

# Into the Heart of India

by Patricia Paul-Carson



Volunteering with Child Haven International  
One Woman's Experience

Patricia Paul-Carson left her husband and three children in Ottawa for three months to intern in India at a home for destitute and homeless children. This is her story—the joys and frustrations, the highs and the lows, the new-found friendships and the loneliness. Her diary provides insight into volunteering in the third world and what to expect when living in a culture totally different from your own.

*“Excellent! This book will be very useful to anyone trying to decide to volunteer.”*

*Fred Cappuccino  
Director, Child Haven International*

*“Entrancing. Kept myself up late too many nights reading it.”*

*Anne Montagnes  
Author of Mumsahib: A Novel in Stories*

I wrote this book to share the joys and frustrations of being a volunteer intern in a developing country. I hope this diary will be helpful to potential volunteer interns in the process of deciding to serve, for volunteer interns who are currently working, and for those who at some point in their lives were volunteer interns. If anyone has any concerns or comments, please contact me at [ppaulcarson@rogers.com](mailto:ppaulcarson@rogers.com)

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More information about Child Haven International may be obtained by sending an e-mail to: [fred@childhaven.ca](mailto:fred@childhaven.ca) or by telephoning 613-527-2829. This diary was written as a fund-raiser. If you would like to send a donation, please address your cheque to Child Haven International, R.R. #1, Maxville, Ontario, K0C 1T0.

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*"I know that I do not set down in this story all that I remember. Who can say how much I must give and how much omit in the interests of truth? ...Writing it is itself one of the experiments with truth. One of its objects is certainly to provide some comfort and food for reflection for my co-workers."*

*Mohandas K. Gandhi  
The Story of My Experiments with Truth – An Autobiography*

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## **The Child Haven Organization**

Child Haven International is an organization dedicated to the well being of women and children in the developing world. It is a non-political, non-profit and non-government organization established in 1985 by Bonnie and Fred Cappuccino, two Canadians who have a long history of improving the lives of women and children throughout the world, and Dr. Nat Shah of Cornwall, Ontario.

Child Haven International focuses mainly on operating homes for destitute children. Currently, four exist - three in India and one in Nepal. In addition, Child Haven provides funds for the training, education and living expenses of a small number of needy Indian and Nepalese children and a few of their mothers. Some of the children have physical disabilities. Child Haven also operates a project in India to promote the use of soya milk and soya milk products and provides income-generating training for women. It sponsors a literacy and family planning project as well as a homeopathic clinic. In Tibet, Child Haven helps orphans and a small village school, in a limited way.

The first home was opened in 1985 in the northwest state of Gujarat. The location was originally in the village of Dhanera in North Gujarat but it is now in Gandhinagar where the home serves 26 destitute children. A second home was opened in 1986 in Hyderabad, in south central India. It now cares for 99 children. In 1988, a home was opened in Kaliyampoondi Village in Tamil Nadu in southern India where 175 children reside. The Nepalese home was opened in 1992 and cares for 84 children.

These homes and projects are funded mainly by contributions from individuals and organizations across Canada and the USA.

Some support also comes from Japan, Europe, Australia, India and Nepal. Child Haven International does not receive any government support.

Child Haven homes are managed by Boards of Directors in both

India and Nepal. Local staff are hired at local wages to operate the projects on a day-to-day basis. Many local residents have been very helpful to the homes through provision of advice, and by providing food and other donations. In addition, since 1985, approximately 500 overseas volunteers have paid their own way to India and Nepal. They have lived in Child Haven homes for three or more months. The unpaid volunteers provide extra tutoring, arts and crafts programs, medical attention, general child care, English lessons, office assistance and cleaning services.

The volunteers receive an orientation in Canada. This ensures they will not promote any religion, or Canadian values. They are encouraged to respect the religious and cultural values of India, and promote a Gandhian way of life at the projects.

The Gandhian philosophy implemented at all Child Haven projects includes no recognition of caste, equality of the sexes, non-violence, strict vegetarianism, simple living, and respect for all religions.

These principles are implemented on a daily basis. The children maintain the religion they have upon entering a Child Haven home. Festivals, both religious and secular, are celebrated. Although the children in the homes come in contact with volunteers from western countries, every attempt is made not to westernize them in any way. The children are raised to be good self-sufficient citizens of India and Nepal.

Children who are admitted to Child Haven have lost either one or both parents. They may have parents who are blind or suffer from another disability. The children are generally admitted to the home between the ages of newborn and six years. They stay until they are ready to enter the labour force. The children are housed in either rented accommodation, or in homes that have been built by the Child Haven organization. The children's parents sometimes visit them in the home.

The children sleep on mats on the floor, and are provided with blankets. They each have a small metal suitcase that contains everything they own. Three simple meals are prepared each day,

consisting of rice, beans, vegetables, chapatis, milk and milk products. The children are taken to doctors and hospitals for any medical care they need.

