
Linnea's India Blog XII: Sundown

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Isaac's safe arrival at the Delhi airport



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It is sundown. Dinner has taken place, its raucous symphony fading as children leave the room one by one. A single child is left sweeping the floor and the green felt around its edge with a short switch broom, rolling up the felt and tucking it away. The Emmanuel children return outside to play for awhile on playground equipment, hit a badminton bird at each other across the court or simply stand jostling in groups on the main stone steps.

The evening has brought with it increased kid energy, and sports become loud and competitive. A game of volleyball is organized, with something like 10 to a side. This is where the adult men show their youthful side: they are the only ones who really excel at the game and - though they never sacrifice the self-esteem of any of the children - they clearly intend to win, rushing in for every play possible, shouting like it is the World Cup. Brother Robert is done when he notices that he has injured his wrist. David takes note that the ball they are

playing with is really a soccer ball, and vows to buy them a proper volleyball the next day.

Evening Meeting is at 7pm. A rug blanket is dragged into the middle of the dining hall, with chairs before it for grown-ups. Children sit, girls on one side, younger boys on the other, youngest at the front. The older boys are back in the church building where they live; they will have their own evening meeting. There is singing songs of the faith that is spirited till it rattles the ear drum - some in English, some Punjabi, maybe some Marathi - local language of the state these children's families come from. Sometimes I sit on one of the chairs and accompany on ukulele, if I know the song. I haven't played keyboard the whole time I have been here - have winced my strumming fingernail down to nothing.

In the glow of the night-time fluorescence, Brother Robert chooses a scripture passage, which he asks one of the older girls to read aloud. A fluid Hindi text is read. The littlest children begin to keel and fall asleep. Sunaz, a little girl who lost many abilities when she had seizures years ago, makes raspberry noises and her sister Sangeeta hugs her close and wipes her mouth with a cloth. Robert begins to reflect on the text. Tonight it is Raksha Aunty's birthday. Raksha is here at the school temporarily while one of the teachers grieves the sudden loss of her mother earlier this month. Brother has chosen Psalm 139: "O God, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up..." It's a beautiful poem of comfort and affirmation that ends with "I praise you God, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." It is a scripture he has chosen in Raksha's honour, but it is for us all. "Who here thinks they are beautiful?" is his question. All put up their hands - except Chris, who has been sitting with his chin in his hand for much of the evening. "Well - that's honest; thank-you for that," says Brother. "But, you know what? It is true: You *are* beautiful. There is only one Chris in the whole world. Why are we beautiful?" he asks the whole group. "Because God made us," they say almost as one - and it is clear that they have heard it a million times.

On Tuesday, David and I leave the school to take the train into Delhi to meet Isaac at the airport. Travel is an adventure in itself; we need to ask our fellow passengers for advice on how to get to the Metro from the railway station, and then onto the special Metro to the airport. To add to my mounting anxiety, our train's arrival into the capital is delayed. However, India is teaching me to stop looking at my watch. At the airport we know that we will not be allowed in the actual building without a ticket, so we wait with all the other taxi drivers and

family members and business people outside the railing at the front of Indira Gandhi International, watching a steady stream of people pour out the front doors.

Isaac has travelled on his own from Vancouver, spent 9 hours in Shanghai PuDong airport to get onto the next flight to Delhi. With support back home from dear family and friends, he got safely on that first flight and even connected with a Punjabi mom and son who were making the same connections. We received a photo of him and them at the airport, and were most relieved to know he was not alone. So, as we stand waiting for him to emerge from the airport, I catch sight of the two Punjabis rolling their baggage out. I'm sure they were not expecting the first thing they would see on Indian soil was a western woman pounding up the walkway at them! I thank her by name and ask how Isaac is. She is dazed, but confirms that he has been on the flight, and so I worry no more. We spot him coming out of the airport doors - and bolt toward each other for a joyful hug.

Our trip back to Ludhiana the next morning is a surprise as we have got our wires crossed with our tour planner. Thinking that a 3rd class seating ticket was good enough for a 5 hour long daytime trip, we buy one for each of us, and we stand on the platform awaiting the train. With India Rail, the cars are numbered and they are neatly indicated on lighted hanging boards as the train is preparing to arrive, so we know where to stand. As ours rolls up, we can see that what we have booked (and possibly the price of \$3.20 for all 3 of should have given us a clue!) was the car we have seen in past where passengers are literally hanging out the train doors, people are crushed standing like sardines for the entire trip, they sit in the washrooms with their feet sticking out the door, they hold their bags up in the air. We stare.

The train has paused for awhile and all we can do is stand, emotions winging between despair and hilarity. Even without Isaac's overnight backpack and the extra rollie suitcase he has brought of toys and school games for the children, it looks impossible. I have to say, "Guys, I think I can't do it..." We manage to get advice that takes us to a more expensive class car, where we make ourselves at home and pay the conductor the extra when he comes along. I think all afternoon about the people who have to take 3rd class "seating".

That night at Evening Meeting, it is David's birthday and a welcome to Isaac. There is a beautiful big cake, to David's surprise, with chocolate curls and brightly coloured icing, and we hand out toffees to all. Isaac is an enigma to the

children, shy and unsure what to say or where to look. I try to explain to children who have 49 siblings what it might be like to feel self-conscious in the presence of others. I don't think they get it, really. In meeting, I tell the story of the four friends who lower their paralysed buddy down into the house through the roof. I lead them in the chorus: "You can't come in, you can't come in, we got here first!" Later, I run back to our room to get my missing camera. As I race back toward the meeting room, I see through the door window Brother Robert is hurriedly shutting the door on me. He is pretending to bar it, while all the children in the room mockingly sing: "You can't come in, you can't come in, we got here first!!" I literally jump up and down on the cold marble tile, I am laughing so hard.

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Linnea Good

"Enlivening Faith through Story and Song"



Happy Birthday, David! Welcome, Isaac!



Ravina



Schools are big biz in India - and so is going abroad to study



Isaac is persuaded to join in a game of Volleyball



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