

India

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

We got off the plane in Calcutta and were informed that there were demonstrations in the streets. It was hot and gritty in the airport. We went through at least eight different arrogant clerks whose sole job seemed to be to raise a stamp high and bring it down with a crash on an official looking piece of paper. We never did figure out what all this paper was about. An Indian citizen explained, the paper wasn't about anything important, but the people needed jobs and this was a job. Exiting the airport, it was still hot and gritty and the air was mixed with a thousand smells that results from literally thousands of people who live, die, eat, cook, reproduce, and live their entire lives on the street. And yet, as our cabs passed through the city, the impression was one of color and energy. And that began my relationship with India - attracted and repulsed

At the hotel, we were greeted by Brother Andrew, who had been sent by Mother Theresa to make sure we had arrived safe and sound. Brother Andrew was in charge of two leprosy camps upcountry and in Calcutta for the week. A beautiful man - Australian with an anesthetically pleasing face, lighted by bright blue eyes that bored in on what we said as if it were the most important utterance he'd ever heard.

Assured that the demonstration was peaceful, we persuaded him to take us out to see it. The protest consisted of well organized lines of middle class young men carrying briefcases and shouting slogans in Hindu. They were recent college grads carrying brief cases, who could not find a job. They had done everything by the book of success that told them you had to have a higher education. And then what - no jobs available. Their eyes seemed hopeless and angry, their faces listless with the betrayal they must have felt. My eyes welled up as I experienced with them the hope of getting off the survival edge and instead being thrown back on it. It was indeed a Catch 22. George several days later visited a client - a tractor company. At the request of the government, the company agreed to take one hundred intern engineers for one year. The company put one ad in the paper and they received over sixteen thousand applications.

That night, we dined in the ball room of this magnificent but run down hotel which was built in the time of the raj. The service was very formal. And then the band appeared all dressed in cowboy outfits and ten gallon hats. George said, "Great, they are going to play country and western," which he adored and I tolerated. There was similar mixed reaction amongst the rest of the group. Raising their instruments, they came forth with The Colonel's Lady's Waltz.

Unbelievable! In their boots, chaps, vests, plaid shirts and ten gallon hats, they played waltzes all evening. Not one country and western - I kept watching the dance floor imagining that any moment a time warp would occur and the whole scene would be transformed into a crowd of red coated uniforms dancing with their ladies dressed in the attire of the early nineteen hundreds.

On the way back to our room, we passed men down on their hands and knees scrubbing the wide marble hallway with some gritty substance that kept up a continual scratch, scratch sound that we heard throughout the night. In the hall we passed a huge picture window and looking out saw a ten by twenty dirt hole lit by torches. Men lined up, carrying baskets walked down a ramp into the pit and shortly thereafter emerged up a parallel ramp, their baskets full of dirt and disappeared into the darkness. This circular slow line never stopped. I was reminded of ants carrying food back to their nests. One of the staff informed us this was to be an Olympic size swimming pool. They must have been using that method three thousand years ago. Arriving at our room where we had left ten year old Holly sleeping (having been assured she would be safe) who should we discover cross-legged in front of the door but a sikh who announced he'd been sent to "guard little Miss". It had been a day in which I kept pinching myself. That night my mind was afire at all the bizarre images that flashed through it.

THE ORPHANAGE AND THE HOME FOR THE DYING

The next day, the group visited the orphanage. Woman with babies and small children lined up in what must be an endless line. These were woman willing to give their child away rather than see it starve to death. The nuns take those they can. The rest moan and cry out and hold up the children. "See how strong she is. She will be a good worker." They finally disappear into the street crowd, probably to return and try again. How do you choose? How do you say which mother's child will live and which mother's child will die.

Each day the carts go out from the Home for the Dying and pick up off the streets those who are dying. They take the selected ones back to the Home. It was formerly a temple that was given to Mother Theresa in gratitude for all her work. The temple is a huge oblong shape divided down the center. On the floor are pallets and on the pallets are the most pitiful remains of humans I'd ever personally seen. One man, I'll not forget, was so distorted that he looked like a spider on his back. I made the rounds with one of the Indian nuns who was feeding her patients. She knelt at each one, and began gently crooning, "You are safe. It's alright. I have food for you".

At the same time, she gently ran her hand over the person's cheeks and forehead. And then she slowly began to feed little tiny bites to the starving one. The love and compassion shown by the nuns transformed them and I thought I'd never seen women so beautiful. "What happens to them?" I inquired. "Many of them die here. Those that regain strength are sent back to the streets."

And then it hit me that when I first entered, the temple had seemed dark and unattractive, and repulsive. And when I left? My last look back as we left, the temple seemed amazingly light and clean, the nuns radiant, the dying peaceful. It was quiet - no street noises invaded this very special place of beauty. A transformation had occurred in me - in my consciousness. From that point on in the trip, I didn't see India as a dirty, hot, dusty, stinky, poverty ridden place to be judged. I saw it more objectively as a living, moving piece of art capable of being transformed.

