairs at House of Love.

During the days of the APFMMA congress, the delegates from each country gave reports on what has been happening in their homeland. There were 44 from overseas (US, Thailand, Philippines, Myanmar, Brazil, Taiwan, Nepal, Hong Kong, Japan & Cambodia), and 88 from within India. It was thrilling to hear all the different ways in which God is at work all over Asia through the Free Methodist Church! We got to hear lots of special music in many different languages.

Besides the general sessions when we heard reports from the different countries and challenging messages from various speakers, there were workshops to choose from: Challenges and Opportunities in India, Challenges and Opportunities of the Muslim World, Reaching out to Chinese around the World, Working among Migrant Workers, Globalization & Missions, and Missionary Care.

Then, on the final night, there was a cultural celebration with different countries making presentations (we sang a Khmer song with Daniel Sar), plus Free Methodist Child Care and school children doing different cultural dances and songs. When you have time, be sure to check out our photos at <<http://nelsonmissionphotos.shutterstock.com/>> David Clemente also has his photos at <<http://triptoindia2008fmc.shutterstock.com/>>

It was hard to get to sleep after the exciting cultural night, but we had to get up EARLY the next morning to fly to Nagpur (in the center of India) for the tour of Free Methodist mission sites. We and the 21 others going on the tour managed to get up at 4:30 a.m. and to the airport on time for our 7 am flight. We were thankful the plane served breakfast.

It was a 3 hour bus ride to Yavatmal, where the first Free Methodist missionaries started in 1881. We enjoyed seeing rural India from the bus: miles of cotton, soy bean and maize fields, hills covered with blooming teak trees, and small villages here and there. We had a short stop at Sevagram Ashram, where Gandhi spent the last decades of his life. We arrived at the YCLT Trust compound just as the English Medium School was letting out for the day. With 1700 students all coming out the main gates at once, there was no way our bus could drive in!

Once the students had dispersed to their homes, we were able to get settled in the guest rooms,

and had a delicious lunch, prepared with western stomachs in mind. After a week of eating spicy Indian food at every meal, many stomachs were starting to protest. Nearly everyone from overseas had some sort of tummy trouble at some point during our time in India!

We all took naps and then headed off to see the Yavatmal Mission House (named Shanti Bhavan), the two Free Methodist churches in Yavatmal (including the "mother" church that is well over 125 years old and still using the original teak pews), and the FM cemetery where several early missionaries are buried. We did some shopping after all that and before supper, and for some reason, no one wanted to stay up and play games afterwards :-)

Breakfast was at 7 a.m. the next morning, so that we could join the Yavatmal College of Leadership Training students for chapel at 7:45. We got to meet the new director of the all the ministries at the YCLT Trust compound, Dr. Billi Graham. It turns out that he was born when Rev. Billy Graham was visiting India, and after his father got to meet Billy, he named his new son Billi.

We had tea with the students after chapel, and enjoyed talking with them. Then we had a tour of the campus before heading off for Umri. It's an hour's bus ride from Yavatmal, so we got to see more countryside. I'd heard about Umri Mission Hospital all my life, because my parents knew Dr. Paul & Jessie Yardy before they went to India, and supported them with prayer and finances. I had to keep pinching myself that I was actually seeing Umri Hospital in person!

After lunch at the mission house in Umri (where our Asia Area Director, David Yardy, grew up), we had a tour of the Helen Rose Training College of Nursing. It was exciting to hear how the Nursing College has grown from 10 students to 225 in just a few years, and now has graduates all over India. They only take in students who are orphans, widows, divorced or from similar circumstances of no hope, and educate them into qualified and sought-after nurses! The students themselves have built most of the buildings on the campus as well!

Next we toured the hospital itself. The buildings from the early years are getting pretty old, and it was exciting to see the new patient and treatment rooms that are being built, thanks to a grant from the Butterfield Foundation, and outfitted through funds raised by the India Bicycle Tour last year.

The last adventure of the day was a walk through Umri village, with the mayor as our guide. It was interesting to see satellite TV dishes on small huts. Scores of children followed us around and were eager to have their pictures taken. We finally climbed back on the bus, headed back to Yavatmal, had dinner and collapsed into bed.

Wednesday morning, Aug.20, we had to have our suitcases all packed before breakfast at 7. Just before taking off for Umri again, we were treated to some special performances by the students at the Yavatmal FM English Medium School. This school has such a good reputation in the town that everyone wants to send their children there.

