

August 6, 2005

Yesterday, August 6th, our group spent the day trying to orient ourselves to our new home, or rather, the blocks surrounding it. First thing in the morning, even before breakfast, a few of us took a trip around our block to see what stores there are and just try to figure out what's what (Adrian and Bill had woken up quite early and had already completed one lap! - they were still game for a second with Matt, Jenny, and I though)

The street immediately in front of ICOSA is divided, so it's fairly tame. The streets further around the corner to the left, on the other hand, were quite frightful. I haven't figured out their exact system yet. For all apparent purposes, there aren't rules per se, more just suggestions. If you want to drive on the left side of the road (this was an English colony after all), you can, but don't feel like you must. That line down the center is only a guideline - as long as the other cars see you coming you're fine. Yes, well, enough about the traffic for now.

Breakfast: our first meal in this brave new world. Though I was quite worried of what Indian food might or might not do to my stomach, those worries were soon alleviated. Clara, our chef, has been cooking for St Olaf abroad students for over a decade, and, being a mother herself, is very conscious about starting us off slowly. That said, the food was excellent!

[This portion of my journal was left unfinished. Here's a laundry list that I wrote:]

We...

- changed money
- went to the malls
- went to an internet access place, emailed home
- ate lunch - chicken and wheat crispy thing, orange paste
- took naps
- went to the beach, bought shells from a homeless man
- saw a statue of Ghandi, Adrian ate some ice cream
- drove around more, saw the police building
- came back, ate dinner
- read for a little bit, then went to sleep

August 7, 2005

I woke up at about 3:00 and spent the next three hours thinking about my Madrigal Dinner program's interface when I port it to OS X.

- went to breakfast for 8:00
- went to a Catholic Church service in English - I even knew one or two of the songs - seemed very similar to the services back home, slightly harder to understand, but still very similar
- we took a tour of the church's associated museum, including the tomb of the apostle Thomas
- came back for lunch, after trading money again
- lunch had my mouth on fire - not terribly spicy, but it still had me in tears and sweating a bit

After lunch we went to Spencer Plaza, a nearby (air conditioned) shopping mall, where I was able to buy 5 shirts for just over 1700 Rs - perhaps I could have gotten 2 in America for that price.

We also checked out the rather large book section at Landmark, a major retail store - out of the racks and racks of books, only about one rack was actually in an Indian script - the rest were all in English - couldn't even find HP in Indian

After congregating in the book section, Bill and Jenny weren't back with us - we spent the next hour and a half cruising around the mall in pairs looking for them, before we finally decided they must have gone home - we left, and sure enough they were back at ICSA when we got there

We had a nice little discussion as a group of what to do and what not to do in the event that some of us become separated again in the future, which basically boiled down to try to wait at any of our previously set meeting points and the rest of the group will try to find you there.

An hour and a half nap later and it was dinner time (8:00 PM) - tonight we had chipottie - not sure exactly which part of the meal that was, but it all tasted great just the same -not nearly as spicy as lunch had been

Immediately after dinner we all gathered outside Matt and Anne's rooms to talk about "vocation" - what it is, what we should think about of how it applies to us and our jobs here, etc. Since I hadn't read the book, I didn't so much have a lot to contribute, but I learn better by listening to others anyway, so it worked out.

Now, of course, though, it is time for beddie bye, with the hope that I don't wake up at 3:00 am like last night :)

August 8, 2005

Matt, Liz and I met together for a short time just prior to our meeting with Dr Moses at 10:00; basically we figured out some of the questions we needed to ask, as well as what we expected we'd be dealing with, what our end goals should be, how to approach the whole situation with the knowledge that a lot of these people have never seen a computer before they came here, and how that will play a role in any curriculum changes we'll be making.

As a group, we met for the first time with Dr Moses (he's in charge of all of ICSA), Sumitra (she's the lead in charge of the computer courses and syllabus), Irene (Dr Moses' wife - she teaches the English classes), as well as all the other ICSA teachers and employees. They greeted us with very fancy (though perhaps somewhat bulky :) hand crafted necklaces - to say we felt treated like royalty would not be out of the realm of reality. In all honesty, it felt a bit awkward. I'm obviously not used to being given this level of respect - I only hope our contributions can live up to the honour we've been shown.

