

NOTES FROM THE ROAD

March 11, 2016

I and others, e.g., David, have sent you pieces of information about our latest trip. As I've said before, I think it went well and the "pilgrims" were a great group to be with.

Because of the generosity and advocacy of many of the folks on the trip, we've received or have promises of "sponsor" funds for at least 5 children, and we are more knowledgeable about the healthcare situation in India, especially in Khajuraho. We have been so blessed each year to have such an able, compatible group. I certainly learned a lot more about what to do and not do in relation to these tours. The bottom line: As always we learn a lot about the families when we visit them, the TIG program, and ourselves. I'll try not to repeat too much of the information you've been given before for the sake of brevity; I suspect this missive will be quite long enough.

Khajuraho, Chhatarpur, and Nowgong

Overall the children are doing well enough in school. We paid the tuition bill at the Jain school for all 4 children attending—Baba's and Laxmi's—and in Nowgong for Bablu's 3 children.

Laxmi's Family

I reported that one of Laxmi's children, whom Mary Lynn is supporting, Chaya, has had some attendance problems at school and with the tutor. I don't think the issue is major (we have seen this problem with most of our families when they have children entering school for the first time), but the families need to understand our expectations, one of which is regular attendance when we're paying for schooling. We spoke with both parents and assume the issue is or will be resolved.

While we were having tea with Laxmi's family, word got around that the doctor, David, was with us, and a neighbor brought a child for him to examine. You could tell from the girl's stare that there was something "not-right" with her. For privacy, David took her outside to examine her. Of course, outside all the neighbors crowded around to see what was happening. David said she definitely had some long-term issues, but there was nothing we could do.

We met with Annu, who seems to run Laxmi's household. She was anxious to hear what progress we were making on her burn surgery. Deborah has been in contact with Children's Burn Foundation (CBF), which, I infer, may prefer to have the surgery done in the US. They are currently comparing the costs of having the surgery done in the US with having it done in India, but more about Annu later.

Baba's Family

Raj, the artist and Milli's art teacher (Mary Lynn and I are paying for her art lessons), is very pleased with her progress. We even spoke with Baba about her going to art school.

After she gets her 10th Grade Certificate, she would submit a portfolio for admission to an art school. Baba likes the idea, but his wife would find it hard for her to pursue art

rather than a husband. Milli gave us a number of pictures to bring to sponsors. She's going to be very tall as you can, perhaps, tell from the picture I sent earlier. Krishna likes and is reported to be doing well in school, but Kerstin felt that he was a typical middle child—sort of overlooked. I did note that Baba used to talk about Krishna a lot more, but now he mentions Hemant, the youngest, a lot. Of course, Milli is the center of that household.

I reported earlier that Baba had lost a lot of weight as noticed by Kerstin and Ann Randall, who had seen pictures of him on our website. Amy and Tim noted in the report I sent from the hospital that he needed to keep taking an “acid-blocking portion pump inhibitor like Prevacid or Protonix.” Baba had run out of the medicine the hospital had given him. I went to the pharmacy, talked to the pharmacist, and got enough “acid-blocking” medicine for 2 months.

When we were about to leave Baba's house after dinner, we couldn't find Kerstin's shoes. Both Baba and his wife panicked since they knew how easy it would be for us to think they had stolen them. They were looking everywhere, then Baba said “Curly” (sp?). Curly is one of the tuk-tuk drivers who hangs around occasionally when we are in Khajuraho. He had followed us to Baba's house and come in. Baba tore out of the house and found Curly wearing Kerstin's shoes. He brought him back to the house and I came as close to hitting him as I have anyone in a long time. His explanation/excuse was that he was drunk. The whole scene is funny in retrospect, but for me it was the worst moment of the trip. There are so many trust issues with me around Baba, legitimate and biased. He noted during the trip that I always check his pharmacy bills twice. I had to admit that I did.

Baba's main worry is that his older brother will return to Khajuraho permanently, and he and the family will be homeless. I suggested that he just refuse to leave. That's what he's done in the past when his brother and his family have visited and they've tried to get Baba and his family to leave. When he refuses, he says the tension in the house for everyone, especially for his wife, is unbearable.

BTW, I haven't paid Baba for transporting the children since December and, as previously reported, we owe him money for prescriptions. Since he doesn't handle large sums of money well, he and I agreed that we would hold owed back money until he needs it for necessities, like electricity and food. He has money for electricity and food for this month that he made by being one of the tour “escorts.”

