

Informal Letter from Scott and Melanie Smith, India. January 2008

Family Update:

Exciting news, Kelli is engaged to marry Dave Fleming on July 19th in Iowa City. Dave is from Boston and is following his passion to be a fiction writer. He is currently a part of the Iowa Writers Workshop, quite a well known program if one is a writer. Kelli and Dave do not know where they will be living after July, when Dave finishes. They are looking for writers fellowships and have applied several places.

Timothy enjoyed his semester abroad in Thailand, making good friends and enjoying the culture and food. He even did a DJ course.

He has been in India for a while visiting old friends. He supported one of his closest school friends during the last weeks of his mothers fight with cancer. She had been a doctor with EHA at the hospital here in Mussoorie. We went to her funeral at a walled Christian graveyard in Dehradun. It was a moving experience and gave us a chance to think about life and death as we stood on the roots of old trees shading even older graves of the British during the Raj period of the 1800's. Two sets of puppies played around the grave stones, many of which had fallen over. Surprisingly, we have been to more funerals than weddings since we have been in India.

We have returned from a wonderfully relaxing 2 weeks on the beach at Goa, all the family except Kelli was there. We took the 37 hour train down to Goa sharing the compartment with 6 young men (call center workers) who had only two seats, they took it in turn to stand. It was a very long and sometimes entertaining journey. They had to pay fines to the train guards, for smoking and having alcohol on the train.

It is always a joy to have the family together. We made a point of eating breakfast together before separating to different spots on the beach with different friends. But would meet up again at Rex's Food Hut in the afternoon for a beach volleyball game and a drink of cold coffee (ice is rare) as the sun set.

Now we have gone our separate ways. Tim is back in New Jersey, Daniel is off on a motorbike, and Hilary is back at school. Daniel is taking a couple of months to revisit India and Nepal on a rented Enfield motorbike. He is on his way to Surkhet next week (his home town) in the foothills of the Himalayas in western Nepal. You can read his travel blog at www.coldwetdog.blog.com

Scott and I went to Patna, in Bihar state, to a Human Trafficking Consultation, arranged by the Church of North India. It is such a problem! One quote from the India Today magazine said there were 500,000 girls, below 18 yrs, as victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation or labour in India. We sat through two days of stories presented by the police, lawyers, the media, faith workers, and many other groups on all the problems involved. It is harder because the crimes often start in one state and ends in another,

and there is not fixed policy on how to deal with it. So, not much gets done. The girls and boys may get sent back but few people are ever charged with the crime. We both felt challenged that this is an urgent problem, and to get involved where possible.

I am planning to go with Scott to a few of his trainings as I am getting very bored with the Archives at Woodstock and want some new challenges.

That is it for now,
Melanie