

## **ANOTHER DAY IN THE LIFE OF A MISSION PARTNER IN SRI LANKA**

One of our friends who edits a Church Magazine for a Methodist Church in England asked us if we could do a Day in the Life every month. We could not agree to that, for one thing I think her readers would get fed up with it pretty quickly and another thing we did not feel we could take on that commitment.

However yesterday I decided so much had happened that I would write it up for her and for any of you who might be interested!

Tuesday February 5<sup>th</sup> 2008

The day began as every day does with an all too early alarm (James ignores my alarm and stays in bed for another hour), then I take a shower and hair wash, whilst the kettle boils for the obligatory mug of tea. I like today in the Prayer Manual as it is Birmingham District and I think of our friends in that District. After prayers and tea, I check emails, aware that friends in the UK are fast asleep but they have written whilst we have been sleeping. Some concerned emails about the increasing violence in this country. Nice of people to be in touch as they are. Means a lot here.

My neighbour and I walk up to 6.45am Chapel together. I like it when I walk up in peace and quiet in the mornings, although I do like my neighbour too. However, he misses chapel more often than I do! The first 15 minutes is silent so for me that is the best bit. The Service is from 7.00am to 7.30am: I pray my own prayers and think my own thoughts based on the Scripture readings, as there is little in English. Students are supposed to do a 100-word summary of their sermon in English. I now know all their hymn tunes so I hum along to a limited repertoire of Tamil and Sinhala hymns. On Thursdays, English Day, they use Hymns and Psalms. In Chapel we sit on the floor so I invariably wear a Shalwarz.

Since one of our Sinhala lecturers (the one who used to translate my scripts for me) left at the end of last term, there is pressure on one Sinhala lecturer for all the translating. He is very busy and hard to pin down and I have 3 scripts left from my December first year exams (18 of them: 8 doing the course in Tamil, 8 in Sinhala and 2 in English). The Tamil and English ones were completed before Christmas. Tomorrow I am meeting all the first year Students after our Ash Wednesday Quiet Day to tell them how they got on and how they could have improved etc, so the pressure is on for me to get finished!

He translated “word for word” two of the remaining exam scripts (a very tedious job, taking an hour on average per script). We made a date tomorrow for the last one.

I had been asked to visit a woman in Peradenya General Hospital. She is in the psychiatric ward and I think her English is only a little better than my Sinhala but her husband is studying in England for this academic year and he asked me to visit her. I took some bars of soap and biscuits for her and headed off for the hospital. I do not do as much hospital visiting as I did 1990-2004!

I had got changed into clerical garb which I do not wear very often here, but I wore my UK version i.e. blue shirt and skirt, not white!

However the visit took me back to those days (1990-2004) in that as I walked into the entrance I met two people I knew which made me feel at home, and has not happened there before. One was a member of the Sinhala congregation at Kandy Methodist Church (but with perfect English) who was going to visit his nephew and his wife and their 3 children who had all been seriously stung by a swarm of bees the day before.

I eventually found Chandrika. It is more confusing when every sign is in 3 languages but at least all the doctors speak excellent English as all their training is in English medium, so if in doubt ask a Doctor. I came through the maze of the wards to her ward. She was obviously pleased to have a visitor. After a conversation, I said a prayer for her, her husband, their children and the country situation, in simple English, and left.

The hospital at Peradenyia is a large teaching hospital and to a Zambian it would seem like heaven. Someone from the UK would think, with the large wards and very old beds, that they had stepped back in time, but life expectancy here is 74 for women and 71 for men. We are not dealing with 3<sup>rd</sup> World hospitals.

When I got back to TCL I had just missed an international call from a friend in Swindon (Rita). Telephone calls, especially international ones, are so rare here, but James had had a chat with her and she wanted to know how we were in respect of the situation in the country. How thoughtful of her.

I had to get changed before lunch as my clothes had that unmistakable hospital smell!

Lunch was our usual salad and sandwiches. The students are puzzled by our diet as they eat variations of rice and curry 3 times a day and we tell them we only cook in the evenings.

After lunch, it was time to finish preparing Thursday and Friday's lectures and also do some admin as Faculty Secretary. Tuesday is the day this term that I have no teaching.

When I get bored, I do an email Send and Receive! Had a nice email unexpectedly from friends in Holland wishing us a Happy Shrove Tuesday and I thought of folks eating pancakes today.

The Principal's Secretary wanted me to come up and check some of her letters so I walked up to the Office for 4pm.

Unusually today, James, not me, went out to play Badminton but I did not have the energy. Usually it is the other way around.

We had had some nice post today, which is always welcome. One friend wrote from Chiseldon saying she had not heard from us for ages and I was thinking the same about her. So, I replied to her letter (she is 91 and usually writes every month and I was wondering why we had not heard since last September. I had emailed a friend to check she was OK and I had written to her at Christmas time and she did not received one either). Mail does sometimes get lost in the post, but on the whole, we are more impressed that most mail does get through e.g. . we send a postcard every month to each of our 6 young nieces, one nephew, several godchildren and to other special children and they all seem to arrive!

James came in at 6pm and we had pasta (James' turn to cook tonight) and fruit salad for evening meal before I went up to Choir Practice at 6.45pm to help them with Western hymns.

Ash Wednesday Quiet Day started at 8.00pm but, after this first talk, all was not quiet on the campus and it is this last incident that caused me to write up my day!

I was walking back with Arlene and suddenly she screamed out in Sinhala and as she speaks excellent English that was an indication of panic, i.e. her first language was used.

She had heard a rustle and grabbed my torch and there was a viper on our path, one of the most venomous snakes in the country.

Arlene shouted for someone to come with a pole and she shone the torch on the snake as it slithered away so that we would not lose sight of it.

First year student Ravi returned with a pole and by then a few other students were gathering to watch. Ravi bashed the snake and then lifted what we thought was a dead snake onto the path. I, of course, wished that I had my camera with me! But one student had a mobile phone with a camera. So I asked him to take some photos for me. If you want one let me know!

Anyhow I put my hand near the supposed dead snake for Manoranjan to take the photos, and it moved slightly and the students all shouted at me. Arlene then said we must burn it and so they did. I watched.

James wondered why I was late home!

I was in need of a drink and had a lime cordial before we headed for bed, reading and prayers. We think of our relatives and friends across the world and here we remember the very difficult situation in the country: yesterday was the 60th anniversary of Independence ( National Day, a public holiday. We had enjoyed ourselves by having a lovely walk in the beautiful Knuckles Mountains but there were 5 bombs in different parts of the country and the war continues in Manner, Jaffna and Wannu regions). The brother of one of our students (a Tamil) was taken into police custody last week in Colombo and so the stories go on..

All in the day of the life of a Mission Partner!

More information on our website [www.rosemaryandjames.methodistchurch.co.uk](http://www.rosemaryandjames.methodistchurch.co.uk)

Next time you will get a Day in the Life of James!

1620 words

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