

# Helping People

## One Drop At A Time



### Field Report From India

June 10, 1008

Dear Friends,

“Incredible India” is the slogan the nation’s travel industry has adopted to lure tourists to India. The hint of adventure, the awesome differences of our cultures and the sheer span of geographical distance paint an exotic picture of a far away land.

Every time Cathy and I travel to India to promote our Bio-sand water filters we always seem to find “Incredible India”. But we don’t frequent the tourist sites and 4 star hotels. We are invited into people homes and businesses, treated to unheard of hospitality and thoughtfulness. We go to the poorest villages in the country where families make \$120 dollars a year toiling in parched fields, into rural schools where students sit on concrete floors all day doing their lessons. We go to local temples and mosques where people find the strength to endure a harsh life.

Yet through it all we find are amazed at the resilience and humanity of these people. That is “Incredible India” to us. The Indian society is very diverse. There is a multitude of religions and regions. Their political parties number in the dozens from communist to capitalists to Hindu national to extremist. Yet somehow it works and the puzzle pieces of diversity seem to fit. I attribute this amazing tolerance to the common bond of humanity forged in a 5,000 year old society. We have something to learn from this accomplishment.

This trip to India is different, as they all seem to be. As our project matures we keep changing our rolls. We began as project implementers, finding and equipping our factory and teaching the Bio-sand filter technology to our director and staff. Our roll shifted to raising awareness of the critical need for life saving clean water in this part of the world and then to fundraising to expand our reach to outlying areas of the District. Now we have morphed into match-makers, putting people and groups together that have clean water and sanitation as a common cause.

My first meeting was on the day I landed in Bangalore with our old friend Yoganunda. This man is the ultimate matchmaker, a world

# giving

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

**Adopt A Family:** \$ 32  
Donation of one water filter to a needy family who is unable to purchase a filter.

**Adopt A Village Partnership:** \$ 3,000  
Provides up to 90 filters to needy households in a village. Each family (i.e. partner) must pay a small portion of the cost of each household filter (approx. \$5.00); the remaining cost is paid by the sponsor. Soap and educational program for village children, donated water filters for schools and child care centers, community steward for one year period. Sponsor name is painted on the side of each filter.

**Make Checks Payable to:**

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2832 Whitney Avenue,  
Hamden CT 06518 USA**

famous Rotarian and the man who made it possible to get our project started in India. He was one of three people who answered an email (one of 73 sent to the presidents of Rotary clubs in this area of India) for help with our project. We have recently faced some serious issues transferring funds into the country because of the Indian Foreign Contribution Regulations Act. He was very gracious and resolved to help us in any way he could. He wanted our project director, Rama Chandra and me to meet with the current and incoming president of their club to do a presentation of our water project the very next evening.

The following day we met with the incoming Rotary District 3190 Governor “UB”. This pleasant gentleman has a special daughter who he calls his “assistant” and indeed she was very helpful during our meeting. She is fluent in both Kannada and English and within a couple of minutes had fished out of a bulging plastic bag of business cards, the card of Rick Benson, the incoming Rotary District 7980 Governor from southern Connecticut. They had met at a Governor’s training course and “UB” remembered him.

“UB” had quite a story to tell as he was held hostage for 8 days on a plane that took off from Katmandu in Nepal and was hijacked and forced to land in Amritsar, India when low on fuel. The plane not refueled and facing hostile forces took off and landed in Lahore Pakistan with one engine flaming out on the last drops of fuel. One hostage was killed to force refueling of the plane which made an unwelcome stop in Dubai and then Kandahar, Afghanistan where they were greeted warmly by the Taliban and Al Qaeda, who it turns out, sponsored the hijacking. It was a pretty horrifying experience that made UB all the more grateful for what he has and his opportunity to contribute to better mankind.

We agreed to find a Rotary Club in the US to do a matching grant with UB. He wants to have a multi-village Bio-sand water filter project as one of his “pet” projects for his Governorship. We were served tea and biscuits, a custom in India that marks nearly every social and business encounter.

That evening I presented our “American” version of the water program to Yoganunda and his two presidents. They applauded the presentation and threw their full support behind our project. We were overwhelmed at their response and willingness to help.

The next day we had a long meeting with Rajendra Rai at his tennis club in Bangalore. Rai is the current Governor of District 3190 and a long time supporter of ours. We are presenting the project to his Club in the evening. His club is looking for funds to complete a matching grant from England to provide approximately 200 water filters in schools in Bangalore. We agreed to provide some of the funds.



Our next stop was at the Indian Institute of Science to meet with a leading scientist, Dr. Sudhakar Rao. I had heard about his work with fluoride abatement in Kolar District and I put him in touch with a retired chemical engineer, Walter Neitlich in the States. They have been jointly working on a community fluoride abatement system for the villages. We met and were given a tour of the research lab and demonstration area at his facility. Heavy concentrations of fluoride in parts of our district leads to deformed bones and pitted teeth in youngsters and severe joint pain in adults. The abatement process is in the beginning stages but this is very important work that we will continue to support.



After a snack and a half hour of rest we headed for our presentation to the Rotary Club of Bangalore West. The presentation went over well and the club was supportive. The next day we got word that the club was going to sponsor two villages through our Adopt-A-Village program. Great news.

The next day I left my suitcases behind and put some clothes and essentials in a knapsack and along with my laptop, walked to the bus stand and caught the express bus to Kolar. That is a two hour bone jarring trip that will give anyone an appreciation of the personal automobile. But for 75 cents for the ride I can't justify hiring a car and driver for \$100 to take me there. After a short walk from the bus stand to our workshop there was a joyous reunion with our workshop staff with hugs and handshakes all around. I got the royal tour of what's new and after an hour was driven by Ramachandre, our managing director, to the local hotel to refresh myself and get some rest. At 4 in the afternoon we met with two executive directors of Rural Development Societies in the northern townships of Kolar District. They are excited about placing filters in the 100 villages they represent as a great development project for the area. We are only too happy to work with them. They have their first village ready to go and will forward the Villager's contribution towards the Adopt-A-Village Partnership program on Monday. They are planning a dedication ceremony before I leave. I am looking forward to traveling to the outlying parts of the district, an area I haven't visited since my Peace Corps days.



The next day we reviewed our production statistics and began to formulate a plan to tackle all the work scheduled for the upcoming months. We paid the staff their monthly wages (everyone in small businesses is paid in cash once a month in India), heard some complaints and resolved the issues. That afternoon I hopped on the bus back to Bangalore for some well needed rest. I skipped two Rotary events that day; I could not muster the strength to attend.



I am looking forward to spending time in Kolar next week, visiting schools and villages, meeting with our auditor, developing standard

contracts for transferring funds and meeting old friends. Our delivery truck is coming to Bangalore today with a load of filters for schools. I plan to ride back to Kolar with our crew in the truck, finally having an opportunity to haul my luggage, half of it gifts for my friends, back to Kolar.

Cathy & Mike

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