Dr Moses gave us a brief overview of what we'd be doing here, and how glad they all are that we were able to make the journey. Following this, we divided into our two separate teams. Matt, Liz and I met with Sumitra, Irene, and Mr Bharat (the computer teacher) to flesh out a timeline for this week and an overall idea of what we'd be accomplishing during our stay. We also took a more in depth look at the current curriculum being used - apparently the curriculum that they've been using is written by the Indian government, and the teachers here at ICSA cannot really subtract anything from it, otherwise the students wouldn't be able to receive a government certificate for their training. That said, the plan is that the ICSA teachers will go through the government syllabus in 6 months (July - January) and then use

our to-be-developed syllabus for the next four or five months. The final tests for both will be in June or July.

The very tentative syllabus ideas we have right now are four one month sections, including one on Java, one on Excel / MS Access, and one about UNIX. The last might be a segment on web development - we're still thinking.

After a lunch with just the three of us (the others took their lunch with to their project site), we sat in for a couple hours on the computer class. This sounds terrible, but I was surprised at the difficulty the students were having navigating MS Word. It reminded me how true it is that they grew up in a vastly different world from me - I'm quite sure most of them really had never seen a computer before they came here, or at least, not that they had the opportunity to use.

Computer skill level aside, though, the friendliness / worship factor was unreal. When we first came into the room and sat down, all the students turned their chairs to face us - I guess they thought we were teaching the class today :) Once we got that straightened out, half the class took up seats at the computers (only about 5 or 6 were working, so each workstation had at least two or three people at it). Their project: type up their own "Bio Data" - name, age, DOB, parents' names, etc. Some were clearly better than others, and I think (though I'm not entirely sure) that there was a strong correlation between English and computer proficiency. Matt opened up right away and started engaging with the students - Liz and I took a little longer, but fairly soon we were practising our English along with them, or rather, they practised English, we practised understanding through the accent. Really, I'm amazed at how well some of them spoke - we could actually carry on meaningful two way conversations with a few of them, and most of the others were well on their way.

After about an hour and a half, we were fairly worn out. Between talking so much, listening and doing our best to understand their accents, and after singing a rousing round of "Row Row Row your boat", it had been a long day! We gracefully excused ourselves and relaxed for a tea break. We were on our way out when we saw our group's laundry had come back (unsorted, but folded very nicely). After figuring all that out, we finally took our field trip to an ice creamery a short distance around the corner; relaxation and long conversation followed, most of which revolved around St Olaf's CS courses. It was pretty neat to be talking with Matt on a level something other than student-teacher, more like friend-friend. Not really the first time that's happened, but still, it's neat.

We got back to ICSA a while later - the other group didn't get back for a while after us - what a long day they must have had! In the time since ice cream and before dinner, I've done my journal for today, as well as talked briefly with a few passing students. I'm struck by how eager they are to learn - no doubt they've lived a harder life than I could even imagine, and yet their spirit isn't crushed - they love to engage, and they love to learn. My deep thought for the day is this: why is it that those who have had the least in life seem to get the most out of life?

On an aside, we have been puzzled all day by the appearance of some yellow spots / stains on Matt and Liz's shirts. We spent considerable time trying to figure out what they did that I hadn't. The funny part comes in how many crazy ideas we went through before someone pointed out the most obvious solution: our necklaces that we had been given had bled onto our clothes a little. Leave it to the computer scientist to not think of a simple solution.

August 9, 2005

Today is Tuesday, the 9th of August, and I've once again woken up at 4:00 in the morning, except this time I wasn't able to fall back asleep. I did, however finish the chapter about C in my Beginning Mac OS X Programming book and started reading the chapter on Objective C. Given my lack of sleep, I suspect it will be a long day :)

Breakfast was at 8:00 as usual, though Elizabeth was quite sick, so she didn't join us. At 9:00, Matt and I sat in on the students' lecture about Accounting, then at 10:00 we stayed briefly longer as the students practised changing number base from 10 to 2 to hex with their computer instructor. After sitting in the classes, I think we got a much better feeling for just how quickly classroom instruction can go, which will be of a lot of help as we plan further for our 4 month syllabus.

Following class, we met with Sumitra and Irene, and went line by line through the government syllabus to find out which topics are covered well and which aren't mentioned at all (on a 0-3 scale). After our meeting, I downloaded and installed the Sambar webserver and started web servicing on the server in the computer lab. It only took a very short time from when the download finished to when I had a nice little "Hello, World!" page hosted and being accessed from a neighboring machine - Sambar seems very easy to use, and we hope we will be able to train some of the more advanced students on the installation process.

After lunch, the biology group went to the hardware store to get some string (they will be roping off and plotting a field tomorrow. While they were gone, Matt and I took the time to just sit back and visit (Elizabeth was still sleeping). The conversation, which I think could appropriately be termed more or less and "heart to heart", roved from impressions of India verses America, specifically people and their perspectives on life and life's difficulties, to his son and daughter and the difficulties their whole family has gone through raising two deaf children, to my own gripes about St Olaf.

