

A Day in the Life of Mission Partners in Sri Lanka August 2007

Rosemary writes:

My alarm goes off at 6.00am. It's still dark at that time whatever the time of year because we're only slightly north of the equator¹. I have a cup of tea, have a shower, check e-mails, say my prayers using the Methodist Prayer Manual, and then walk up the hill to chapel for 6:45am. Everyone sits on the floor. The first 15 minutes are silent and are the highlight for me – the rest of the service is usually in Tamil and/or Sinhala. Today I'm teaching so, rather than return home for toast and marmite, I join the students in the mess hall for some milk rice (kiribath) and chillie paste, one of my favourite Sri Lankan dishes. The subject of today's lecture (3 hours with a tea break) is the Book of Revelation; I'm learning lots and hope the students are too. The students are final (4th) years and are not supposed to have any translation but four of the thirteen have very poor English, considering they have spent so much time in English classes (4 hours per week per term per year).

After the lecture, I visit the TCL Nursery on my way home. I'm nominally responsible but my Sinhala is worse than the teachers' English so communication isn't easy. But 3-5 years olds are much the same wherever you are – they smile, sing and draw. There's a Down's Syndrome boy who used to cry whenever he saw the "sudu nona" (white woman) but now he is used to me and I make a fuss of him.

After lunch, I sit at the laptop and write up the Minutes from the last Faculty Meeting. As Faculty Secretary I inherit quite a lot of admin work and with that and preparation for lectures, unlike my previous life of a Circuit Minister I spend a lot of my time being desk bound. However, as anywhere there is much that interrupts too: e.g. intercom and door-bell (telephone very rarely).

In the afternoon from 4.30pm to 5.30pm, I teach one of my two voluntary music theory classes. This is the 3rd beginners class I have started. The other two are now combined into the Advanced Class, advanced being a relative term! I think I now know what I am doing when teaching music theory (not in the original plan

when we came here 2 years ago!) and this group seem quite keen. The 10-year-old daughter of one of the first year students also attends. She is a lovely girl called Psalm and plays the violin and speaks all 3 languages so she helps with translation!

Meanwhile, what has James been up to today?

A new task for him this term has been that he now teaches English 5 hours per week (4 hours to students and one to spouses)

James writes:

I am teaching the elementary class English from 8 to 10, two days per week. There are 8 of them. Their main difficulty is being able to speak a full sentence in English. So, I encourage them to try. They will have an exam at the end of the year when I hope most of them will make it to level two. One problem is the fear of failing in public so they are reluctant to try. A friendly atmosphere in class is thus essential. At the beginning of the term, I was not enjoying all the preparation involved but now I am enjoying it more.

One day a week, I teach an hour to the spouses of students and this is a simple conversation class. Today they talk about a story concerning Rosemary, a camera and an elephant with a damaged ear.

With a Faculty colleague, I do a final inspection of the major repairs that have been done by a contractor. 10,000 roofing tiles, 500 feet of guttering, not to mention repair and treatment of rafters and battens comprised a large project. With climate change coming to Sri Lanka too, we decide to add extra cement strips onto the tiles (not nailed down) to ensure that increased winds do not lift up the tiles.

Today in the Office, I also teach Nilusha the new Accounts Clerk how to use the spreadsheet ledger system that I have written. She is a quick learner. She has experience in computerised accounts elsewhere. Her English is poor so I practice my Sinhala and she her English.

At about 6pm Rosemary and I drive to the police station in Kandy where we visit one of the students who has been detained under Sri Lanka's December 2006 Prevention of Terrorism Act. He was found to have a CD of songs sympathetic to the Tamil Tigers but there is some doubt about whether this CD might be illegal. We've visited him several times now since 24th July when he was arrested. His cell, 6' x 8', is easily accessible and the police have been polite and helpful to us. We bring him his evening meal and a book of prayers. It's hard for anyone at college to imagine that Manoranjan has been or is involved in anything sinister. He just wants to be a good minister and marry his fiancée. No Tamils from the North and East have visited because they are worried about being detained themselves. Where they come from, people who are arrested are often badly treated or simply disappear. The Sinhalese students have been magnificent and have visited everyday. We await the due process of law.

In the cell next to Manoranjan is Kamal, a Sinhalese man, who is accused of selling cars to the Tamil Tigers. I practice my Sinhala as I give him translations of "Jekyll and Hyde" and a Dorothy L. Sayers. Kamal had asked us for reading matter.

We return home and retire at our target time of 9.30pm. We don't always do this – the intercom or urgent work usually prevents this. We read and say our prayers. James writes a diary but Rosemary has given up, as exhaustion took over! .

[¹James writes: 80° 34.18'E, 7° 16.042'N to be precise. Those with broadband can find us easily using Google Earth. The most distinguishing feature is the worn white wicket in the middle of the cricket pitch next to our house.]

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We are happy to provide articles for church magazines at any time
and there is further information on our website
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