The children attend public school where lessons are provided in the local language. In some cases, tutors are provided for the children to enhance their learning. Older children are being prepared to work in the labour force and further training will be provided after tenth standard, (the equivalent of a Canadian grade 10) as required.

Occasionally, an abandoned child needs an adoptive home or a parent requests that his or her child be adopted by a suitable family. In these cases, Bonnie Cappuccino works with the appropriate Indian officials to find a family. The child is usually adopted in India, following the laws and regulations of the country.

All homes and projects are visited by Bonnie Cappuccino four times each year to ensure proper management and care.

## **Deciding to Become a Child Haven Intern**

Ever since I can remember, I have always wanted to serve in a developing country. When I was about 10 years old, I saw Audrey Hepburn in the movie "The Nun's Story." It was a film about a young nun who worked as a nurse in the African Congo and who fell in love with a doctor. I am sure it was as much the love story, and Audrey Hepburn's beauty, that attracted me to the idea of working in a third world country as anything else, but the idealism and the desire to help others were also major factors of the romance it held for me.

As a young teenager, I can remember reading about the development of the Canadian University Service Overseas (CUSO), an organization that recruited young university graduates to work for a two-year period in the third world. I felt sure that I wanted to be a CUSO volunteer. I applied when I completed my undergraduate work, and was accepted to go either to India or to the Philippine Islands. However, at that time in my life I had major concerns about cultural imperialism. I felt it would be inappropriate to go to a third world country, so instead I joined the Company of Young Canadians, another brainchild of the Lester Pearson Liberal government. I happily set off to Cape Breton Island to practice community development in the fishing and coal mining community of New Waterford.

Over the years I have donated funds to various organizations working in the third world, including Foster Parents Plan and Oxfam. My idealistic concerns about cultural imperialism shifted to concerns about how third world countries could withstand the economic imperialism of the west without an educated and skilled population. My desire to go to a third world country remained, but given that I was by now married and had three children, I was ensconced in a way of life which I did not dream of leaving, even for a short time. As I got older, I thought I might do development work in the third world when I retired.

In the winter of 1998 my dreams of contributing to the third world

surfaced once again. An unexpected situation prompted me to take action, and become involved in development work before I retired. My husband Michael had been offered a position in France for a year. My teenage girls, Leah, 17 years old, and Margaux, 15, were reluctant to go. Eleven year-old Matthew would have been happy to live in another country. Like my daughters, I had grave concerns about spending a year in France. I was afraid that I would be spending most of my time visiting art galleries, tasting wine, skiing, and generally enjoying the life of a middle class woman. Although, this sounds like a glorious way to spend time, I knew that a continuous diet of these activities would leave me empty and unfulfilled. I would feel as if I was avoiding the important issues in my life.

I had growing concerns about slipping into old age. I had just turned fifty and was worried about ensuring the next decade of my life was spent purposefully. I did not want to turn sixty and not be able to answer the question: "What did I do with the last 10 years?" Although in many ways I enjoyed my job with the federal government working in the area of employment equity, I wanted to do more.

We grappled as a family with the possibility of going to France, and how we would accommodate my husband's career and the needs of the rest of the family. Then suddenly, the offer was withdrawn due to a company reorganization.

Having spent three months agonizing over the decision to go to France, I began to wonder what I would do if the decision were mine to go anywhere in the world, and do anything I wanted.

Very quickly I realized that I wanted to go to India and volunteer with Child Haven, which I had heard about from a variety of sources. I took the next decision very quickly – if that was what I really wanted to do, then I had better do it.

Several years earlier I had listened to Fred Cappuccino give a speech about Child Haven at the Unitarian Church I attend in Ottawa. The only thing I could really remember about his speech was how wonderfully funny and touching he had been. I had read about the Cappuccinos in the Ottawa Citizen. One of the

Sunday school teachers I had taught with a few years earlier had been a volunteer at the Nepal Child Haven home.

In the spring of 98, I telephoned Child Haven and asked for an information package. I read it and put it aside. When my husband Michael found out I had sent for the information, he stated with a certain amount of resignation, "You're going." After 22 years of marriage, he knew me well.

A month or so later I bought a raffle ticket for a fund-raiser for Child Haven and thought no more about it. Imagine my surprise when I received a telephone call from Bonnie Cappuccino telling me I had won a pair of computer speakers! Incredulous, I told her I was thinking of telephoning her because I was interested in becoming a volunteer. When she said a training session was being organized in two weeks, I gulped and took a few steps back. It was too soon. I could not go. She then mentioned that another session was being organized in about six weeks. I took a deep breath, and committed to go. Within six weeks, I was well on my way to making up my mind about going to India.

The training session was quite something. Those who have been to Bonnie and Fred's home have experienced the friendly welcome and acceptance that are second nature to them. They have also experienced the chaos—books, clothes and papers are everywhere.