For whatever reason, I feel less animosity toward the college here in India than I have during the rest of the summer, though I think that may be because I'm removed both from idiotic freshmen and my job at MA. In the end, though, I do find myself thinking maybe this next year will be better - I just need to find balance between the many different worlds I'm trying to live in. In any case, it was of great benefit to me to be able to vent to professor Richey and get his reaction - that, combined with the simple fact of living here at ICOSA, has given me a great deal more perspective.

When the Bio group got back, and after tea time, I joined them in a trip to Spencer's Plaza, where I gathered a rather long list of prices on various IT books in the Landmark store. A quick field trip with Anne to my shirt store (to buy some shirts for her husband) later and we were on our way back home.

In the evening, Matt and Anne went to listen to an inspirational talk by a woman who's been crippled in an accident years ago (I came in about 45 minutes late). She told about how the whole experience created and affected her faith story, and also how it led her to enter, and then win, the Miss Washington state beauty pageant. The hard part of her story (for me, anyway) came when she started telling anecdotes. It started innocently enough; she wanted to illustrate that God keeps His promises to His people. Fair enough. Then she talked about how God promised both her and her mother that she would be known by millions of people and also be physically restored. The first has come true, and she knows the second will, too. She then talked about a time that she went to a mall and approached people to ask if she could pray for them. After being rejected a number of times, she saw a blind woman in a wheelchair and approached her. So she says, after praying several times with the woman, not only were the woman's physical ailments (something about a twisted leg and arm?) healed, but she could see (she had

been born blind in one eye and could only see things about three inches away with her other eye). Now she was reading the "Godiva" sign about 20-30 feet away. Did you catch that? She was born blind, now she was reading. The instinctual debater in me asks the logical question - how can she read, let alone pronounce (and from her telling the woman had actually said letter names and then the word itself)?

There was also the individual that emailed asking for money so he could pay for college and textbooks, etc. She responded to him to ask God, and all will be provided. He emailed back two weeks later saying tat God had provided. Okay... she didn't offer any more details than that. No glorious description of what or how God had provided, not even a hint!

Okay, so in the end, I found her speech to be fairly not convincing, though her translator from English to Tamil was VERY skilled - he really got into what he was doing. After she finished her talk, a local pastor took the microphone - "I'll only be two minutes..." Half an hour later, we were leaving. In that half hour, the pastor tried preaching a sermon, except there was no content other than variations on "God is Good and He'll provide for you". Think southern Baptist, charismatic hands in the air singing and praying - all the kinds of things that drive me crazy and had me just praying for it to be over.

All that said, it was an interesting experience.

For dinner, Matt took all of us students to a nearby restaurant (Anne stayed behind in case Liz woke up and needed anything) where we had the chance to sample 6 or 7 different dips for our bread. It was great to have a fairly authentic meal in an honest to goodness Indian restaurant. And nothing was too spicy, which was an added benefit. We had a great time eating and visiting and eating some more - a pleasant end to a long day.

August 10, 2005

I slept until 6:00 AM today! Went out for coffee with Bill and Adrian, then came back and ate breakfast. Liz was feeling well enough to join us, though she went back to resting afterward.

Matt and I started our day teaching English class from 9:00 until 10:30. We started by reading off some of the accounting definitions we had copied from class yesterday, and demonstrated others (such as a "transaction", where I bought an eraser from Matt and he gave me a "receipt"). In order to engage the kids more and give them practise speaking, we continued with the basic "Hi, my name is _____. What is your name?" and made sure everyone in the class took a turn asking and answering. Other sentences included age, father's name, how many brothers and sisters, where people were from, how much does such and so item cost, and asking who some of their favourite cricket players are. Richey got a big laugh when he said "I am 19 years old".

At 10:30 we took a break for tea time, then went back into class to observe the teaching of DOS. Richey was glad he wasn't teaching, since he would have jumped in with a number of commands and what they do, whereas Mr Bharat was starting at the very beginning - what does MD DOS stand for, what is the boot process, what drives can you boot from, etc. My it's been a long time since I did anything DOS!

Lunch happened, more rest happened, and Richey and I talked some more about what kind of algorithm would be needed for a computer to solve a Sudoku. Matt also started trying a new system in which he divides each square into a 3 by 3 grid of it's own and places a dot in each spot that could not be the

number for that square. Using this method, he successfully forced a Sudoku all the way to the end with no guesses at all.