Ajju's Family

The scariest moment of the trip for me was at the tuk-tuk driver's, Ajju's, house where we were having tea. Ajju asked David to look at his wife who is a few months pregnant. David examined her and said she needed to go to Chhatarpur to the hospital immediately. Ajju wanted to take her to a midwife in Chhatarpur who oversaw Baba's wife's last pregnancy, but David insisted that she go to the hospital. The group agreed to give him money for a car to and from Chhatarpur and for medical expenses ₹10,000 (c. \$150). The hospital kept Ajju's wife late into the night and then sent her home, but

she had to return the next day. I don't know whether they didn't keep her overnight because of costs. At any rate, when I last spoke with Aju, he told me she was feeling "much better." I told him that the group had agreed to cover his wife's pre- and post-natal care. He expressed great gratitude.

Jagjeet

We went with Jagjeet's father to Chhatarpur to visit Jagjeet's school. The grande dame principal rolled out the red carpet with snacks, water, and a tour. No one could produce any grades for Jagjeet because his teacher was absent the day we visited, but we were assured he was "doing better." We agreed to pay his tuition and transportation costs through the end of the school year. I didn't give his father the money because I am still hoping to see some grades. Jagjeet goes into the 12th grade next year. I suspect he won't pass the Indian 12th Grade Certificate Exam, but I didn't think he would pass the 10th grade exam, but he did—not with flying colors but he passed. I guess we might as well pay for one more year in the hopes that he will pass the Exam, but I'll leave that decision up to the OG.

Ajay

The OG approved admitting a new student into the program, Ajay, who is 11 years old and dropped out of the government school at the end of the 4th grade when his sister, who is the only one in the family who can read, married and left home. The group interviewed the nervous boy and his father who is our tuk-tuk driver in Khajuraho when we need a second tuk-tuk as we did on this trip. We took Ajay and his father to the Jain school for an admissions interview. The school recommended that he enter at the second grade level. We didn't pay his tuition because at that time the OG hadn't met and approved admitting him. I called to tell the family when the OG had approved his admission. They were very appreciative. We also told the family he needed intensive tutoring between now and the beginning of the school year next month. We had thought that he would go to Vicky, the other children's tutor, but that would prove a real hardship as he lives in the country, not in the Old Village. The family believes they have found a capable tutor that lives nearer their home. The tutor charges ₹300 (about \$5) a month—pretty much the going rate. Ann thinks that Ajay, in light of his learning gaps, needs one-on-one tutoring and is looking for someone to fund this. At this time, I don't know anything about the tutor other than that they have located one or about the tutoring situation. I will give more information when I get it.

Hanote Family

Sam Hanote continues to do well in Sacred Heart Convent School. As directed by the OG, we talked with the Hanotes about helping us oversee the healthcare of the families. They said they would be willing, but when we talked about remuneration, they demurred. We'll have to figure that out as we go along what a fair fee would be.

Mrs. Hanote seems to have done a great job establishing her school. She now has 100+ students, many of whom can't afford to pay. As always, she would like for Baba to send his children to her school, and if Bablu moves back, will undoubtedly want his children to go there, though Sam still attends Sacred Heart. David wondered if we

couldn't educate more children by supporting Mrs. Hanote's school as she again asked us to do. Doing so would certainly be a different model for us, and I ask David to bring this issue up at the next meeting.

Bablu's Family

The person that I would say is doing worst is Bablu. He's depressed and worried as any sane person in his situation would be. As I reported, he borrowed money from family and friends to get his passport because he was sure we could find him work abroad, which, as far as I know, we can't. Ann did some research and we tried to explain that he almost surely couldn't make it abroad without some kind of in-country support group, but he made a comment, when I spoke to him last week, that suggested that he still thinks we could do something on this front if we really wanted to. This belief makes sense from his perspective. What experience has he ever had with people who offer to pay for his children to go to school and help with his family's healthcare? If we can do these things, can't we find someone in some country for him to work for?

