

Clare's Diary

23rd March 2011

Wednesday

Mum and I are up at 2.30am to gather the last of our belongings together and say goodbye to the cats and dogs. We are both looking forward to seeing Dad, who has been in India since last week, but first we have to get there. In the airport we meet the crew with whom we will spend the next two weeks. Malcolm Quigley, Director of VSO Ireland is there along with Rossa O'Sioradain, the director and producer and Micheal, Martin and Sam. The lads have about 400kgs of equipment with them which fortunately the lovely fella at the check in desk chooses to ignore. We arrive in Hyderabad, complete with all the luggage at 1am. I am thrilled to see my Indian family again, who as always are there waiting at the arrivals gate.

Thursday

How lovely it is to wake up to the hot sun blazing into my room, tropical sounding birds squawking and...the madness of Hyderabadian traffic outside. Indian drivers are a law unto themselves and I shut my eyes tightly as we weave through traffic, opening them just long enough to catch a glimpse of a family of five on a single scooter. The bigger the vehicle the more right of way you tend to have but our seven-seater offers little consolation in the face of a gaily decorated truck full of building debris. We are taking it easy today, Dad and I have been wired up to sound, but we are really just adjusting to the idea of being on camera all the time. My first Indian meals today and I can't get enough of the stuff!

Friday

We have an early start this morning as we are off to Charminar to begin filming in earnest this morning. Charminar means 'Mosque of the Four Minarets', and is one of the most famous sights in Hyderabad. As it is Friday most of the markets in this largely Islamic area are closed today, which is fortunate as the cameras gather quite a large entourage which follows us everywhere. Dad gives me a brief history of this beautiful monument, although it feels much longer when we retake four times in 35 degrees. Our air conditioned car is a blessing, although as soon as I think this I feel quite guilty given that the majority of the population of this city will never know the comfort of something I take so much for granted.

Saturday

This morning's trip is the antithesis to yesterdays. We drive through tree lined avenues lined with sleek, ultra-modern buildings; we are in Cyberbad the city's technology hub which has recently taken over Bangalore as an IT centre. The wealth here is evident, a cup of coffee in a hotel is six or seven times the price of one anywhere else and security is high. The drivers take us to this wonderful park which overlooks a glistening lake and hillside, right here in the city. Its beauty is breathtaking and I'm glad that we get to soak it all up while Dad and I are chatting away on camera. This evening we take a trip to the

marble Birla temple, one of the largest Hindu temples in Hyderabad. Dad shows me how to observe the rituals inside and we join the throngs of people who have come to worship.

Sunday

We are honoured to be spending a few hours today with Dad's guru and spiritual adviser, although the contrast between Hinduism and Catholicism is something I often find difficult to rectify in my head. This afternoon the crew pop over to our apartment where they conduct interviews with us all, I have to pinch myself to make myself believe that soon this will all be made into a documentary and it strikes me that I am so lucky to be sharing this experience with Mum and Dad. Tonight we have a party to which all the family, neighbours and friends are invited. It is wonderful to see everyone gathered together and I use the hard day's work as an excuse to indulge in a huge plate of Indian sweets which I find irresistible!

Monday

This morning my cousin Kavitha and I take an auto-rickshaw.....for two hours....in forty degrees...up and down the same half mile stretch of road....enough said. This evening, we finally get a chance to do some shopping, wandering through the wonder of Sultan Bazar which sells everything from saris to bangles to ice cream- I buy all three! It's hard to describe the atmosphere here this evening, saying it is full of life is inadequate. To say the street is alive itself is better, in the stride of the businessmen hurrying home, in the playful gestures of the street kids who sit on the kerbs, in the furrows of concentration on the fruit sellers face as he weighs a customer's order, in the voice of the chai wallah shouting his wares. The air is dusty and the scent of magnolia flowers entwined in the women's hair mingles with the cardamom and pepper. Tonight is our last night here and it is with a heavy heart that I say goodbye to my family, for people so close to me, they just live too far away.

Tuesday

We all have an early start this morning as we head for Bhubaneswar, the capital of the state of Orissa. From Bhubaneswar we catch a train to Berhampur. That makes it sound easy; catching a train in India is actually no simple thing. Fortunately we are in reserved seating so entry into our carriage is calm and orderly. For those who are in third class, it is mayhem, we watch as people clamber through windows, pull others ahead of them out of doors and ultimately do anything to get on board the train! For me, it again highlights how different life is here for the haves and the have nots. We are collected at the station from where we drive over bumpy country roads to our destination, Gram Vikas, the Village of Enlightenment. Welcome to rural India.