Later in the afternoon, Matt and I took an excursion to a nearby coffee shop to flesh out some details for our syllabus (Liz was still sound asleep at the time). After maybe an hour, we had a fairly detailed unit by unit course laid out for our three core modules (HTML / Web, Excel / Access, and Java), as well as some supplementary modules on PhotoShop and PowerPoint. Finally, something tangible to show to Sumitra and friends!

When we came back, we waited for a short while until the students were out of the computer lab before going in ourselves to do some searching for online tutorials. A simple Google search later and we had tutorials coming out our ears. I do think we've got two in mind that will work very nicely, now. The first is a basic introduction to the web - what is it, who can use it, why is it there, etc. The second is an HTML tutorial from w3schools.com. I love this one because it takes everything one step at a time, answers some logical beginning questions, gives examples, and then walks through the examples. Brilliant! So with only half an hour of searching, I think we've got a very good handle on our HTML (and JavaScript) tutorials.

The rest of the day was uneventful - nap, dinner, bed. Yay :)

August 11, 2005

We all started our day by going to English class, making the odds a bit better today than yesterday, since we had 8 on 30 instead of only 2. We divvied the class into 4 groups and aired off to work with them. Jenny and I went through the basic "My name is ___", parents' names and occupations, school subjects, favourites, birthdays, etc. When we ran out of ideas for sentences, we moved into the world of song: The Itsy Bitsy Spider (with hand motions!) The other groups noticed and started copying us, but of course our group was the best :)

What was really cool was when our group taught us another English song they had learned in school. To hear their voices sing it - writing about it can't do the sounds justice, but it was beautiful. Then Jenny and I tried to sing with them, and it became less beautiful, but alas.

At the end of class, the 8 of us had to perform a rendition of the Kookaburra song - we got a big laugh for that.

After class and after tea time, Matt, Liz and I met with Sumitra to show her our outline syllabus and some of the web resources we've found. She seemed impressed, or at least satisfied, and assured us that everything looked feasible as far as instructor training and also student comprehension (we're told that Mr Bharat, the computer teacher, already knows Java, which should make that module, at least, go very smoothly).

After lunch we put our minds to work with the daily Sudoku, then headed over to Spencer Plaza about 15:00. Richey and I looked around in the book store to try to get a better idea of which books we'd like to have ICSA use., then I finally bit the bullet and found and purchased an iPod to USB cord so that I can restore the music database file on my iPod (it's been corrupted somehow, but hooking it up to any computer will solve the problem). 850 Rs for that silly cord, but it's the price I pay for forgetting mine at home.

On our way back to ICSA, we were assailed by three begged girls, the oldest couldn't have been more than 14 or so. They were so persistent, even after both Matt and I had given them money - they kept following us for at least two minutes, before I'm ashamed to say I yelled at them to go away. My lesson - I'm filthy rich, and I wish I had given them more than a measly 20 Rs. Little kids especially deserve so much more than the life of a beggar, and the serious ethical question that's been raised in my mind is again that of how much is appropriate. In the end, I know the amount I gave was piddly and inadequate, but I haven't taken time to plan out my responses in such situations, so I didn't really know what to do.

There's a youth / Sunday School leader conference being held at ICSA through Monday, so we've been meeting some of the participants as they pass by our sitting area. Kate and I had a fascinating conversation with one man from Bangladesh, who, being a Christian in a Muslim nation, has been through some difficult confrontations with people who think that Christians are out to get Muslims (the Iraq war being the prime instigator of this belief - apparently the rest of the world views America as a Christian nation). In my mind, this kind of testimony is something one hears on the news or from the pulpit - to actually meet someone who is on the front lines of the religious confrontations put a real human face on the situation.

August 12, 2005

The Bio folks left ICSA at 6:00 AM this morning to head to somewhere far away - they won't be back until tomorrow evening, so Matt Liz and I are on our own for any adventures we want to plan.

We spent the morning working in the computer lab - I typed up the syllabus outline we'd written, Richey Moodled up a course webpage and added some links and content, and Elizabeth did some research on Java tutorials. By 11:30, we had a decent sample Moodle course to show Sumitra, Dr Moses and friends, as well as a more specific plan on what our new curriculum will cover and where we see the students going in the line of related projects. They seemed well pleased.

Now writing this section of my journal several days after the fact, some of the details seem a might bit hazy.