Visionary people are supposed to be right-brained. It was very apparent that Bonnie and Fred fit the pattern. They have wonderful ideas, empathetic personalities and the energy and commitment to put them into effect. The details are of secondary importance.

They are also very funny. Outside their rambling old house were several old cars in various states of repair. At one point Fred, who wears floppy brimmed hats and has a white beard, said, "My son is a bit of an eccentric—he collects old cars." I am not sure whether Bonnie saw the grin on my face when he said this, but she retorted, "Let's face it Fred, we're all eccentric." And indeed they are—Bonnie with her saris and bracelets half way up her arms, decked out, as Fred puts it, "like a Christmas tree,"

and Fred, equally unconventional in his own way.

The Cappuccinos can get away with it. No one can question their dedication, commitment and hard work over 40 years to help children in the third world. Their endless capacity to give puts most of us to shame.

There were only a few people at the training session. They included a middle-aged school teacher, a recent university graduate of Indian background, and a young couple, one of whom was interested in making a film about Child Haven.

We arrived late Friday afternoon. The session finished 24 hours later. On Saturday, Eleanor Duncan, a former volunteer, arrived to help with the orientation. Everyone called her “Jane” in Gandhinagar because “Eleanor” is difficult for the children to pronounce. I left with another information package and a growing sense that I would be a Child Haven volunteer.

I attended a second training session at the beginning of September to assure myself this was what I wanted to do. I was still convinced. I talked with Bonnie about what home would be best for me. I had three criteria. First, I had to be able to have instant contact with my family. This meant a telephone had to be available, and there had to be frequent flights from the home in India to Canada. I was worried about leaving my family. I wanted to know if something went wrong at home, I could return immediately without days of waiting for a flight. Secondly, I wanted to be with another volunteer. I knew that I would find it difficult to be alone. My third consideration was that I wanted to be very busy, as I am an energetic person.

When I told my concerns to Bonnie, she suggested that I go to the home in Gandhinagar, in northwest India. Bonnie said that the electricity in Gandhinagar was very rarely disrupted because it is the state capital of Gujarat . Therefore, I would have constant access to the telephone. She also told me about Hot Mail, an inexpensive method of communicating through the Internet. I had a yen to go to the home in Hyderabad because it was close to a big city. I love city life, but I knew that having peace of mind about access to my family was more important. I settled on the

home in Gandhinagar.

I felt I needed to talk to previous Child Haven volunteers. Although I had met a few at the training sessions and they were very positive, I had heard from other people that not everyone who volunteered was happy with their experience. One of my friends gave me the name of a volunteer who had a negative experience. I telephoned this person so I could hear the worst. When I spoke with her she told me this had been one of the best things she had ever done in her life! I asked Bonnie for a few names of former volunteers. I met with one who had been to the home in Gandhinagar. She was generally quite positive about her experience. No one said anything to convince me I was doing the wrong thing.

## Preparing To Go

I had made the decision to go. There was a lot of preparation to do. Gathering the things I would need to take to India was the least of my concerns. I was worried about preparing myself and others psychologically for my departure.

In order to ensure the trip could actually happen, I had to get the permission of my managers at work. When I asked, they took only an instant to agree. I tried to put my request for a three-month leave of absence in such a way that they could say no. I explained I didn't want to put them in a difficult or awkward situation where they felt I would be uncooperative, if they refused. But they were extremely cooperative. One manager expressed his admiration, and disbelief that I would do such a thing, several times.

My family's reaction to my decision, and helping them to cope while I was away, was a major concern. By this time, Michael already knew of my plans, as he was involved with the step-bystep, decision-making process, of deciding to go. However, he expressed concerns about how this experience might affect me, and in turn, affect our relationship. I assured him I would be essentially the same person when I came home. He joked that I might want to sell everything we owned when I returned, or that I would start wearing a sari and a nose ring. He was also worried that I might get sick or injured in a traffic accident. I assured him I would be careful about what I ate and where I went. At one point he said he didn't want me taking trains, because India is known for its numerous train accidents. I could not promise that. In fact, I was dying to ride on an Indian train—something I considered the quintessential Indian experience.

My children had also been following the progress of my decision and they also expressed some concerns.

Leah was worried that she would be the one to do all the housework that I normally did. I had several talks with her and the rest of the family, about how everyone had to help. We

developed a schedule of activities to ensure everyone knew who was doing what. Margaux was worried that she would miss me. All I could do was tell her I would miss her too. When Matthew first heard that I would be going to India, his immediate reaction was, "You're going to get a dreaded disease." He reacted so quickly and with such assurance that he was right, I wondered if he knew something that I didn't.

I was worried about telling my parents, who would soon be turning 83. They live in a senior citizen's home in Peterborough. Although both my brother and sister visit them frequently, I knew they also looked forward to my visits and telephone calls. My Dad is not well and I was anxious that he might get very sick or die while I was away. I had to deal with what I might do in such a circumstance. I knew I would come home.