Mother Theresa had explained her philosophy to the Dean of the Institute. She reminded him that until groups like ours came up with solutions that would work, her order would continue to minister to as many as they could. And she was grateful to have been given such a glorious task. I realized from what I had seen that only in the greatest valley of sorrow, can a mountain of joy exist.

Everyone has experienced the opposite also. Think of the greatest time you ever had - when you were so alive, you could hardly stand it. And when during that time did it come over you that this won't last - it will end. That's one common example of sorrow in joy.

THE BEGGARS

One noon we walked down the street looking in stores. The street is full of baggers. Parents maim and cripple their children, so the children will have a means of survival. Before we left the U.S., Paul Cain an Indian Intern at Sidley and Austin told us about the time, he and another doctor were walking down the street in Delhi, They encountered a woman carrying a baby with a bandage around its eyes. The baby was screaming. His doctor friend approached the woman and lifted the bandage from the baby's eyes. A bee flew out. The woman was in the process of blinding the baby.

And our street. A woman walked up to me and holding up a bundle of rags, crying, "Baby sick! Baby dying!" Inside the bundle of rags was a small baby that looked as if it had been dead for days. I almost lost it at that point. I turned and looked

at the stream of citizens exiting the buildings for lunch hour. It was strange. They didn't see me. They didn't see the beggars. Their eyes were blank. In fact if you were in the way, these people with Little Orphan Annie eyes would run into you.

They had figured out a protection - a perfect balance - be a zombie on the street. Don't feel or see anything that pains you and of course you give up seeing anything that is hopeful or delightful either. Life if you live it demands you say 'Yes' to reality whether it is delightful or depressing. After all, this is the only world and the only life you have. You have to be willing to be vulnerable and sensitive if you want to truly be alive.

GANDHI TOMB

One more example and this is the one with which you are most familiar. It happened in Delhi at the tomb of Gandhi. The tomb is a great rectangle of beautiful black marble set in a grassy park. If there were trees I don't remember them. Just green grass and pathways radiating from the edges of the park to the tomb. Like the Vietnam memorial in Washington, D.C., it had the power to stir something deep inside of you. Gandhi was pure presence and the power of that presence had affected the whole world. The paths to and from the tomb symbolized that Global impact.

As we were returning to our transportation, a group of very young, beggar boys of five to eight years of age surrounded us. Their cries for rupees were pitiful. They were all crippled in one way or another, having been well prepared by their family to go into the beggar guild. And their faces looked wrinkled and old. Everything in you made you want to help them but you don't give money to beggars. Seeing one get money, the rest of the pack will turn on the lucky one and try to take it away. Our group seemed paralyzed.

One of our people, also named George, stepped away from us, clapped his hands and motioned the little boys to come to him. He asked them, "Do you know how to greet people?" They executed the Indian greeting - namaste. "And the way Americans greet each other?" They stuck out their hands and each shook his hand. "I'll bet you don't know how Africans greet one another." And he preceded to show them the high five. He taught it to each one. "Why don't you try it with one another? Why don't you try it with that group? Introduce yourself. Tell them your name and age." Our paralysis vanished when we became a part of the group. Soon the beggar

boys in the excitement of the game had turned into laughing, shouting, active children having a good time. Of course, they were the same crippled little ones, but everything was different. When we left, they all came up and thanked us and gave us a final high five.

The lesson in this one is that true compassion can be the agent of transformation. George had no intention of giving them money. According to his perception, all little children need to play. So he used this understanding to transform the scene to one of joy.

LEARNINGS:

1. Joy and sorrow are part of each other, like two sides of the same coin. The height you reach with joy is equal to the depth you reach with sorrow.
2. Joy has the power to illuminate and transform people and situations. It's the other world in this world made visible.
3. Those who refuse to experience Joy because of the cost in sorrow have elected to make their eyes blank and sometimes their whole lives. A prerequisite to Joy is standing with eyes wide open to the world.
4. You can choose to live in Joy and be the agent of transforming the sorrow.

That was what I learned in India. I was going to give you some of the tools, but this is getting too long and I'm exhausted. I'll do better and give you a quote from Joseph Campbell who knows better how to live life fully in Joy than I do. I'm still learning.

**Participate joyfully
in the sorrows of the world**

"The obvious lesson.....That the first step to the knowledge of the joy of the wonder and mystery of life is the recognition of the monstrous nature of life and its glory in that character - the realization that this is just how it is and that it cannot and will not be changed. Those who think that they know how the universe could have been better than it is, how it would have been if they created it, without pain, without sorrow, without time, without life, are unfit for illumination. All societies are evil,

sorrowful, inequitable; and so they will always be, So if you really want to help this world, what you will have to teach is how to live in it. And that no one can do who has not himself learned how to live in the joyful sorrow and the sorrowful joy of the knowledge of life as it is."

We cannot cure the world of sorrows
but we can choose to live in joy.