

Helping People

One Drop At A Time



Field Report From India

June 15, 1008

Dear Friends,

Things in India usually do not go as planned. You must be flexible and understanding and have the patience of a saint to get anything accomplished. The rhythm of life and therefore business is set to a different clock than what we are used to. There is a great word in Kannada called "soomnay" (phonetic spelling) which translates to the expression "just because" and answers a lot of questions about why things are done the way they are done here! You just have to love it!

On Monday the 9th of June I had repacked my two suitcases so I could spend a few days in Kolar. I was waiting for the workshop truck to pick me up after a morning delivery of filters when low and behold Ramachandre shows up with a change of plans. We hopped into his auto and drove to Rotarian Seshagiri's office, in the garage of his home. He has business supplying gears and drive trains to the military and heavy equipment manufacturers.

He is also the president of the board of directors of a private school in Bangalore that takes the poorest students from the poorest of the surrounding villages and gives them a free education, three meals a day, medical treatment and path to success in a society where they would otherwise have no chance to succeed. The school was started and funded by a German woman who married an Indian and was appalled by the educational opportunities of the less fortunate in this country.

"Sesha" told me that when he feels depressed he comes to the school for rejuvenation. All the kids know him and swarm around him affectionately calling him "Uncle." They excitedly chat about their schooling and speak very good English. All the classes are taught in English except the Kannada classes which teach the local language.

I told him the story about the ocean storm that washed up thousands of starfish onto the beach. An old man wandered down to the beach and found a little girl picking up the doomed starfish one by one

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:

**South Asia Pure Water Initiative, Inc.
2832 Whitney Avenue,
Hamden CT 06518 USA**



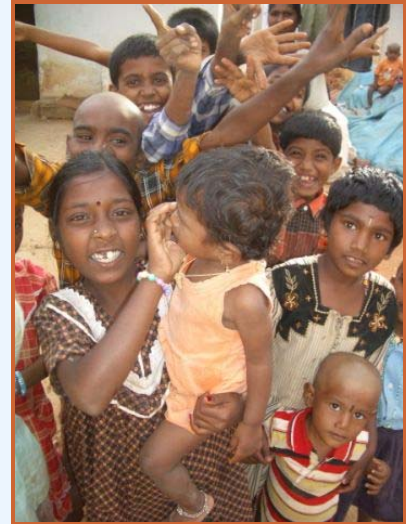
and throwing them back into the ocean. The old man approached the little girl and told her that there are thousands of stranded starfish on the beach so what good does throwing back these few? Without hesitation and with a starfish in her hand the little girl said “it makes all the difference in the world to this one” and promptly threw the starfish in the ocean. I told Sesha that these children are the starfish that got thrown back.

We proceeded to two nearby villages where some of the school children come from. These villages are quite different from the rural agricultural villages I am used to visiting. These villages had an edgy feeling. The kids and adults seemed out of sorts. The kids were wild, frantic. The adults were idle and not at all curious about the strange visitors in their village. These were really city slums that looked like Indian villages. The major occupations were manual labor in a local brick factory or laborers on the many nearby construction sites. Skilled laborers make about three dollars a day. Unskilled laborers make about half of that. They have bore well source water and poorly maintained delivery and storage systems so the water is contaminated. These people need our help.

The next day I took the bus to Kolar for our monthly Community Stewards meeting. The Community Stewards are the villagers we train to maintain and operate the filters in a hygienic manner. There is one steward in each village we “Adopt”. We pay them a monthly stipend for a year to look in on every household in the village and make sure everyone is using their filters properly and troubleshoot any problems. We pay them monthly at the workshop to insure they show up for our training sessions. After the sessions we treat them to lunch at a local restaurant along with all of our workshop crew. By any standard lunch is an all you can eat feast of south Indian delicacies. On top of all of that I ordered ice cream for dessert for the whole gang. The bill for all 22 people came to \$20.

The following day four of us drove to Bangalore for a couple of meetings. In the US we tend to value a planned, orderly process and come to rely on that to structure our lives. In India the day just unfolds with unanticipated wrinkles, disappointments and delights. This was one of those days. We drove to a government school (read poor, understaffed and lacking adequate funding and supplies) where we had stored 11 filters to be installed in Bangalore schools as part of a matching grant program with the Rotary district in Bangalore. The headmaster of this school only wanted one filter installed in the kitchen. The other 10 filters were to be transported to another school for installation. This school was a higher primary school serving 900 children from 3rd to 5th standard.

We met a young woman at the school from an organization called Akshaya Patra. This is a charitable organization that provides a mid-day meal to underprivileged children to promote literacy.



Children don't learn on an empty stomach. They serve meals at 600 schools in Bangalore alone and on any given school day serve meals to 800,000 children in 6 States in India. They only serve organically grown vegetarian food. We sampled the children's lunch of rice, sambar (a lentil based gravy with vegetables) and curds (a thick yogurt). This simple meal was delicious. I was very impressed. They were also impressed with our filters. I could sense a partnership was in the making!

After we demonstrated the filter, the headmaster wanted all 11 filters and not just the one we installed in the kitchen. The kitchen also contained an elaborate "Aquaguard" commercial water filter which cost \$2,300 but was not used because of maintenance problems. At \$35 our filter seemed like a bargain!

We waited a couple of hours for the food service truck to transport 7 of the filters to the other school, the headmaster finally compromised on 4 filters for his school! Our next meeting was with the committee to approve our filters for all the Bangalore district schools. These filters were painted with special epoxy paint that looked great and easy to keep clean. The filters were stored at a metal fabrication workshop near the old airport in Bangalore. We waited another two hours for the committee of two to show up for a five minute inspection. Ramachandre was as gracious as ever but I had to walk away before I let my American impatience interfere with the process by saying something about our wait time!

The drive back to Kolar for me was long and agonizing. I have been fighting an upper respiratory infection and the polluted air in Bangalore just made it much worse. We reached Kolar by 8:00PM after a long day of delights and disappointments, typical of my days here in India.

Cathy & Mike

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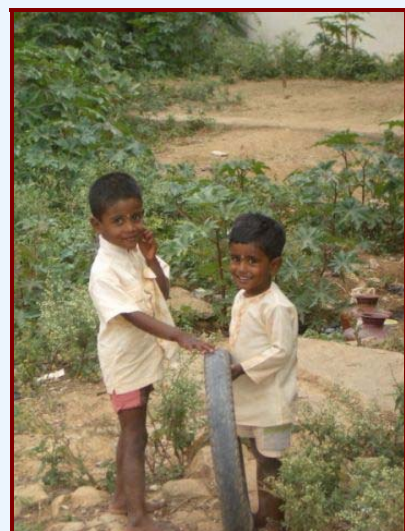
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Taste The Healthy Difference