We had a most interesting time eating lunch - as we were eating, the international group of Christian youth leaders came in to eat as well, and I saw and heard something I only wish were more common in the states: a group of 50 or more people singing:

Thank you, Lord for giving us food
Thank you, Lord for giving us food
Thank you, Lord for giving us food
Right where we are

Hallelujah, Praise the Lord
Hallelujah, Praise the Lord
Hallelujah, Praise the Lord
Right where we are. Amen.

They weren't the best singers in the world, but what may have been lacking in tonal quality was more than made up for by true sincerity and gratefulness. I love the song for it's pure straight forwardness -

"Thank you Lord for giving us food" - there is no beating around the bush, no deep metaphor, just a simple yet powerful message. In the coming days, we had the opportunity to hear this group sing several more times, and each time reminded me first of all of how much I've been blessed by God, and second that it is always the right time to give thanks, "right where we are".

We spent some more time in the afternoon working on adding a quiz to our Moodle site, and also went out for ice cream later on. Dinner (for Matt and I, anyway) was at a fancy restaurant situated on top of a nearby hotel. The view was amazing, the service was excellent, and the food was pretty good too - I'm hoping we get to go back before the end of our trip. A nice ending to the day.

August 13, 2005

It's Saturday, and we spent the morning Moodling! Between the three of us, we made some nice progress finding and linking to the online tutorials we want to use, as well as prettying up the Moodle page and expatiating on our stubbed-in assignment descriptions. That, in a nutshell, was the morning.

In the afternoon, Matt Liz and I headed across the street to the national museum, where we spent about 2 or 3 hours wandering about. The most interesting thing on the way in was the dramatic price difference between ticket prices - had we been native Indians, our tickets would have been 15 Rs. As foreigners, that price jumped to 250 Rs (about \$6.75 or so).

The museum itself was about what one would expect - lots of old statues and stone carvings, also metal sculptures and idols. Other buildings had extensive collections of mammalian, aquatic, and aerial life forms, some skeletal, some still with fur, and some authentic all-natural plaster. In another building, we saw a brief overview of the history of coined money in India, followed by a large (and blessedly air-conditioned) room filled with metal idols of Vishnu and other Hindu gods whose names I don't remember. This was followed by an art exhibit of paintings - true art, as I pointed out, not meaningless "contemporary" sculptures. Upstairs from the paintings was a small collection of holograms. The idea behind this was interesting - rather than having to invest in climate controlled displays and added security for some of the rarer pieces of historic jewelry, etc, why not make a hologram out of them and display that - neat idea, though the practical application was slightly less impressive.

On our way out from the museum grounds, we took time to stop in the book store, where I was pleasantly surprised to find books about both C++ and HTML written in Tamil, as well as an instructional book called "Tamil for You" and an English-Tamil dictionary. All for under 400 Rs, which made me very happy. Not that I'll actually be able to learn Tamil before I leave, or likely ever choose to learn it, but I love buying foreign language books from countries I visit.

The bio folks got back while we were gone to the museum - they had had a good trip, but were exhausted.

The play we were planning on seeing (a Rock-Opera musical about Adam and Eve called "The Fallen") wasn't showing tonight after all, and the play that was being performed was already sold out. That being the case, we decided we would go see an Indian movie, so we left around 8:45 for what we thought was a 9:15 show time. We got there by 9:10 or so, but the movie wasn't until 10:00. Oh well - we sat around and talked for a while before they let us in to the rather large, air-conditioned theatre. Our seats were in the balcony all the way in the back, but the screen was so large we had no problem seeing. We got our first dose of Indian commercials, actually a double dose, since each commercial played twice back to

back. The main difference from American theatres, though, was that there were no previews for upcoming movies, just the commercials, then the movie itself.

As I found out later, the movie we saw was entitled "Anniyan", and is best described as a romantic comedy meets The Incredible Hulk / Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde meets The Matrix. Yes, it sounds weird to me, too, but it was an incredibly well made movie - the acting was fairly convincing (though granted we obviously couldn't understand the dialog), and the cinematography was superb. Throughout the movie there were four or five 'music video' scenes, each of which sported any number of absolutely awesome crane shots and excellent camera work all around, not to mention the songs were pretty peppy themselves. Beyond that, there was a phenomenal Matrix style karate scene, and also a fair number of crowd scenes - good job extras casting!

In the end, the movie lasted 3 hours, some of which was scary, some of which was just plain disturbing, but most of which was enjoyable. We finally headed back home at 1:00 in the morning - thankfully we took rickshaws instead of walking.

