

India and Back in 10 Days

Last fall, Dr. Bruce Kniegge and I arrived in Tuni, India after three days of tortuous traveling. We were on the way to the home of our hosts Sunil and Sofia. As we turned on to a narrow street with houses on both sides crammed together without any organization, I saw a banner crossing the street from one house top to the other. Written in bright colors of blue, green and orange were the words, “Welcome Dr. Bruce Kniegge and Dr. Charles JangDhari.” As we approached the banner, a band started playing Indian music, and firecrackers exploded throughout the neighborhood. I asked, “Is this all for us?” Sunil replied, “Of course!”



Our welcoming banner across the main street of town.

I was embarrassed by all the attention. We were greeted by smiling young people at the gate as we were ushered into a yard. As we entered, fifty to sixty children and adults were seated on the ground under an open tent waiting. “Please go to the head table and be seated,” says Sofia. As we prepared to sit, two men said, “Welcome to Tuni!,” and I realized that all eyes were on us in expectation. They put a ring of flowers around our necks, and two young children came to the table with bouquets of flowers for each of us. I whispered to Bruce, “In twenty years of conducting clinics in other countries, I have never been welcomed so graciously.” Bruce agreed.

As we were introduced, I looked at the faces in the crowd and noted the looks of tense excitement. We were exhausted after traveling so many hours, yet so

many pairs of brown eyes were fixed on us with expressions of great expectation. They seemed to be thinking, “What are these Americans going to tell us?” I reached into myself for that last burst of energy and said, “It is wonderful to be with you, and we are looking forward to caring for your physical needs.”

As I looked over the crowd of young and old people mixed together, I imagined that this is what my grandparents looked like before leaving India as indentured servants for Trinidad. If they hadn’t left, I might have been one of those children or adults looking at the speaker. Now I have the privilege to come here and serve them. What a circle of events!

My journey to this place started after reading in the CCA Journal about Dr. Bruce’s earlier trip. I remembered thinking that he had done what I had been dreaming of doing. I felt a strong and urgent desire to follow up with the work Bruce had started. At the time, it was 2005; I had recently reopened a practice in the States and realized that I didn’t really have the financial resources or the ability to close my fledgling practice. It has been my experience that whenever I have decided to take these types of trips that there has always been obstacles to overcome. You may find the same thing to be true.



These obstacles won’t be as difficult as some of the obstacles that Samson, a warrior and leader in the Old Testament faced; however, it seems that way at times.

In June of 2006, I was invited to the CCA’s convention to be the banquet speaker. At the end of my presentation, I mentioned my desire to go India. Afterward, several of those in attendance felt led to help me pay for the trip. With some additional creative financing on my part, I was able to finagle the rest. A few days after the conference, Dr. Bruce Kniegge called me and said that

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someone had committed to providing the money for him to accompany me on this trip. So the date was set for November 16, 2006. Our desire to serve resulted in the finances being provided, but it also required sacrifices on our part as well as help from others. We had to be willing to do more than just go.

After ten intensive days of caring for villagers, I was filled with many feelings and impressions of my time in India. The dedication of Sunil and Sofia, our hosts and pioneers of the work, inspired me. They are not yet thirty; he is a pastor and she is an anesthesiologist, and yet they have a mature commitment. I asked Sofia why she started working in these villages. Why not work at a hospital or private clinic and earn a profitable living? She told me that during her internship, her medical director had sent them out to surrounding villages to do examinations and treatments. He wanted to expose them to the needs in the villages in the hopes that some of the students would choose to provide this type of care in the future. For Sofia, this was a life changing experience. She was shocked by what she saw and heard. Some of the elderly patients had not seen a doctor their entire lives. Most of the villagers belonged to lower caste tribes and are unable to get out of this type of slavery existence. Sophia felt that as a Christian she needed to do something about this great need. After that first experience, she kept going back. She married Sunil who was also working in the villages as a pastor. Other pastors heard about their work in the villages and invited them to come to their homes and villages as well. They now visit over thirty villages on a regular basis. Sophia feels that it has all come from, "*A desire to meet the needs of the people with Christian love and a willingness to obey.*"

Thousands of people flock everyday to big public hospitals in cities for treatment. I read recently how in these overcrowded hospitals, patients must first battle horrendous lines to see specialists, then wait months to undergo tests and surgeries, causing them to spend more than they can afford for board and lodging. Many sick people never gather the resources needed to make the journey, and tens of thousands of others borrow money or sell assets to cover expenses. Health problems are often catastrophic in nature as the expense incurred is one that the family or individual will never recover from. I witnessed these situations for myself.

As I returned from India, I looked for insight into the purpose of the trip and my experiences. I realized that the heroes of this world are men and women like Sunil and Sophia Kumar and others, including those who gave so that we could go. Individuals whose simple obedience to helping those in need has

resulted in changed lives. They not only listened to the whispers and leadings of God in their life, but they obeyed them. To each one of you reading this, I exhort you to do the same and follow the teachings of Christ, to "*Go into the world and preach the Good News, heal the sick, feed the hungry and proclaim the abundant life.*"

My hope in sharing this experience is that it will motivate you to continue to obey when God prompts you to either support or go on a mission's trip. You and I are the instruments that God uses and the ambassadors that He sends to defend the fatherless and the oppressed. You and I are the ones who must listen to their cry and encourage them. It is not some other person that you know or the person sitting next to you at work or at church that is this ambassador or the instrument, it is you and I.