

West Bengal #1  
August 2008

I am contemplating eternity as I fly 15 hours non-stop from Newark, NJ to Dehli, India. My youngest son Andrew, 21, is accompanying me on this trip. He will see things that will change him forever on our journey through Calcutta; north east through tea country and the Himalayan foothills and 2 days in Mizoram State, on the extreme north east border of India and Myanmar.

It has become apparent, on the second day of travel from Toronto, that I may have pushed the young lad too hard. His head is bouncing off the steel lattice covering the windows on the train from Bagdogra to Sitali. He cannot hold his head up with 10 hours of time zone changes and 48 hours of moving around the world. Our six hour stay in the Mildew Motel 8 in Dehli only served to stuff up the sinuses before we flew on to the Northeast. I am hoping Legionnaires Disease will heal before we have fly back to Canada.



The area we are headed is at the foothills of the Himalayas, sandwiched between Bhutan and Bangladesh. Huge rivers run out the mountains and regularly wipe out the train tracks and roads going east-west. The road once took 3 hours but now takes more than 7 hours each way. We chose to go by train for a princely sum of \$1.00 US each for the 3 hour ride. Indian Rail actually rolls in cash at these rates! Wooden slat benches and paint job from the British Raj indicate where they are saving money. It is still a good way to see the countryside.

**“My dad used to whack me for eating with my hands”**

We will be spending a few days with my old friend Nicholas Narjinary and the growing North Bengal Ministries. He has adopted some 110 children. Most are either orphaned or parents give them up as they are unable to look after them. The tea garden workers in this area are really indentured slaves earning \$1-2 per day for back breaking work. All this while working to see 500 Christian Fellowships established in the area; build and operate 5 or 6 Christian schools, including a high school.

We are in process of constructing the first of these schools on campus, through the generosity of Canadian donors. There is little available for these tribal people. Education frees them from the cycle of poverty and, the high-end Christian Education these schools offer, trains hundreds of disciples each year for the future. It is amazing to see their discipline. The kids are happy and contented with all their needs met.

These kids, as you can tell by the pictures, make the trip very worthwhile. I enjoy days of “Uncle”, “Uncle” when ever they see us. They run up and fasten on to a finger as you go walking. It is rather funny to have 8 or 10 of them hanging on and still try to get anything done. Andrew is picking up where Pastor Jack left off in teaching them ultimate Frisbee. He had a good game of soccer on Sunday afternoon. Soccer is made more challenging in that it was played in a cow pasture, a description that applies to 80% of India.



We visited a little church out in the village areas on Sunday morning. The temperature is just over 30 here, not much different than Ontario on certain days. However, the humidity! I spoke on John 7 “Springs of Living Water” and it was certainly that. Water was running from my eyebrows, forehead and down my back. It took three soaked shirts to get through the day

It began to rain on Sunday. 2008 has been a great year for ducks in Ontario but it does not compare to the deluges of Biblical proportions they enjoy here. The warm air from the Bay of Bengal blows up and hits the foothills of the Himalayas and everything gets dumped. Incredible rains that go on for days and the rivers rise all around this area, rerouting, taking out villages, roads and railways.

I was introduced to a Tea plantation manager, S.N.Hussain. He asked me stay at his home and talk about the possibility of schools for his 'children'. Hussain looks after 5 large plantations in the area. We visited his beautiful estate with manicured lawns and servants. It is a huge old home built by the British in the early 1900's. He has his own golf course and air strip. It is a life style one could become accustomed to. I had a button by my bed to summon Kumar to bring tea 24 hours a day. The tea they serve is like nothing you find back home. It is often less than 48 hours from tree to cup.

These men hold life and death power over the workers. Hussain has a real compassion for his 'children', more than 1000 children of his workers on the one plantation alone. He wants to allocate a large segment of the plantation for a Christian school and accompanying church. This could be done of each individual plantation in the Duars area. Hussain wanted to meet and know the type of people from Canada that will back the local ministries before he goes to the large amount of work to legalize the change in land usage. This is even more astonishing in the Hussain is a Muslim! We had hours to discuss his Shiite faith. It was better than a university course. His wife, as most Indians, speaks many languages including Bengali, Hindi, Urdu and English. She mentioned she read Urdu. Urdu is mainly spoken in Western India and Pakistan, 1000's of kilometers away. My wife Nancy had purchased an Urdu Bible in Ontario, which I brought in my luggage. We had no idea where the Bible would end up. I asked Mrs. Hussain if she would like it. Her response was enthusiastic so it was left as a gift for her hospitality.

Pray with us for this unprecented opportunity to help the kids of tea plantations. The hundreds of plantations offer an opportunity to help great numbers of families living in poverty.

Phil Dempster

**Pick out the Canadians !**



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