August 14, 2005

Sunday morning Anne, Kate, Liz, Adrian and I went to a new church; Jenny went to St Tome [the one we went to last week] and Matt went golfing (seriously; apparently there is actually a golf course somewhere in Chennai). The service here was quite different from last week's - first of all, it was much more subdued than St Tome - things were taken at a much slower and deliberate pace - this actually gave me a hard time when it came to singing, since the tempo was continually much slower than I would normally sing. Since I didn't know any of the songs, this wasn't a huge issue, but I still found myself expecting a verse to start but no one else would start singing for several measures - they liked to ease themselves into each verse of each song, almost as if they were caught off guard that there was more to the song.

Rants about the tempo aside, I did absolutely love this church for the fact that we got to sing several songs in Tamil (or try to sing, at least). They printed the Tamil script in the bulletin, under which was an English pronunciation, and to the side a rough translation. Can we say awesome?! I think we all really got into it, especially near the end of the songs after we'd had a few chances at pronouncing the refrains.

The other piece I found to be of particular interest was that the reading of the Scripture lessons was done in Tamil, though the other parts of the service, including more than half of the sermon, were done in English. It was too bad we couldn't so much understand those parts, but still a fascinating cultural experience nonetheless.

When the service was over, there was a sale outside with crafts, stationery (of which I bought a few packs), food, and drink (no glass doors, so we didn't indulge). We also met up with one of the pastors staying at ICOSA - he recognised us and came over to say hi and visit. In all, I think we stayed for about half an hour after the service talking and buying and talking and watching, before heading back home.

The rest of the day was fairly uneventful. We walked to the Egmore train station - about a half hour walk, though we did get a little off course on the way there. At least people were very willing to give directions, usually accurate. The station itself was a busy place - there's a giant parking lot in front of it that was absolutely packed with cars; inside, there were people everywhere, even moreso than I've

typically seen in India. We left after only a few minutes - beautiful building, but there wasn't terribly a lot to see on the inside.

The afternoon brought time for email and a little work on my Sudoku solving program, and not much else.

August 15, 2005

Monday morning we got up super early (about 6:00 or so) to go watch the Independence Day parade. Our rickshaws dropped us off a good 15 or more minute walk away from the parade route, and because it had rained all night the streets were muddy and icky. My sandals enjoyed that. When we got to the street the parade was supposed to go down, we had a few issues with cameras, in that the security guards (there were hundreds - spaced out about every 20 feet or so along the street) wanted us to bring all our cameras back to our room. They were generous in suggesting that one person could take all of them back and the group could keep going forward. Our solution: we backed off a few yards and stuffed all the cameras into Bill's bag, then tried to move ahead again. The security guy wasn't happy, so Matt stayed back with Bill's bag while the rest of us tried to work our way further up the street.

Before we could go far, we had to -pass through security checkpoints like one finds at an airport terminal. Any hint of metal, even glasses, as I discovered, set off the alarm. I also learned that even pens and pencils aren't popular - I had a great time emptying all my pockets of stuff.

We made it through fine, eventually, and kept going. This whole time we were half listening to a speech (played over speakers along the street) being given somewhere in the distance - it was in Tamil, of course, though, so we didn't really get much out of it except occasional references to "Tamil Nadu", the state we're in. We hadn't gone far from the checkpoint before asking someone when the parade would start - we had been told it started at 8:00, and it was now about 8:15 or so. As luck would have it, the parade was already over - it had started 7:30 or earlier, I didn't quite catch the time - this after all the hassle we went through to get there and go through security. Alas, "flexible", as I've taken a habit of saying.

After our failed parade viewing attempt, we headed back out to meet up with Matt - since we're all much paler than anyone there, and most of us were wearing some form of Indian clothing, be in a Lungi or Saree, it felt like we were a parade ourselves on the way out - or at least, that's what the people staring at our group must have thought.

Instead of heading back home, we opted to tour around the area of town we were in. It struck me as a much poorer neighborhood than around ICSCA - we passed many many homeless beggars, many were families with small children.

The other thing that really struck me was how subdued the mood was all around, both at parade / speech street and around the rest of the area we visited. People seemed somber, almost, not the mood one would expect on the celebration of their independence day. On the other hand, maybe Americans are really loud when it comes to celebrating our July 4th.

On our touring, we passed a street vendor selling flower necklaces - the girls each bought one to put in their hair, and the sellers seemed quite amused at these Americans trying to be Indian -amused in a good way, that is.

When we came back to ICSA, I made the mistake of checking my email. It wasn't so much a mistake as a frustration, actually. Apparently, at some point the previous day, a spammer decided to send lots of mail from "sales@jeremygustafson.net", from which I was lucky enough to receive all the bounces. It was quite exciting to log into my email to see more than 300 new messages all in a couple hour time period.