When we arrived in Umri, we first visited the Yardy English School, which has over 400 students so far in grades K-8. They'll add grades 9 & 10 eventually. We saw a sign by the

computer lab that Internet access was available! Next we visited the International Child Care Ministries Umri Hostel, and were entertained by the 160 some children living there. One of our group told them a story, so they were entertained too. We finished up with lunch before piling on the bus and heading back to the airport in Nagpur.

It was so thrilling to see places we've heard about and prayed for over many years. The funds that are raised through India Country Shares are being put to very good use, in partnership with funds raised by the Indian churches themselves. They have exciting ideas for future outreach and ministry too, as the Lord provides funds.

After the 3 hour bus trip, we were glad to stretch our legs before getting on the plane back to Mumbai. It turned out we were on a "no frills" airline for this flight, and those of us who were tall could barely fit into the seats. I had red marks on my knees from their being pushed into the seat ahead of me for the 1-1/2 hour flight. "No frills" also meant no meal. We finally arrived in Mumbai around 8:30 p.m. Half of our group had on-going flights later that night, and the other half were spending another night or two in Mumbai.

My first adventure of the evening was going to buy stamps at the Post Office in the domestic terminal. I knew where it was from when we'd left for Nagpur, but it hadn't opened before our flight took off then. I knew it was only open until 9 p.m., so I arranged with Jim that he'd get our suitcases while I dashed over to the P.O., and then I'd meet him at the bus stop for the shuttle to the international terminal. I got my stamps, mailed my postcards, and then went back to find Jim. It turned out that the shuttle bus stop was \*inside\* the domestic terminal, not outside, and the guards at the door didn't want to let me back inside! David Yardy and Jim came to plead with them. They wanted to see my boarding pass from the flight from Nagpur, but I couldn't find it! After dumping most of my purse on the floor, they finally relented and let me back inside.

We said our goodbyes to all those staying on in Mumbai, and then got tickets for the shuttle bus, and started to think about food for supper. That's when the next adventure began. Pastor Joshua Hu from Taiwan suddenly realized he'd dropped his wallet on the plane! Conversations with the airline staff went from English to Cantonese to Mandarin and back, while the rest of us prayed. Praise the Lord that the wallet was found on the plane and returned to Joshua!

By this time it was around 10 p.m., and those with a flight around 1 a.m. wanted to get over to the international terminal and check in. The rest of us didn't fly out until 4:50 a.m., but we hoped to be able to check in early, and then shower, change clothes and relax in one of the airline lounges. Well.... The international terminal in Mumbai is being renovated, and no one bothered to tell us that there was no way we could check until 3 hours before our flight! The five of us leaving at 4:50 should have stayed in the nicer, quieter domestic terminal for \*much\* longer. As it was, we took turns sitting in the few empty seats we could find in the international terminal, trying to avoid the smells of paint thinner and solvent, and trying to stay awake. We were all very happy to finally get on our plane and head for Hong Kong!

After our second week of feasting and fellowship in Hong Kong, we were very ready to head back to California, but there was one more "adventure" awaiting us. All the passengers were

boarded for the flight to San Francisco on Aug. 27, and we were waiting for the announcement that we'd be leaving the gate shortly, when the pilot came on and announced there was a small problem with the hydraulic braking system of the plane! After trying to fix it two different ways, they finally declared it safe enough to fly, and we were able to take off 3 hours later than scheduled! The Lord helped us keep choosing to rejoice, even though we had to sit on the plane 15+ hours instead of a little over 12.

It was very good to get home again, see our loved ones or talk to them on the phone, enjoy low humidity, cuddle our kitties, pig out on fresh tomatoes and green beans from the garden. Now we're trying to catch up on all our e-mail before heading off to Sacramento on Monday to see some of Jim's Swedish cousins for a couple of days, and then fly to Indianapolis on Sept. 15 for a week. Your prayers have kept us going over the past month of traveling many miles, and we're thankful! Please keep praying that we'll have the energy to do the things the Lord gives us each day, and that we'll keep choosing to rejoice in Him.

We've been saddened since our return to hear about new violence against Christians in Orissa State in India. Our Free Methodist churches, pastors and congregations have been heavily affected, with many pastors missing. Thank you for lifting in prayer these brothers and sisters in Christ.

We'd also appreciate your prayers for my sister, Nancy, who had surgery for breast cancer while we were gone. When she's ready for radiation therapy, we're hoping it works out for her to stay with us.

Thanks again for your prayer partnership with us!

In Christ,

Margaret & Jim Nelson