I was also worried about telling friends and neighbours. I was afraid people would say I was a bad mother for leaving my children for three months; afraid that they would belittle what I was doing by saying this was an action of an idealistic 20 year-old; I was afraid some people would say my work in India would have no impact. But the opposite happened. Hardly anyone reacted negatively. People lauded my decision. They encouraged me to follow my dream. No one, not even one person, said I was a bad mother.

Only a few people had negative reactions. My father expressed concern about my family but my mother said she wished she could go with me. One woman I met at a party told me if I wanted to help children of the third world, I should adopt a child. She felt spending three months in India would only keep the children I was working with alive an extra three months. Even after I explained how Child Haven worked, she made it clear she thought my trip was a crazy idea. However, the vast majority of people were amazingly supportive, and I was encouraged by their support.

I had to prepare myself psychologically as well. I had many fears. I worried that something might happen to my children when I was away. I agonized over the fact that I would not be able to go to them immediately. What if one of them were in an accident

and had to go to the hospital? How much guilt would I feel for not being there at the time?

I was worried about finding my niche when I arrived at the home in India. I had talked to some volunteers who said that they had trouble finding enough activities to do. How could I ensure my three months were well spent? When I returned, I wanted to be able to tell everyone that my work had been useful, that all the adjustments people in Canada had made for me were worthwhile. Michael's advice was to align myself with the manager of the home, and to be her "gofer." It was good advice.

I was worried about getting sick. I made sure I had all necessary inoculations, and took malaria pills as required. I had heard horror stories of people becoming extremely sick as a result of food poisoning. I knew I would be very careful and follow the advice that all doctors gave, because I had no interest in getting sick. If I got sick, I would be draining the organization instead of helping it. And I did not want to come home sick. Then I would be no help to my family either.

I worried about my reaction to the children in the home in Gandhinagar. Would I be able to take care of them? Would I like them? Would I get a disease from them? Would I be able to pick them up and hug them?

During the months leading up to my January departure, I would awake in the middle of the night with these questions on my mind. More than once, I asked myself if I were crazy. But my answer was always the same. Go. You are meant to do this.

## **Four Weeks Before Departure**

The four weeks prior to “D-Day” were hectic. Not only was I doing last minute planning for Child Haven, I had to deal with the usual Christmas rush.

I spent time between Christmas and New Year’s getting the things I needed to take on my trip. I couldn’t believe I spent almost \$300 on medications. I bought everything on the list that Child Haven provided. I thought if I didn’t use the items in India, my family would be able to use them when I returned home.

I had arranged for my ticket in November. Because Michael travels a lot I was able to use his air mile points for most of the trip, although I had to purchase the portion from Mumbai to Ahmedabad, the nearest city to Gandhinagar. (In 1997, Bombay changed its name back to the original name of Mumbai, which was used before the British colonized India.)

I looked into a variety of travel insurance plans, but finally decided that our existing insurance would cover anything that might be needed. I wanted to be sure I could be air lifted from India if necessary.

I reserved a hotel room at the Hotel Columbus in Mumbai both by fax and by telephone. I was excited to be talking on the telephone to the hotel receptionist in India so far away. My flight would arrive from London at midnight and leave for Ahmedabad late the next afternoon.

So much good had already resulted from my decision to spend three months at Child Haven. I felt confident that I was doing the right thing. People were touched by what I was doing.

My manager at work asked a colleague to collect money for the children at the Child Haven home. Almost \$500 was donated. When I was delivering Christmas cards to thank those people who had given donations, I met another colleague in the hall. She and I had a lot of difficulty working together, but when she

heard I was going to India she sent a memo congratulating me on my decision. She then donated a substantial amount of money to be spent on the children. She was very pleased with the Christmas card, and asked about my plans for leaving. As I turned to go I heard her say, "Friends?" I shook her hand. I was very moved by her gesture.

Other people gave money for the children as well. Both my parents and Michael's family donated, as did my book club. I was touched by people's kindness, so touched, in fact, that I cried.

People not only donated money, but they had such kind words to say. One of my neighbours told me that after hearing about my trip, she thought about doing something similar. A friend told me of a mutual acquaintance who, after hearing about what I was doing, was re-evaluating her own dream of studying in Spain. I was absolutely delighted to think that other women might be encouraged to follow their dreams because I was following one of mine.

## **The Diary Itself**

### **Tuesday, January 5, 1999**

It is the day before I leave for India. Many people telephoned to say good-bye. When I said good-bye to my close friend Susan, she cried and said she was in denial. I asked her to stop crying because I wasn't dying.

Michael came home from work early, and we spent the afternoon together. This man rarely comes home from work before six o'clock – and here he was, devoting the day to me. What an honour!

