

Helping People

One Drop At A Time



Field Report From India

May 3, 2006

Dear Friends,

This past week has been interesting, to say the least. We have dealt with a variety of issues, both difficult and fun, and our spirits have been both low and high. But we have pecked away at the problem areas and now feel like we have resolved all important issues and we have forward momentum once again.

On our drive back from Mysore Monday our car was involved in an accident. This is not surprising if you could observe the driving conditions here; one is taking a risk every time you get into a vehicle of any kind. There are rules but nobody follows them and the lines drawn in the road mean nothing. If there is no traffic going north there might be four cars going south that are spanned across a two lane road. There are animals of all kinds on the road (we saw a herd of geese and some camels on the highway to Mysore!). Smaller vehicles weave in and out in any little crevice they can fit in; horns honking constantly to announce that one vehicle is approaching and passing another. The only real rule here seems to be that the biggest vehicle has the right of way. It is bizarre.

Anyways, our car was at a complete stop in traffic and a large truck apparently didn't see our vehicle and started to cross into our lane. Its front right tire hit our front left tire and we were stuck together. Drivers from both cars got out and a lot of heated talking took place. The drivers both blamed each other and couldn't come to an agreement on their own. A police station was two doors away so Ram walked there and came back with some officials. More talk ensued and then about four men lifted the front of our vehicle off of the ground and moved it over to the right so both cars could get off of the road. The front fender of our car was dented, but the car was drivable. Both parties went to the police station and hashed things out. Eventually they settled on the truck driver paying 2,000 rupees to RamaChandra, not enough to cover the damages, but better than the alternatives, as we found out later. If the insurance companies get involved then the car must be impounded and reports submitted by the police and adjusters, and this whole process can take a very long time. An interesting experience that added a couple of extra hours to an already long day of traveling.

On Tuesday we visited a village called Kyasamballi, which is home to the Rotary Club of Kolar president Venkatesh. We were hosted by a village leader named Ranga Reddy whose father was the first chief minister of Karnataka, the state's highest office. The family home was built around 1880. It had 6 inch carved teak doors and an inner courtyard. At one time more than 40 extended family members lived in the house. We toured the village schools and water supply.

There is a section of the village that is very poor, populated by "scheduled

giving

U.S. dollars go a long way
in India.....for example:

Adopt A Family: (Donation of one water filter to a needy family who is unable to purchase a filter)	\$ 25
Adopt A School: (Donation of two water filters to a school accompanied by a clean water education program)	\$ 100
Adopt A Village Partnership: (Donation of up to 60 filters to a needy village, subsidy of up to 30 filters purchased by villagers, soap & educational program for village children, community steward for one year)	\$ 2,500

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castes”, who are people that are on the lowest rung of the social ladder. Their huts had burned down in a fire about five years ago and the government built them concrete replacement homes. We toured the area and Venkatesh has agreed to purchase 15 filters for some of the villagers from this section. We agreed to donate 10 filters using contributions we received that were designated for that purpose. The village is hosting a health “camp” or awareness day on Monday and we will attend and bring the 25 filters at that time.

On Wednesday we met with a chartered accountant to help us with some necessary tax filings and required audited reports. He is a member of the Rotary Club of Kolar Central, the second club in the town of Kolar. After our meeting we went to a nicotine awareness event that their club was hosting that day. It was a good opportunity to meet some of the Rotarians from the other club in town. Some of them drove us to a stainless steel sand filter for drinking water that they had installed for public use in town. It is in a compound that houses a silk cocoon auction market. The climate here is ideal for growing mulberry, the food of the silkworm and thus the area has a thriving silk industry. We toured the market area and although the auction was over it was still quite interesting. We agreed to attend their Rotary meeting on Friday night and give our slide presentation about the Bio Sand water filters.

On Thursday we spent a good part of the day re-designing the front and back cover of the User’s Guide that is given to each person that gets a water filter. We added some photos and logos that Peace Corp buddy Dan developed. We think it will be nice. There will be 4,000 of them printed in Kanada and 2,000 in English. Although there are other languages spoken here (Tamil, Telegu, and Hindi) we are told that not many read and write these languages.

On Friday we “divided and conquered”. Mike went with our marketing manager, Stanley, to visit some customers who owed money for their water filters. His presence did wonders in having people “pay up”. One man was told to pay his balance due by Monday or his filter would be taken away. Mike and Stanley will be sure to follow up on this to set the tone for others. The new “rule” is that no filter will be installed unless it is paid for first. While on their collection venture Mike and Stanley visited several homes where the filters were installed and spoke to owners to see if they are satisfied. One woman told them that her hair had been falling out but since using the filter this situation had stopped. A couple of others told of joint pain that had disappeared. All like the taste of the filtered water and comment that their hair feels softer when used for bathing. All of this news was positive and uplifting for us.

Cathy went with RamaChandra and our production manager, Raja, to the village where we had conducted a demonstration in November. There had been some communication problems and the relationships had broken down. We met with the village head and after much discussion we worked out an agreement to donate two filters to their school and also bring ten demonstration models to the village. This will all take place next Tuesday morning. We aren’t sure if the relationship has been totally mended, but Cathy thinks it is a good start. We feel they need some personal attention and the fact that we have visited them once and will return next week will be important.

Cathy and crew also met with Mune Gowda, the chairman for the area’s produce society. RamaChandra says he is a very influential man and if we can get his support then it could mean a lot for marketing puposes. In India if the important people back a project, then people follow;

if they don't then residents are afraid to do things in defiance of that person. Cathy had tea and saw his fancy water filter (approximate cost of 28,000 rupees vs a cost of 800 rupees for ours) which he is apparently having trouble with at the moment. The group had a tour of Mune Gowda's silk making business (he does it all including growing mulberry for the silkworms to eat, harvesting the silkworm cocoons, taking the threads from the cocoons, twisting those threads together to form thicker strands, dyeing the thread, weaving the thread to make cloth, making clothes, and selling the finished products in a retail shop!!), his poultry farm, and his seedling farm. Incredible! After our visit (all talking was done in Kanada!) RamaChandra said Mune Gowda had agreed to support our efforts and invite people to our event on Tuesday morning. Rama said he had been to see this man once before to ask for his support but was turned down. So we are not sure why he has had a change of heart and whether the fact that we went to see him had any bearing on it or perhaps it was just that his fancy filter is getting clogged and he is starting to like the idea of our cheaper model. Whatever the reason, it is a good result for us.

It is now Saturday and we are back in Bangalore for a little R&R with our dear friend Haroon. He treated us to an outstanding lunch today and we are laying low tonight because Mike has a head cold. Tomorrow (Sunday) Cathy will attend a Rotary District Assembly with RamaChandra. Mike has decided to skip it and get some extra rest so he can hopefully get rid of his cold.

Next week will be incredibly busy. Monday we will attend the health camp in Kyasamballi. Tuesday we go a village presentation near Kolar. Wednesday is the Adopt A Village gala in Chilapanahalli. Thursday the workshop staff's families want to come to the workshop to meet us. Friday night we will attend a Rotary meeting. Saturday we will drive back to Bangalore and prepare to return home early Monday morning. We are expecting a crazy but wonderful week.

That's it for now. Thank you for your interest in our efforts.

Cathy and Mike

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Taste The Healthy Difference