

An abundance of unforgettable memories - by Mary Crotty

When travelling to India I was not entirely sure what I was expecting but knew that the trip was something I had wanted to do for a long time. My friends, Niamh Laura and Agi, who were lucky enough to visit the school last year, had told me how amazingly life changing their experiences had been yet none of their words could prepare me for the overwhelming generosity and care that I was about to receive at Rangammal Memorial School.

When Emma and I first arrived, it was the very early hours of the morning on Saturday the 23rd January, yet we were surprised to learn that the students would wake and begin their studies not many hours later. The students are extremely dedicated to their studies and to learning, especially the older students who are preparing for their 10th standard and +2 examinations. Such an impressive work ethic is something I have rarely come across in children and adults alike in England, yet here in Rangammal School, it seems like a natural instinct which I really admire. It is no surprise that the students do so well every year; I wish them all the best as they very much deserve the excellent marks they achieve.

Since arriving at the school, we have been surrounded by the smiles of the happiest children I think I have ever met. The youngest students are never without a smile and always want to include us in their imaginative games. Meanwhile, the older boys will most definitely be playing cricket somewhere, which although I have had fun practicing during my time here, I can safely say it is not a talent of mine and will happily leave it to boys who are very skilled at it. I would not be surprised to see several of them on the television playing for the Indian team in a few years' time. The older girl students are also very talented at drawing and making beautiful Henna designs, they have taught me a lot about their life here. Although hearing-impaired, it is surprisingly easy to communicate with the students, whose English is very impressive, and it has been lovely to spend hours talking with them in the evenings and becoming very good friends.

I have also had the pleasure of experiencing lots of Indian life and the bright culture which runs throughout it while I have been here. The staff and Madam Sylvia kindly arranged many excursions and trips out for me and Emma, which have really enhanced our experience here as we developed more of an understanding of the very different, but wonderful, Indian way of life. On several of the trips we were accompanied by Madam Sylvia herself and I felt very privileged to spend time with her, and listen and learn from her stories which really painted a vivid picture of her amazing experiences and achievements since travelling to India those many years ago. It is extremely humbling and inspiring to think of just how much she has provided for so many children who might have otherwise gone without. Additionally, we were lucky enough to be invited to the special puberty function of Mrs Alamelu's daughter, which was one of the most memorable trips for me. The excess of colour, jewellery and the most beautiful sari's is something I will always remember and I am very thankful to Mrs Alamelu and her family for letting me be a part of the celebration. I also especially enjoyed trips to the Jawadhi hills with Madam Sylvia and Father Saul, and Sathanur Dam with Ms Vimali and Ms Merci, where I could see different aspects of the beautiful Indian landscape and met some wonderful people. We were treated like family and never went without which honestly was very moving, and, as the

weeks passed, I began to feel more and more like a member of the school “family” at Rangammal.

I have also really enjoyed my time spent at the day care centre, which is situated behind the school while the children eagerly anticipate the construction of the new, state of the art Education and Therapy Centre which I think will be finished later this year. The students at the centre mirror the happiness and joy found in the students at the school and are no less eager to involve me in their games, show me their work and just generally make me feel welcomed and at home. Their teachers are extremely patient and kind and have equally made me feel wholly welcome. Additionally, the schooling that the hearing-impaired students receive is very impressive. Watching the audiology team carry out audiogram tests and conducting speech therapy sessions has been very eye-opening; all the members of staff are dedicated to their students who sometimes seem more like their friends.

I would finally like to say a large thank you to all of the teachers, students and Madam Sylvia herself for gifting me with such an amazing experience from which I have collected an abundance of unforgettable memories. It is difficult to imagine, as my time here comes to a close, my mornings and evenings without the children and teachers and I will honestly miss them very much. Thankfully, with the help of the students, I am not short of photographs and it will be such a pleasure to look back on them in the years to come and remember happily all that I embraced here at Rangammal. I hope that I may meet you all again in the not so distant future.