

August 2008

Andrew is getting the full treatment on this trip. He has seen elephants wandering down the road; more rain than Noah; potholes that would swallow a minivan; probably more tea than there is in China; and of course, the inevitable Dehli Belly. Andrew missed my excursion to the Tea plantation and all its luxuries, while he lay around all day in the rain waiting for the next and frequent, call of nature. He did say he wanted the full missionary experience....

We were up early yesterday to catch the train back west to Darjeeling. There are few transportation options this far out in the boonies. It is still raining. The wonderful ladies here did our laundry several days ago and have not been able to dry it, despite fans and keeping it indoors. There are no electric clothes dryers and the power only works periodically.

The 100+ children/orphans lined up for us at 6:00 a.m. to give us the royal send off. It is a fun moment of 'high fives' and hugs. The vehicle used by the orphanage was on its last legs years ago and it is always a challenge to start. Like most machines, it can sense when you are stressed or in a hurry and of course, did not start.

At this point the kids jump into action and the boys get behind vehicle to push-start it. They are all eager to help, sometimes too eager. They were all milling around the vehicle and the kids started to push when one of the 10 or 11 year old boys rushed toward the front of the car help and tripped, diving headlong under the front of the rolling vehicle. The driver hit the brakes a little late and it was clear the boy went right under the wheel. The children screamed in horror and the small SUV was pushed off his body. I was expecting to see a dead child when I jumped out, terrified to even look. His angel was working overtime and the front wheel only brushed his head and landed on his upper arm. He was clearly hurt but it could have been so much worse. A happy moment was turned quickly into a moment of horror. Reports later that day by cell phone to the train confirmed that the arm was not broken and he was stitched up and sent back to the school.

This incident was not the first time I have seen a child hit by a car on these trips. It is always horrifying but not surprising with so many kids on the street. I have a new resolve to seek funds for a new vehicle for the ministry.

We arrived at the train station to find it deserted. The rains had indeed taken out part of the track again. The search began for taxis with none to be found. The driver decided to try the next town 15 minutes away. We discovered the break in the track was between the two towns and the train was sitting ready to reverse direction.

Andrew and I jumped on the train with our luggage while others lined up to get our 41 Rupee ticket (\$1) The train started to roll. It was unnerving in that 1) we had no ticket 2) We did not know whether we were rolling east or west 3) our traveling companion, Sajal, was no where to be seen!

The train picked up speed so we sat down to enjoy the ride. We may have been on our way to the Myanmar border for all we knew. Suddenly we spotted Sajal coming down the aisle. He had run out of the ticket line and jumped on the moving train. We would jump off and buy a ticket at a future stop.

Finally we could relax for the 3 hour trip across the top of North East India. Sajal's cell phone rings. He relays the message "We found Andrew's passport and money belt in his room".

This is what we fathers call a "teachable moment". I explained to Andrew how important it was to keep his passport stapled to his butt; that it was likely he would have to stay in India for 6 months while I went home; that there is no way to get off this train and go back; and that FED EXP does not service the back end of nowhere. Since he is a sensitive fellow he took the advice to heart and beat himself up even more than his dad could.

There is always a way to get things done in India. Everything here is outside-the-box. There are no 'boxes' we would recognize. That is probably why they do so well running software help lines. There is a solution for everything. It is possible to make someone very happy by paying them \$2 per day, buying them a 50 cent bus ticket and sending them 5 hour by bus with a passport. That of course, is what they did and Andrew's passport arrived at our motel in Bagdogra late that night.

Darjeeling is a wonderful place to visit. Exotic cities in this area, sandwiched between, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, China and Tibet, have a very similar feel. If you like amazing views of the Himalayas, trekking

and white water, this is heaven. Gangtok, Darjeeling and Kalimpong are built on the top on mountainous ridges running higher and higher towards Tibet and China. It is amazing to see the buildings are hung off the cliffs. The drive up is also amazing. We climb over 7000 feet from the India plains to reach the city

We are off to Calcutta and may not have much opportunity to communicate in the coming days.

Phil & Andrew