Bonnie and Fred Cappuccino arrived late in the afternoon with a suitcase full of things for the children. It was so heavy that Michael and Fred together lifted it into the car. I worried about how I could lift the suitcase alone. They brought \$1030 in cash for me to take to the manager of the home in Gandhinagar. Michael and I were worried about my carrying so much money in cash. We telephoned several banks to find if any were still open. At

5:30 p.m., we dashed over to a nearby trust company, and changed the money into traveller's cheques.

In the evening all the children were upset – Matthew said he had no friends, Margaux was in tears because she was overwhelmed by homework and Leah was upset because the project for her business course was difficult to do. I talked with each one of them. I am amazed at how little guilt I feel about leaving them. I am convinced this trip is part of my destiny. I am constantly finding signs that confirm this is what I am meant to do.

### **Wednesday, January 6, 1999**

The day of departure has finally arrived. I was up at 6:00 a.m. and I gave each of the kids one final hug and told them I loved them. Margaux got out of bed to say good-bye. She was in tears.

I was almost unable to get my carry-on luggage onto the airplane at Ottawa. The security attendant insisted that I squeeze my bag into the metal frame designed to see if carry-on luggage fits the allowable size. My bag would not fit and the attendant told me to check my bag. Alarm bells were going off in my head. I knew the plane would be leaving soon. Michael realized I was having problems. He approached the desk and forced my suitcase to fit into the metal frame. The fit was so tight that Michael had a hard time getting the suitcase out of the frame. By this time we had an amused audience and one man said, "Why don't you just take the frame with you?" After much yanking the suitcase came out and the attendant let me stagger through the security gate with my overstuffed suitcase.

As I went through security, I heard Michael's parting words: "What would you do without me?" He often says this whenever he gets me (or my suitcase) out of a tight spot. I turned around, gave him a big grin and was on my way.

I had decided to visit my friends Helen and Paul in Paris before heading to India. I had not seen them since last summer. I was looking forward to spending a few days with them. Because of air mile plan routing restrictions, I had to fly from London to Paris, back to London, and on to Mumbai, before taking my final flight to Ahmedabad. This routing was of concern because air regulations required that I take my suitcases with me, instead of sending them directly to India.

This not only meant lugging my own bags, but also the seventy-pound suitcase for Child Haven. All Child Haven volunteers are expected to take a suitcase filled with clothing and other donated items for the children. I had developed bursitis shortly before leaving for India. Although the medication the doctor had given me cleared it up, I knew it could flare up any time. Carrying heavy suitcases would certainly aggravate it. Even minor exertion caused throbbing pain in my shoulder.

I was able to keep my suitcase, carrying most of my personal belongings, to under 35 pounds. It was my carry-on bag and the Child Haven suitcase that worried me. I had stuffed my carry-on bag with far too many things including my lap top computer and

several books. The Child Haven suitcase (I later found out they were called “Bonnie bags,” by all the volunteers) was filled with Child Haven newsletters, which contributed to its massive weight.

In London, I had difficulty getting on the flight for Paris. I could barely lift my carry-on bag through the security check. I thought I would break my back lifting it. On the plane to Paris I started to cry – if I can’t handle this luggage, how will I ever lift that 70 pound behemoth for Child Haven. The wheels on the bottom of the suitcases, which were great for passing through the airport, were of no use when the luggage had to be lifted for the security check. I was ready to call Helen and tell her I could not make it to her apartment.

When I arrived at the luggage pick-up carousel in Paris, I found my own bag, and waited for the 70-pound monster. It never arrived. British Airways had misplaced it! They told me when they found it they would keep it at the airport until I made my return flight to London. I knew I had a guardian angel.

I then made my way to the airport exit looking for a taxi. There was no place to change my money into French francs because it was so late at night. However, Michael, who travels frequently to Paris, has used Visa cards to pay for taxis, so I wasn’t worried.

When I arrived at the taxi stand I could find no taxis that took Visa. I started to despair. A number of taxi drivers gathered around me as I asked questions about the cost of getting into Paris by taxi. A discussion ensued amongst them until they finally agreed that the taxi driver first in line would take me to Paris for the 250 francs I had in my wallet, slightly less than the normal amount. Together the taxi drivers threw my bags into the trunk of the car. My spirits started to rise. My guardian angel was looking after me.

### **Thursday, January 7, 1999**

I tried all day to get some money changed into French francs.

I was buffeted between the banks, the post office, and two long distance telephone calls to the TD Bank in Canada before I finally

got the currency I needed. Frustration was mounting, as I was misinformed by a host of bank and post office clerks. I vowed the next time I travelled to take plenty of traveller's cheques.

A nagging pain seared my shoulder.

### **Sunday, January 10, 1999**

I arrived at Charles de Gaulle airport early Sunday morning to get my flight back to London, after a wonderful few days in Paris. I went to the lost luggage desk to pick up the Bonnie bag. The desk was closed because it was only 7:00 a.m. Once again I checked in without the suitcase. The attendant told me the luggage would follow me to London and Mumbai on another flight. Oh happy day! Once again I do not have to deal with the Bonnie bag.

