

Trip Highlights from Marilyn Molitor: "Surprised by Joy - Again"

Stepping out of the airport doors and into the warm moist air of India serves as another signal of just how far I am from the high dry desert air of my home. I'm hoping and praying that our contact person "Paul" shows up, I feel less in control than my comfort zone allows for. My travelling companions are my young lovely niece, Anna, this is her and her husband's ministry and also along is her college friend, Stephanie, they both look cool and calm and I wonder if they can sense my anxiety for their wellbeing. And as if on cue, there is Paul, our translator, driver, organizer and director of the orphanage and along with him, his beautiful wife Krishna and three other smiling and welcoming young men who are placing heavy fragrant ropes of flowers around our necks and welcoming us to India. I am surprised by the joy factor – by the intense hospitality, the undeserved welcome of two strangers, is this what heaven feels a bit like I wonder – a welcome that is undeserved, unexpected, but entirely genuine, thoroughly warm. We are whisked into air conditioned cars while our copious luggage disappears miraculously – then we are winding through crazy traffic scenes as if from a movie; herds of goats and randomly wandering cows are unfazed by 40 mph cars and trucks streaking by their meandering path, motorcycles and mopeds zip through impossibly small spaces and jam packed auto-rickshaws all hum along as if they are involved in an intricate dance that only they know and now elicits involuntary gasps from the newbies in our car. Anna smiles sweetly and knowingly.



Careening off the highway and winding down narrow, obscure alleys, I think to myself, I could never find my way home on my own, "Please Lord, protect Paul" I pray almost audibly. Then just as suddenly again, we are stopped and there are beautiful singing voices and children dancing, we step from the cool car into a loving welcome; we are walking through raining rose petals, into waiting seats and more fragrant necklaces are looped over our heads – Anna has foretold of all these possibilities but I find myself surprised over and over by joy- by beaming smiles and sparkling eyes, the warmth that is in the air is reflected in their welcomes.

I did not know it those first few hours, but this was to be a repeated script for every church we visited, a foreshadowing of each welcome we received there. The hospitality we encountered is unrivaled, thanksgiving, honor and praise to Jesus Christ is first and foremost on the lips of the beautiful believers we met, they often recount how God has provided using Josh and Anna.

Uncorked, effervescent, unbridled; this joy in these spiritually lit places we are visiting is such a stark contrast to what we see as we drive through city checkpoints where small children are begging at the windows of stopped cars, rags falling off their emaciated bodies, rough hair, that translates to lack of clean water, nutrition and loving care a sense of hopelessness covers this repeated scene. I think Paul would scoop them all up if he could, he hands a few coins out, he seems to know what he is doing. I want to cry out for the wrongness and for the contrast, "can't you take them all Paul?" God has called Paul to a big vision, he has no limit of ideas and possibilities galore. Paul was an orphan himself, he knew hunger and dirt floors and dire poverty. Now as he gives all the credit to God, he has favor with people in places of influence, so many doors are opening as he and his wife Krishna walk in gratitude and a humble spirit.



We visit churches where I feel so unworthy to speak, I want to say, "You speak – You Speak To Me", you are the faithful in a difficult place, in a place where following Christ comes at cost we do not pay in our parts. Hundreds of pastors' wives show up, they double the expected numbers for Asha's first women's conference, they have travelled through the night, slept on floors in unfamiliar places. Gathered now, their voices remind me of our own women's gatherings, the lovely comforting harmonious lilting of women discussing their families, their children, their struggles and delights, I know these sounds, I understand their context and am comforted by the common ground - even if I do not recognize their words. We walk in common joy and the bond that Christ alone forges through this gift of Joy unexpected and unwarranted.

There was nothing that prepared me for the joy and the welcome at each of the churches and the many homes we entered. I thought to myself, I want to take this home; this ability to make others feel so loved and welcomed. Then I would wonder how can I return this gift to them? The joy of the Lord is in this place – and I do take it with me. Now home, I read of the Joy of the Lord being our strength and that we are to rejoice in the Lord always and my brothers and sisters so far away are with me again. I find myself looking forward to the time when we share a language and have an eternity to catch up, worship together again.

Now, if you can go see this for yourself -- you should, because all the words in the world will not replace the actual fragrance of falling rose petals and the filling of every one of your senses with the goodness of God's people rejoicing with one another over and around and about, and you too will be surprised by joy - again.

Trip Highlights from Stephanie Houde:

My name is Stephanie and I had the amazing honor of traveling to India in September with GPI (and my long-time friend, Anna!) Before going on this trip, I had this image in my head of very broken and almost shell shocked, withdrawn orphan children in my head.

Often when you hear stories about orphan children with heartbreaking pasts, that's what you find, broken and emotionally distant children. Not so with the children at Aasha Children's Home. I cannot express the way that these children took me by surprise. Their joy is tangible and their love for Jesus and their wholehearted passion for him was contagious.

I'm incredibly thankful to have gone and witnessed the fruit of this ministry first hand and I've been deeply inspired by how effective the ministry model is that GPI has set in place. They take care of their people with excellence and so much honor. It's evident in the excellence and passion that the GPI Indian Nationals that serve on their staff hold on a regular basis. They're alive with vision and deep love for Christ and His church.

The children in Aasha Children's home are orphans no more and they truly have a place to call home and a family that loves and nurtures them. I'm just so thankful that I was able to share in this experience.