One thing I have to say for Bablu: He's persistent and industrious but prone to very bad decision-making. He goes out everyday looking for work. He rents a tuk-tuk on days when there's an available one, and on days when there isn't, he tries to get tourist business for tuk-tuk drivers who give him a small commission. I told him the group had promised only to pay his rent through April when we would look at his situation again. I talked to him about returning to Delhi to find work. He doesn't think he can find anything that will pay enough for him to support the family. He didn't when he lived there before, and couldn't drive or didn't have the tuk-tuk. He still thinks that it would be best for his family if he found a job abroad. His brother-in-law took him to meet with a group that supposedly finds jobs for people in the Middle East. They told him they could find him a job in Dubai paying ₹45000 (almost \$700) a month. He says that in his situation he can't pass this opportunity up. I told him what I had seen how Indians were treated in the Middle East. He said that whatever the treatment he had to find work to support his family, so he's working with the aforementioned group to meet the requirements for emigrating. He will have to go to Delhi for a medical exam and get a visa. If he passes the medical exam and gets a visa, they will, supposedly, send him to the Middle East if he pays close to \$2000 baksheesh (sp?) or bribe money to get the job—a kind of headhunter's fee. He said, "Baksheesh is the only way."

Bablu said that when the school year ends at the end of this month, if he can't afford the Nowgong room, he will move his family back into his parents' home in Khajuraho, but he doesn't believe that he can live there long because of the harassment from the people he owes gambling money to. He'll try to stay until he finds out something definite about the Middle East prospect. He reports that Chanda agrees that the only way out seems to be to have him go abroad so he can make enough money to get them out of gambling debt. Ironically as bleak as things are for Bablu, the current situation in Nowgong is perfect for the rest of the family. They're surrounded by Chanda's family, including a brother who is helping them out financially and emotionally; they are going to a wonderful school (we met with the principal and some of the children's teachers who report that the children are doing well); and they have a very able tutor who teaches at

the school and lives in the family's building; we met and paid her.

Healthcare

David made some significant inroads on the healthcare front. We met with the baby doctor and the adult doctor that most of the village people use. It turns out that they may not be full-fledged doctors, but they are the first line of healthcare for our families in Khajuraho. David talked to them about treating our families and receiving pay later.

They agreed to this, and I made up a temporary "sheet" for each of the families, identifying them as a TIG family. I also made up a list of our families and who is eligible for treatment. This list has been given to the "doctors" and a pharmacist in Khajuraho.

Though we didn't talk about this approach with the pharmacist whom David, Martin, and I met with, I sent the list of the families to him, asking if he would work under this "help now/pay later" plan. I haven't heard a response from him. We also met with a doctor at the government hospital that none of the families use because they say the doctors are often not at the hospital and they just don't trust that their loved ones would receive quality treatment in that hospital. When David spoke with the doctor there, we got a much rosier picture of the services offered (at least we think it was a rosier picture, but we had so much trouble understanding him that the picture was smudged rose at best). I think that in the end we were closer to the families' evaluation of the hospital than we were to the doctor's. Ann walked around the hospital while David, Martin, and I were with the doctor and found it to be "very dirty." We also met very briefly with the head of the hospital in Chhatarpur about the "pay later" plan described above. He sent us to his financial staff, and David and Martin, after much arm twisting, got the head financial person to say he would support the plan. You have seen the letter that David wrote to him. There have been some to-be-expected bumps in implementing this plan, but David, who has the lead, is on top of them.

Another tense medical moment was when David and Martin questioned the pharmacy bills, which I too had often thought of as high but had come to accept. Several times in the past I went to the pharmacy in Khajuraho and Delhi to "verify" charges, which led to Baba's comment that I always double-checked his pharmacy bills. Basically the question for David and Martin was in light of how much people earn, how could they pay so much for medicine. Was there a scam to get money? If so, were the families in on it? This, of course, would have been devastatingly upsetting. We went to the pharmacist and went through one of Baba's bills line by line. David was surprised at the number of medicines that were prescribed. The pharmacist explained that the doctors get a kick-back from the pharmaceutical companies for prescribing their medicine.

David also found that some of the medicines prescribed for the children seemed to be counter-indicated. We agreed that the families have no way of evaluating what is prescribed as most of us wouldn't. David asked the pharmacist what happens when people can't afford to pay for medicine. He said, "They might die." Again, we come to needing to find better doctors for our families.

Resources

In my estimation, the best thing that happened during our journey was meeting the head of HR at the Lalit Hotel, who, I think, will be a great asset to us. I think he will help us

find better doctors for our families and will prove to be a valuable sounding board when we have questions and/or ideas. This contact we made through David and Martin.

