

The Smiths serve as PC(USA) co-workers in India

Informal Letter about the Smith Family and life in India

September 2007, Mussoorie.

Living completely alone this last week is a new experience, Hilary is in boarding, Scott is away, not even Kiana, our previous dog is here to keep me company. Not sure what I would do with out my World Space satellite radio. I am very aware at night of the silence, which is broken by small cracking noises from the tin roof, contracting as it cools. Then, of course, in the morning loud crashing sounds wake me as monkeys jump on the roof.

Moving back to India was not as easy as I had expected, it does something to my brain every time I move. It is a bit like feeling sea sick, wanting to sit down and let the world carry on around me, and then thinking why am I here? I do not belong here. Then after a month a routine develops and I feel normal again.

To remind us that we are back in a country where poverty, crime and violence are linked together and even though we are usually well protected, two cell phones were stolen. Once from our house during church, it had not even been activated. I must have not locked the back door. The second time, at night, on a crowded railway station from Scott's belt .

Hilary is back with her old friends but also has Sydney who came from Blacksburg to Woodstock for a year.

Hilary now has a nose-stud and has returned to the Jazz Band. She will be going to Chennai for a Model UN meeting with a group from the school. I have been asked to go as a chaperone.

In my last Mel's Musing I was worried about getting our bags on the train from Delhi to Dehradun, so here is a story of what happened.

Bags a Blessing or Curse?

To avoid the tension of the Old Delhi Railway station, we decided to get on at the previous sub station. We ordered a taxi from the YWCA, where we had stayed the night, for 7pm. It came at 7.30 but our train was at 9.10 so no problem. The bags were packed in and on top, and tied down. It was not

long before our driver was lost, we crawled along in three lanes of mixed traffic, buses, motor bikes with 3 children on the back, auto rickshaws, bicycles, hand pushed carts all trying to get home before dark. An hour went by, we should have reached the station by now. Conversations out of the window asking directions with never a clear answer. Eventually, down some back alleys we reached the station, it was 9 pm. Immediately 4 red jacketed coolies (porters) jumped up and ran to the taxi. Hurry, hurry, the train is leaving. So out and down with the bags. We all grabbed the smaller bags, I kept hold of the computer, Hilary had two pieces of hand luggage, as we set off with the first cooley yelling, fast fast, run run, jaldi jaldi! We had to go up 2 flights of stairs, over the tracks, and down to the train and along 8 railcars. The cooley kept telling Hilary to run and I was telling her not to (mainly because I could not and also because I still felt we had 5 minutes).

Bags were thrown in the carriage door, we jumped in as Scott is coming along the platform, he hands over 50% more payment than required as the train starts moving. Remember this is July in Delhi, it is 95 degrees and we have been running BUT we made it. The train was actually was scheduled to leave at 9 not 9.10!!

We are the only passengers so far on the train so plenty of room to store the bags, the fans are working, we had made it, and life looked good.

As we relax, and count the bags (11 I think) I ask Hilary where her saxophone is? Our spirits sink, it was out of the taxi, brought to the train, but now has gone...maybe the porters got more than 50%!!! Hilary thinks a while, she remembers putting down.....she runs down the carriage to the other door (we were using doors both ends to be faster) and round the corner by the first seats is the saxophone. Our spirits rise, now we can really relax and celebrate with the bananas, pears and cold water we brought for the overnight ride.

Lesson learnt: The things one worries most over are sometimes not the ones that we should be worrying about. I was not worried about losing the saxophone!!!

Come and visit us and experience Indian train rides, cheaper than Disney World with plenty of thrills.

Check out: www.indianrailways.gov.in/maps/all_india.htm

Scott and Melanie Smith
Phone 91-135-2631878
Sisters Bazaar,
Mussoorie,
UA 248179
India