I arrived in London. As I sat in the airport waiting for my flight to Mumbai, an announcement was made on the loud speaker for a flight to Toronto and Ottawa. I could go back home now, I thought. My stomach was full of butterflies.

The nine-hour flight to Mumbai was long but uneventful. The business class seats were filled mostly by white westerners. I was one of a few white people in a sea of Indians in economy seats. I talked to no one. I was too tired, too shy and too overwhelmed by the immense trip I was taking. We were squeezed in like sardines, but I somehow managed to avoid conversation with my close, almost intimate seat-mates. I settled into the flight routine: reading, eating, and dozing off as the plane soared toward the Indian sub-continent.

There was a two-hour wait for the luggage at Mumbai. The airport was packed with people and it was hard to move around. Bonnie's bag was nowhere to be found. Because it was after 2 a.m., I decided to go directly to my hotel – once again, without the Bonnie bag – and to return the next day to look for it, a few hours before my flight to Ahmedabad.

I went to the washroom at the airport where a woman in a sari handed me some toilet paper. I left my coat outside the bathroom

stall. When I came out I gave the women 10 rupees. I checked my coat pocket, only to find what little change was there had disappeared. Fortunately, there had not been much of value in those coat pockets. I felt grumpy, nonetheless. Even minor theft leaves one feeling violated.

Getting through customs was a non-event. A clatter of new arrivals was waved through at once, with no one checking the luggage.

Once through customs, I couldn't find a telephone anywhere to call my hotel. Two young men in a booth marked "Hotel Reservations" called me over. They told me they would dial my hotel for me. They handed me the telephone so that I could speak with the receptionist at the Hotel Columbus. I was told they had no reservation for me, despite the fact I had both telephoned, and sent a fax. The young men suggested I go to the Park View Hotel. I had tried to book this hotel from Ottawa as well, with no success.

Although the young men had not telephoned the hotel, they told me no single rooms were left; I would be obliged to pay \$92 Canadian for a double room. I felt I had no choice – particularly since they had a free minivan to take me to the hotel. They took me out to a small, white unmarked minivan in the huge airport parking lot. There was no indication that this was a hotel vehicle. I began to worry the driver of the minivan would take me down some dark street and demand my money or my life. Just when I was on the point of panicking, two other tourists came aboard. I breathed a sigh of relief.

When we arrived at the Park View Hotel, I tipped the driver and asked the desk attendant for a single room. Sure enough, single rooms were available for 1500 rupees or \$60 Canadian. My luggage was taken upstairs to a tiny room with a very small single bed. Before the two men left, they asked for a tip. I gave them 50 rupees, about \$2. I checked the bed and wasn't sure the sheets were clean.

Although it was 4 a.m. Mumbai time, I telephoned Michael, as we had agreed I would. He wanted to make sure I had arrived

safely and I wanted him to make sure I had arrived safely.

The receptionist told me I would be charged 125 rupees or about \$5 per minute for the telephone. I agreed. However the 2 minute and 27 second telephone call turned out to cost \$20 – to cover hidden and unmentioned costs. I went to bed feeling angry and upset. I had been in the country only a few hours, and I felt I had been taken advantage of three times already. I reflected uncomfortably on the differences and clash of values I had encountered. I finally fell into a troubled sleep.

The next day, I walked around Mumbai for about an hour. The place is crazy. Traffic is everywhere. It was a cacophony of people, bicycles, rickshaws, cars, and trucks. I didn't venture too far—I quickly retreated to my room realizing that I have to take India one step at a time.

I booked out of my room at noon, and took a taxi provided by the hotel to the airport to look for the Child Haven suitcase. I was scared stiff. The traffic was wild. The cars are nothing more than tin boxes on wheels. Although there are two main lanes of the roads, they are not further subdivided. When passing cars, we would be no more than an inch or two from them. I found myself leaning to the side of the car furthest away from the vehicle we were passing. I was amazed that we didn't have an accident.

Beggars approached the car for money when it stopped at traffic lights. At one point, a very old man wrapped in extremely dirty rags on both his body and his head walked up to the taxi with a rusted pail over his arm. His hand was missing. A little girl of about three with a terrible skin condition approached the taxi with her hand out. She knew she had my attention and I would possibly give her some money. It is hard to believe a three year-old can be so street smart and so cunning. The only way to avoid beggars is to look straight ahead and pretend you don't see them. I felt we were both dehumanized.

When I reached the airport, I spent at least two and a half-hours looking for the lost Child Haven suitcase. Finally, I pieced together some information and found Air France offices. An Indian employee spent almost an hour helping me find the suitcase

that was in an Air France container outside the actual airport buildings. He also helped me with all my suitcases and found a taxi to take me to the domestic airport, a few miles away. I offered him 100 rupees for his trouble. He was reluctant to take it at first, but finally accepted. My faith in humanity was being restored.

The taxi ride to the domestic airport was as hair-raising as the ride to the international airport. I was developing nerves of steel.