When he walked me to the tuk-tuk that had to wait outside the Lalit gates, we had a very encouraging talk. He wants to help and knows our families—the good and the bad of them—because he is from the Old Village—an Old Village boy who has done very well for himself. Of course, the families know him as a neighbor. He told David and Martin about an apprentice cooking program, so we took Jagjeet and his father to talk to him about this program. I thought it was a very good conversation, but when I last spoke with Jagjeet and asked if he had followed up on the conversation, he had not.

David also suggested that we create a Resource Book for all our sites, which is an excellent idea. Of course, we would probably have to pay someone to do this work.

David has a young woman in mind. Julian, the new college graduate who was on the trip with us, also expressed some interest in doing this work. For what I guess are obvious reasons, we wouldn't want a young woman to go to the sites alone, so she would have to work mostly, I guess, through the internet, which I've found to be very unreliable in issues related to our sites, e.g., the information we tried to find out about social workers in Khajuraho. There's a website for Khajuraho social workers that isn't active, and we found that the social workers we thought worked in Khajuraho weren't there anymore. What has become clear—and once clear, obvious—is that our families' knowledge is limited by caste and education. Whether or not there is actually a doctor in Khajuraho (the pharmacist said there isn't; the Lalit HR director said there is), when someone gets sick at the hotel, they bring in reputable doctors who lives in Khajuraho or nearby. Maybe we can work something out with such doctors to get better and more reliable healthcare for our families. I have asked the families what the richer people do when they get sick. Their response has always been that they go to Chhatarpur, which undoubtedly some of them do, but there may be untapped resources closer to home, which we need to explore.

Varanasi

School

As was the case in Khajuraho, all the children seem to be doing well or at least improving, even Govinda's (who may prefer his given name "Govind" now) older daughter, Kusum, who has struggled. Preetam, Gungun's older brother, who is just completing his first year at the Imperial School, seems to be holding his own. Priya, her sister, Pammy, and Gungun, Govinda's niece, continue to do very well. The group met with the Imperial School principal, who was as gracious and impressive as ever. We also paid for all the children's tuition through the end of this school year (March) and got uniform-related clothing for all the girls. We also enrolled Govinda's third child, Vasundhra (Kallu), age 4, in LKG, Lower Kindergarten or Nursery School.

Tutors

Priya found a tutor (₹600 or less than \$10 per month) for herself and Pammy. I don't think we were particularly impressed with the tutor's English, but Priya said what she needed help with is Math and that the tutor was helpful with that subject. Gungun's mother, Serena, also found a young woman tutor, who was quite enthusiastic and had

already been tutoring for at least one month without pay and was hoping that we would hire her and give her back pay; we did both. The hire, however, was “conditional” in that we said we wanted to see how things were going during the first paid month. She is charging ₹600 (\$9) per month per child—double what the other Varanasi tutor is asking. We’ll see if she’s worth it. She seemed smart enough. A number of the group didn’t like the way Govinda spoke to her, but she certainly held her own, and often in those Hindi exchanges, the tone sounds harsh to me. I suspect Govinda’s tone really was “harsh.”

We talked about “forcing” the children to work with the same tutor, but we came to the conclusion that that was going to be more trouble than it was worth. Plus there are a number of tutor-issues still in the air that need to be settled before embarking on the sensitive issue of having the feuding families with the same tutor: Priya and Pammy’s tutor is pregnant, so how much longer will she be able/willing to tutor? Govinda’s wards’ tutor is hired on a trial basis. Then there’s the issue of what common ground could we find for all of them to meet with a tutor. They certainly couldn’t convene at each other’s homes as the families do hate each other. Since Priya and Pammy joined the program, I’ve felt we had to offer someone in their family the chance to make money by working with us; the obvious choice is their brother, Deepak. I told him we were taking the group out the next morning and to meet us at the hotel at 10. He didn’t, and Priya told me when I mentioned that he hadn’t shown up that “he didn’t want to go on that [Govinda’s] boat.” Deepak did join the group later to Govinda’s dismay. He called me after I left Varanasi to tell me that he didn’t want Deepak working with us. I told him I couldn’t promise that he wouldn’t. Though the one-tutor solution makes sense resource-wise and economically, I don’t see it as a realistic solution. These families have deep resentments and begrudgingly tolerate the sight of each other when/because we are in town.