I went back to my room to rest and pack my backpack for our trip to Bangalore. After a quick lunch, Matt, Anne, Liz and I were on our way in a rather spacious car (with no seat belts, of course). We left ICSA at about 1:40 in the afternoon and didn't arrive in Bangalore until about 8:30. Of course, it was another hour or more before we found our way to the Indian Institute of Science where we would spend the night. They graciously served us dinner (with silver ware and real napkins, not the plastic ones they have in Chennai), after which we showered and crashed into bed.

August 16, 2005

Tuesday we woke up bright and early (and by that I mean about 7:30) for breakfast - eggs and toast with butter and jam. Matt and Anne went off for a while to plan out their list of topics for our meeting with Dr Sukumar at 10:00, while Liz and I went on a picture taking frenzy. We found out the previous day that Jenny had already topped 300 pictures for the trip, so with the thought of 'what would Jenny take a picture of?' we went around the campus snapping shots of just about everything.

In my mind, our meeting with Dr Sukumar, arguably the world's foremost expert on elephants, can be reduced to the following. We started by watching a PowerPoint illustrating the path taken by a male elephant over a several month period. Sukumar and his team have tagged several elephants with GPS enabled collars that take a location reading (or try to, in any case) three times a day, then send that info back to the researchers. It was actually pretty neat to see how the elephant would occasionally take a 'day trip' outside his normal range to visit a town or something interesting.

After Sukumar's presentation and explanation about his research, Matt and Anne talked with him about the students who come to Bangalore for the Bio in South India program, and that they should be given greater challenges on their assignments. The three also talked about maybe adding a course at the Institute for the Global students, who will be spending a month in Bangalore

The most exciting part of the meeting for me was the next discussion, which was about adding an Interim course in Bangalore for St Olaf's math and biology students. If all goes well, this course will be offered Interim 2007, replacing the Bio/Math course that was held at the Biosphere 2 before it closed; I'm strongly considering applying for it.

After our meeting with Dr Sukumar, and a far too long demonstration of their ecological modeling software, we picked up our bags and had our driver bring us downtown, where we found a very nice restaurant for lunch. We each ordered what, in my opinion, is best called a sampler dish, in that we were given rice along with 5 or 6 toppings to mix in, along with 6 little tin dishes with various flavourings, pudding, and the like. All of this was served on a large leaf - I'm not sure what kind - and the refills kept coming. I was so stuffed by the time we left.

Before getting into our car for the trip to back to Chennai, we made a stop at Planet M, the Sam Goody of India, to pick up 6 copies of the Anniyan soundtrack for the group. We also found a two CD sampler

of some of India's number one pop hits, which should be interesting - I haven't listened to it as of this writing - I have no idea what to expect..

And finally we had to leave. The ride back to ICOSA was over 7 hours, and included several bathroom stops and a short snack stop. Oh the bathrooms this country has - and by bathrooms I mean squatters - eww. Glad I'm a guy.

August 17, 2005

Wednesday was a fairly uneventful day. We Moodled in the morning, then met with Sumitra and Irene to show them our progress, then did more online research, added websites and tutorials, took some breaks, drank some tea, and relaxed. Somehow the entire morning and afternoon went by this way.

The evening was much more exciting - we all went out to eat at the Pinnacle (the restaurant on top of a hotel at which Richey and I ate last week). For the first time all trip, our group took three cabs instead of only two, and, though for a while it looked as if we were lost and destined to endlessly roam the back streets of Chennai, all three drivers did successfully find the hotel eventually (and together, to boot).

It was a different experience eating there as a group. For one, I noticed we seemed to get less frequent service, or, more accurately, hawk-like attention, than when it was just two of us. That aside, the food was just as good, if not better since we had more variety to pick from this time (more people = more dishes) and the mocktail I tried was quite splendid as well.

Getting back to ICOSA after dinner was quite an adventure unto itself. We didn't ask our rickshaws to wait for us, so we had to flag some down, a task that proved surprisingly difficult for once. One came right away, so a group of four took off in that one. Then Matt started talking with the driver of an actual automobile cab - after a little negotiating, we decided to take that - it was much more expensive than a rickshaw, but also more comfortable and a new experience, in any case. So we headed to Egmore. And we got lost. First of all, back roads all look the same to me, so I was never able to be sure if we were anywhere near the path we had come from or not, though I'm quite sure that the dead end we found (and then had to turn around in - a very difficult task for a large car in a small alleyway) wasn't one of the correct paths to have chosen.