## **Tuesday, January 12, 1999**

I arrived last night, finally, at Gandhinagar. Amy, one of the young women whom I met at a training session last summer, met me at the Ahmedabad airport, about a 40-minute drive from Gandhinagar. She had a deep blue shawl draped over her head and a child in her arms. She looked beautiful. It was dusk and it got darker and darker as we drove to the Child Haven home. I could not see the countryside as we made our way along the smooth flat road to Gandhinagar. I felt like Alice-in-Wonderland hurtling down a tunnel to the unknown.

When I arrived at the end of the tunnel with a thud, I found 28 beautiful dark-skinned children sitting in a circle eating rice and beans with their fingers from stainless steel plates. I sat with them and watched, thankful to be with them at last. Amy introduced me to each of the children who seemed polite and friendly. I met Kala, the local manager of the home; Jessie, a young volunteer who would be leaving the home in a few days; and the three ayahs who work in the home. Ayah is the Gujarati word for nanny and Gujarati is the language spoken in the state of Gujarat.

Amy and Jessie gave me a tour of the home. It is a large split-level with four floors. There is next to no furniture in the home except for a desk, some beds, a few chairs, and mats to sleep on. The main floor consists of a large living area where eating and other social activity takes place. Behind this room is the kitchen, the volunteer bedroom with an attached bathroom, the office and another bathroom for the children. On the second floor is the girls' bedroom and a verandah; the third floor consists of the boys' room, a bathroom, a room where the ayahs sleep, and

another volunteer room, where I am sleeping; the fourth floor is where Chandu, the cook and his wife Raika sleep.

Although Amy asked me if I would like to share the downstairs bedroom with her when Jessie left, I decided I would prefer to be in the upstairs bedroom even though it means I will not have easy access to the volunteer bathroom. I want my own space. Amy was very generous in assuring me that I could have access to the staff bathroom whenever I wanted - even though it meant I would be walking through her bedroom to access it.

All the volunteers are called by their first name with the adjunct "Sister." Amy is Amy Sister and I am Trish Sister, but most often we are simply called Sister. Sister or "Ben" in Gujarati, is a term of respect, so Kala is called Kalaben. The name alone is permissible when people know each other well.

Today I read a few stories with the children, played with puzzles with them, went to the local market, and bought a sari and a salwaar-kameez, a traditional Indian outfit for everyday wear. A salwaar-kameez includes an A-line dress that falls below the knees, baggy pants that are tight at the ankles and a scarf draped over the chest.

After buying the clothes and some rice and vegetables at the market, Amy, Jessie, Kala, and Maya, an ayah and I, went to a little restaurant, called the Pooja Parlour. The walls of the Pooja Parlour were covered in white cement fashioned into designs. Tiny mirrors of coloured and plain glass were embedded in the cement. Stuffed animals made of brightly coloured fabric were strategically placed throughout the room. The restaurant had such a light airy feel. I felt at home right away.

I could feel myself falling in love with everything. Things seemed so simple and pure. The kids are adorable. I wanted to hug them, to pick them up, to dance with them. They are cute and funny and smart.

Michael telephoned this morning. Everyone in the family appears to be fine, and Michael sounded optimistic. Margaux and Leah were working on school projects. Matthew had gone skiing with

his friends. He had a good time. They say they miss me.

### **Wednesday, January 13, 1999**

Today I went to Ahmedabad, about an hour away by bus, with Amy. She is almost 24. She has been here over two months and her capacity to find her way around this city of four million people amazed me. Will I be as competent in two months?

Amy talked about the other volunteers who were at the home during the same period she has been there, information that I found very helpful. She talked about her views about the home, and how it worked. She pointed out that her opinions were only one view of the home, which reminded me to deal directly with Kala to get information on how I could best fit in.

The bus drive to Ahmedabad took forever. One woman had complained that someone stole her wallet as she was waiting for the bus. Everyone had to get off the bus and be checked by the police. Like a handful of other people, Amy and I did not get off the bus. Eventually everyone got back on, and the bus started. It was very rickety, but we arrived without incident.

The traffic in Ahmedabad, like Mumbai, is crazy. We were approached several times by very dirty children begging for money. One child was practically scratching me as her hand reached out. I followed Amy's example and became very severe when I said no. I was amazed how detached I felt from those children. I remembered the advice that was given at the Child Haven orientation—we cannot help everybody. I knew I was doing what I could to help Indian children, even if it was for only a limited few. And I knew that my reaction was the only way I could survive emotionally in this country.

We changed the money that Bonnie and Fred had given me for the home. I changed some money for myself, as well. We stopped at a shop where I bought a shawl for 200 rupees. It will serve me well until the weather is warmer at night. The summer sleeping bag I brought with me is just not warm enough in this winter period. I plan to use the shawl as a blanket as well. It will keep me warm in the evenings, and keep off the chill of early mornings.