Govinda’s Family

Both families (Govinda’s and Priya’s) had us over for a meal: We had lunch at Priya’s and dinner at Govinda’s. It was at the dinner that I thought Govinda’s wife, Meera, looked pregnant. When I asked Govinda if she were, he said that he had asked her and she said “no.” The next morning he told me that he had asked her again and she said she was pregnant. If Govinda didn’t “know,” it’s because he didn’t want to know. He is not happy about the pregnancy, but I pointed out that he bore half of the responsibility.

If Meera didn’t tell him, I’m sure she didn’t because she didn’t want any pressure from him not to keep the child. They estimate that she is 5 months pregnant. I encouraged them to get her pre-natal care that we would pay for.

Vikas

Vikas is doing an excellent job as a fiscal conduit. He keeps very good records and receipts, and we are usually able to reconcile to the paise. We paid him ₹10000 (about \$150) last year to serve as our fiscal conduit. When Martin and I were meeting with him to reconcile the numbers, he asked for a raise of ₹2000 (\$30) and we agreed to it. We left money with him to pay expenses for the upcoming school year.

Delhi

School

Again, it's good to be able to report that all the children in Delhi seem to be doing well.

It looks like Chahat, whom Bobbi found and supports, may be a very good student.

Anjali, whom a previous tutor thought was "retarded," is doing fine at the Sikh school, and no one has any idea what the tutor saw that made her think Anjali has problems.

We met with the principal at the Sikh school and Amandeep's impressive teacher at the Catholic school, as well as the tutor of the children in the Sikh school—the one whose husband doesn't allow her to let us in the house. We met with her on the porch, and she also reported that the children are doing well. We also enrolled Anjali and Rohit's 4 year old brother, Saurabh, with the participation of his mother, into the Sikh school, and agreed on a reasonable temple fee of ₹1100 (about \$16).

Rohit and Anjali's Family

I'm delight and proud to report that Anjali and Rohit's parents, Raju and Rekha, made the final payment of the ₹19,205 (almost \$290) they owed us, as you may remember, for unenrolling their children from the Sikh school in a fit of pique over an unrelated incident with Rekha's father in Khajuraho. Once they had calmed down and wanted to get back into the program and their children back into the Sikh school, we agreed to readmit them on the condition that they pay us for the tuition money we had lost when they withdrew the children. They have been exemplary parents/ TIG members since, and we were all glad to have the debt paid off and this unfortunate incident forgiven and behind us.

Field Trip

As we did last year, we had an outing with the families. We asked that the whole family come and there was 100% compliance and a grandmother. Chahat's father wasn't in town, so he couldn't come. We went to a sort of temple theme park—I don't know any other way to describe it—called Akshaardham, honoring Bhagwan Swaminarayan. I think everyone (19 of us in all) had a great day visiting the temple, taking a boat ride through Indian history as seen through Indian eyes, and ending with a great laser and water show. Most of the costs were picked up by the traveling group, but I did put ₹2000 (\$30) from the TIG monies toward the day's expenses.

Amandeep's Family

As you know, we try to use these trips as a means of giving the families some money by paying the fathers for helping us. I reported earlier that Baba, Bablu, Govinda, and Deepak all did a great job and were appreciated and very much liked by the people on the tour. We used Amandeep's father, Charanjeet, as our main chauffeur to and from the airport. He sold his motorcycle and bought a car so he could go into the chauffeuring business; therefore, we wanted to support him. His regular job is chauffeuring some government employee who didn't pay Charanjeet for 3 months, telling him that the government had not paid him for 3 months—a blatant lie I'm sure.

Not having income for 3 months, Charanjeet has fallen behind in his car payments and asked if we could help him. I told him we didn't finance cars. I asked as I was leaving whether he had ever gotten paid. He said he had. I don't think I believe him, because

he again asked if we could help him with the car payments. I told Ann about this, and she asked Baby, Amandeep's mother/ Charanjeet's wife, how Charanjeet's business was doing. She reported that he was getting paid regularly by the government official. We suspect he hadn't told his wife about the problem with getting paid.

Annu

Deborah, who's done a superb job of keeping the Annu burn surgery search on track, did some research and found a top-notch plastic surgeon in Delhi, Sunil Choudhary (http://www.maxhealthcare.in/images/doctor_document/profile_drsunilchoudhary.pdf), who works out of one of the "luxury" hospitals, Max Healthcare: Super Speciality Hospital. Deborah asked me to contact him, which I did. He made time to see Laxmi, Annu's father, and me on the day I called as I didn't have much time since I was about to leave Delhi. We took pictures of Annu for the doctor to see, and actually Laxmi, when he was looking for a surgeon for his daughter after things fell through in Dehradun, had come to this hospital, so they had some background records on Annu.