We did eventually make our way back home, and after giving in to the driver's request for extra money for the extra length of the trip, went inside. The others had gotten back a long time before us, and they were mostly in the computer lab checking email or working on posters. Most everyone was soon back to the rooms to sleep; I stayed up probably far too late talking with Jenny while she finished her presentation poster.

August 18, 2005

Thursday was an uneventful day. Or so it seems in retrospect. We spent most of the morning and early afternoon putting together our final research and tutorial links, then declared ourselves and our project "wrapped", at least for the India portion. I don't feel I was very productive today - mostly I just kept thinking that I'm ready to get back to my own computer, where it will be much easier to do a lot of this research, etc. Our outline at this point is fairly complete, and we have a half decent site to show Sumitra,

Irene, and Dr Moses. We'll spend the next four months perfecting it, of course, and that will actually be my student work position for this coming year at St Olaf, but for now, we are done!

In the afternoon, Liz, Matt and I went over to Spencer Plaza once more to look at / buy books. Matt and I also found ties to wear for the wedding tomorrow, and Liz and I spent some time in Planet M picking out more Indian CDs. I bought about 6 or 7 CDs, but the price was right at 100 Rs or so a piece. In our time at Spencer I discovered a most interesting facet of Indian shopping - there is no such thing as a RadioShack anywhere! I wanted to get an audio splitter so that I could listen to someone else's CD player at the same time as they did, but it was unbelievably difficult to communicate that to the store owners. I finally did find a store, CD Byte, in which the guy behind the counter knew exactly what I wanted and pulled one out of a drawer right away. I found out later when I tried to use it that it's very finicky, and will only work at certain angles, pressures, etc. The moral of the story - I love RadioShack, and I miss it.

August 19, 2005

Friday morning we had our last English lesson with the COPA students, most of which consisted of drawing names and handing out the prizes we had organized last night. We also wrote some sentences on the board and had the class say them / aloud; things like "we are going back to St Olaf tomorrow" and the like. For better or worse, that only brought us halfway through the class. This gave us time to get several group pictures of us with the students, and we spent the remaining hour or so signing our contact information in the student's notebooks, as well as snapping more pictures on request (a lot of the students wanted to have individual photos taken with us). To me it seemed like the time would never be over, but eventually we left the classroom.

After tea time a group of us went took a rickshaw ride over to a sweet shop right next to the train station, where Bill stocked up on candies. Okay, "stocked up" is an exaggeration, he really only got a sampler platter, upon which we were all invited to indulge ourselves that evening. Most of the sweets were really good (and sweet!), though there were a few that didn't particularly agree with my mouth. My favorite candy was, for lack of a name or better description, a silver covered cookie dough, though, interestingly, most of the others didn't like it.

After lunch we all gathered for our going away ceremony. Once we were ready, we were paraded in to the meeting hall in which all the students and teachers from both the computer and electronics courses had gathered. They started with a song sung by Sumitra, after which we were adorned with flower necklaces and given golden plates with elephants on them. Dr Moses and a few others gave speeches (including Prof Dr Matt and Prof Dr Annie). The part of Dr Moses' speech that still lingers in my mind was a powerful line about how often we see a group of people crossing a border to cause death and terror, but in the past two weeks, they saw a group of people cross borders to bring help and hope. He said it much more eloquently than that, of course, but the message is there. The world is what we make of it, and each day we have a choice about whether we're going to be those people that hurt others, or if we'll be among those who reach out and help.

Following our ceremony, we moved to the computer lab for tea and cake, which came on a plate with a very interesting "mixture" of grains and spices. I didn't particularly care for that part, but the cake was good, and the tea wonderful as usual. As we sat around the table, Dr Moses showed us his collection of flags of the numerous political parties in India, and told us a bit about each one. There was also a little

bit more discussion on what our future involvement with ICSA will be, but soonly thereafter we had to take off to go to the wedding!

[The rest of my journal is incomplete, but here are the notes I scribbled:]

- start packing up computer files
- the wedding!

August 20, 2005

- tea early with Richey
- packed
- book store purchase and long talk with Daas
- haircut
- cooking with Clara
- final packing
- left ICSA at about 6:15 or so after hugs
- flight left at 10:00 - I promise I will do/my best to get back here

The Flight Home

- layover in Kuala Lumpur - we got a hotel stay out of it - very nice 2 rooms for rest and relaxation
- flight to Taipei
- flight to LAX – ick [I was very sick]

My Goals that I'd love to see Happen in India:

- open a radio shack chain with partiular emphasis on hiring the electronic students from ICSA
- introduce an Apple store in Bangalore
- Help Daas open an orphanage