The doctor said that they had the equipment to perform laser surgery, a question the Children's Burn Foundation (CBF) wanted asked, but the doctor said that he wanted to see Annu before deciding the best procedure for her. He emphasized that he thought her countenance would be improved with surgery, but that it was important that Annu and the family understand that she would never look "perfect" and that the grafted skin would likely darken over time. He said it would take about a year before he would know whether she would require other surgeries. For what it's worth, I was very impressed with Dr. Choudhary and the hospital. As you know, Deborah has been liaising with CBF and has passed the information we received from Dr. Choudhary on to them. They are evaluating whether it would be more cost effective to have the surgery done in India or the US, as apparently they have a special relationship with Shriners Hospitals that keep the costs down. I have also contacted the Operation Smile doctor who performed Milli's cleft palate surgery, since I recently learned that Operation Smile does surgery on burn victims. He knows of a US doctor who leads an organization that performs pro bono surgeries on burn victims in India. He is contacting that doctor/organization to see if they can be of help. So we have a couple of irons in the fire (bad expression in this instance) for Annu. I hope something soon comes to fruition. I think the waiting must be very hard for/on her. It certainly is on me.

Health-Related

One thing you will notice when I send you the financial listing from this latest trip is that the medical costs are very high. We noted this before when I sent the list of expenses from my November trip. I have documentation/receipts for all the costs and I'm sure they are legitimate. The good thing is that the Delhi families seem to be availing themselves of the healthcare component of our program. I note that Amandeep's family as does Laxmi's has significant medical expenses. The group also visited Jivodaya, the Catholic Delhi hospital that works with our families; we added money to the hospital account.

Laxmi

Laxmi is doing an excellent job as our fiscal conduit in Delhi. The only problem is that he lives so far from the families and schools. It probably takes him more than an hour when he needs to visit them and pay bills. Since we gave Vikas in Varanasi a raise, I thought it only fair that we offer one to Laxmi though he didn't ask for one. We have always paid Laxmi less than we have Vikas because Laxmi's family is in our program and, therefore, receives tuition and healthcare benefits. Last year we paid him ₹8000 (c. \$120) for his fiscal conduit work. I offered him ₹9000 this year, a rise of about \$15.

Kolkata

Ann Randall, Julian Kennedy, Baba, and I went on to Kolkata. For those of you who have been, the orientation to the Mother Teresa work was less off-putting. The introductory materials that pointed out "how you really aren't needed, so don't rock the boat with any new ideas" have been mercifully dropped. Still, I would not call the orientation experience "welcoming." We were blessed in that the "regular" orientation nun, who always questions why we're traveling with an Indian, was absent. One of the volunteers said to Ann that she was glad the "regular" wasn't there because she can be so difficult. It's unfortunate that the orientation is so off-putting, because the experience of working with the nuns, brothers, adults, and children is overall very rewarding. All in all things went very well. Ann worked at a home for disabled infants. Julian, Baba, and I worked at Nabo Jibon, a home for disabled boys and men. There is a new head brother at Nabo Jibon, who told me that the order had a new program for alcoholics. I was interested because of Baba. I spoke with the nun who heads the program. She said it was very small, only 12 beds, and was reserved for the indigent of the Kolkata slums.

A Caveat or Two

I just want to remind folks who might be wondering that though we bill the trip as a "TIG Trip," the pilgrims, including me, pay our own way and for the escorts. The only thing that TIG funds were used for as related to the trip itself was the contribution, as noted above, of ₹2000 to cover a small portion of the Delhi field trip expenses. We also, as noted above, used our approved on-the-ground authority to pay ₹10000 for Ajju, who at the time of payment had not been admitted into the program, to get medical care for his pregnant wife.

If there are questions, opinions, corrections, differing interpretations, etc., please share them with all of us. Glad to get this epistle off my back. I hope there aren't too many mistakes in it. Peace and Love

Paul A. Ramsey

February 22, 2016

I'm sorry I've been so out of touch. I haven't been online for more than a week. At the end of the day, I just haven't had the energy (age) to get online, so then I get

discouraged about all the e-mail piling up and don't want to get online. At any rate, the trip has, in my opinion, gone well—certainly better than I anticipated. If I do the trip again, I won't agree to so many permutations on the schedule. It was a lot to keep track of, and I don't really have the bandwidth for that. Maybe we should turn things over to a professional travel agent. Still, things went well with all the permutations. We had 3 OG's on the trip: David, Martin, and Kerstin. Martin was a great help on the financial front and David, superb on the medical. Baba, Bablu, Laxmi, and Govinda took excellent care of us and proved to be very able "escorts." I didn't want people traveling alone, which could have been the case with all the aforementioned permutations. Baba and Govinda escorted people who took the train when the rest of the group flew. Bablu took care of one group member in Delhi who left early.

Two of the pilgrims and I are now in Kolkata working at the Mother Teresa homes. It finally warmed way up (in the low 90's). Overall the weather has been lovely to cool.

The good news is that all of the children are reported to be doing average to very well in school. The one issue has been some school and tutor attendance problems (I don't think it's anything serious) with Laxmi's daughter, Muskan, which I wrote about earlier. We spoke with the tutor and both parents. I think the mother understands that school has to be an everyday thing even when it rains or the children don't want to go to school. We went to Jagjeet's school, but weren't able to get much information. We were told he is doing better.

Baba

I sent you a financial summary related to Baba's most recent hospitalization and some medical records in a previous e-mail. He is feeling well, but has lost a lot of weight.

Kerstin said that she didn't think he looked well, but I don't notice such things. I thought he looked good with the weight loss. My sense is he's doing better on the drinking front, but he hasn't stopped (and probably never will). He said it was so easy for him not to drink when we're in-country and so hard when we're not. He's particularly stressed (and it wouldn't surprise me if this stress didn't set off the problem with his esophagus.

Of course, the smoking and drinking didn't help.) about his brother's return to Khajuraho with his family. If the brother returns permanently as he, apparently, is thinking about doing, Baba's parents have already said he and his family will have to find another place to live. When we had dinner at Baba's, Milli read a story she'd written about needing a place to live when her grandparents put the family out. All of us thought this kind of manipulation was inappropriate. I asked Baba about the story. He said he knew nothing about it until Milli read it. He said that he thought his wife was behind the story as she wanted him to ask us about renting or buying a house or property for them when we were in town.

Bablu

Bablu has borrowed \$500 from family to apply for a passport, which he got. As I reported before, he's gotten this idea in his head that he's going to work out-of-country, and we can help him to find a job in some other country. He refused to listen to the visa issues and all the other obstacles to his leaving his family and going to slave abroad.

The group traveling had a meeting with him that not all thought was appropriate since what some perceived as sensitive issues were discussed publicly, but one in the group, Ann, agreed to do research on emigrating to Australia since there is some grape picking trail there. Ann and I met with Bablu privately and went over what Ann had found out.

There's not a snowball's chance in hell that he can go to Australia without in-country support. I spoke to him last week, and, in light of the discussions we had with him, he's rethinking trying to leave India and, as we suggested, is thinking of returning to Delhi without his family to try to find work.

Govinda

Again, the children in Varanasi seem to be doing well in school, especially Priya, her sister, Pammy, and Gungun. Gungun's brother, Preetam, is doing much better than we anticipated, and Govinda's daughter, Ragini, is improving. The sad news is that Govinda's wife is pregnant again. He already has 4 daughters.

Delhi Families

The Delhi families are doing well. The traveling group took 19 family members out on Saturday. We agreed to have TIG pay for a portion of this outing as you will see when I send you an update on trip finances. It was a great day. We insisted that the wives come with the whole family and they did. We went to a Disneyland/Temple complex.

Of course, the families had never seen anything like it, and most of the children ate ice cream for the first time and were delighted.

Another tuk-tuk driver, whom many of you who have traveled to India would know if you saw him, Ramachendr, (He's one of the "country people" who live near Baba's family's farm) has asked that we support his youngest child, Ajay. Since he is the youngest, there will be no other children to support from the family. Ajay is 11 years old and went to a government school through grade 4. Neither parent reads or writes, but his sister helped him with his school work until she married. It was then he dropped out of school.

The traveling group interviewed Ajay and his father. Both seem to be sincere about Ajay's returning to school. He would go to the Jain school, which is our least expensive school— \$150 a year with tutoring—and someone has come forward to sponsor him.

I know we have been concerned about support for our families in the out years, and we should be, but we should also look at growth in terms of the monies we have raised and what we should be able to raise in the future.

– Paul A. Ramsey