Amy knew of a tiny shop in Ahmedabad that had four computers that the public could use to send e-mail for 80 rupees (\$3.20 an hour). However, the system was not working so we couldn't send any mail. The fellow who owned the shop was friendly and spoke excellent English. When I asked him when the system would be up and running, he simply shrugged and said with a British accent, "Ma'am, this is India," implying that I was nuts to even ask the question.

As much as I loved being in the chaos of a large city like Ahmedabad, I was glad to return to the peace and tranquility of Gandhinagar. There are about 150,000 people who live in this relatively new planned city. It has a very rural feel about it. Gandhinagar is divided into 30 sectors each with its own school, post office, market, and tailor among other things, creating a village-like atmosphere in each sector.

Child Haven is located in Sector 7. Like the rest of the city, Sector 7 has lots of low-rise buildings and dirt roads. Makeshift homes of the poor are scattered among the homes of the middle class. These ramshackle homes are made of plastic and cardboard and fabric – whatever the family can scrounge up to make their house. There is no sewage or running water. I have seen the children defecate in the park areas across from our home, but I have no idea where the adults go to relieve themselves. Most of the children at Child Haven come from homes like this. Their parents are very poor – labourers, garbage collectors, or without any jobs at all.

Because Gandhinagar is the state capital, there is a substantial middle class, who work for the government. Many live in well-constructed single family or semi-detached dwellings surrounded by a courtyard.

### **Thursday, January 14, 1999**

Today is Makara Sankranti—the kite flying holiday in India. All the children have small colourful paper kites and are flying them from the roof. The little ones are frustrated because they cannot get the kites to fly from the lower roof where the wind is not strong. The ayahs think it is safer for the young children to be on

the lower roof, but I asked Kala to let them go on the upper roof with the older children because it is well fenced in and they are in no danger. She agreed. Kites are flying from roofs all over Gandhinagar.

Kala arrived on the roof mid-morning with special fruit and candy balls made of sesame seeds and a sweet sticky substance that tasted like molasses. We had a special lunch of crispy fried bread, rice, a vegetable stew and a honey-like sweet. We never have anything to drink with our lunch or dinner. I worry I am not getting enough liquids. When do Indians drink? Surely this must affect vital bodily functions.

Guests arrived late-morning. They included an older man and his wife and their extended family. They were participating in the tradition of giving out sweets on kite-day to the poor. After visiting us, they were going to visit the slums with their gifts of food. I thought of asking them if I could go with them but I hesitated. I am sorry I hesitated as it would have been an experience I would long remember.

Although we had special food today, we normally eat very simply. It's almost the same thing every day. We have spicy rice crispies and sweet milky, spicy tea called "Chai" at breakfast. The children have one glass of milk a day – a mixture of buffalo and cow's milk, and they drink it with breakfast. At lunch we usually have plain rice and curried beans. Although we eat six different kinds of beans throughout the week, they all taste the same to my western palate. At dinner we eat spicy rice and vegetable curry. At least half the curry is made up of potatoes and the rest is eggplant or cauliflower or spinach. Garlic, coriander and spices such as cumin and turmeric are mixed into the curry. At both lunch and dinner we eat chapatis, the poor man's bread. I love it. I worry, however, about the lack of protein, despite the fact that a high protein content can be found in beans.

We do not use any utensils – just our hands. I am learning to let the rice soak up the liquid curry and then scoop it up with the ends of my fingers and put it quickly into my mouth. A spoon has been offered, but I prefer to eat in the same manner as everyone else. However, eating with fingers is an art, and I have yet to

master it. I still get rice on the sides of my mouth and I feel foolish looking at how delicately everyone else can eat.

Each person has a stainless steel plate and cup. They look new and are in good condition. I laugh to myself about the diet. At Helen and Paul's home in Paris, I was eating oysters and drinking champagne as I looked out on the gilded dome of Les Invalides. Two days later I am eating rice and curry with the poorest people of the world.

Kala asked me to stop calling her Kalaben. "What is this Kalaben?" she asked in a somewhat gruff voice. "Call me Kala." I was delighted.

I am still enamoured with life here. The children are mostly sweet, although one little girl who craves attention, drives me crazy. I try to remember that those who are the least lovable need the most loving. It's hard to put that philosophy into practice when a child clings to you constantly. But that is a small worry. Life here is so simple, so basic, so pure. I feel at peace. Canada seems so far away. I haven't yet started pining for Michael and the children. When will it happen? How lonely will I feel? Surely, I won't get away without feeling lonely at all. And if I did, I would feel guilty about it.

### **Friday, January 15, 1999**

This evening Amy and I discussed the role of volunteers at Child Haven. Amy and Jessie, who has left to travel throughout India, have had a difficult time knowing what their role is here. They are uncertain about what they can and should do. I heard this refrain from three other volunteers I talked to, before leaving Canada. It seemed so hard for each of them to find their niche during their three-month stay.

What is our role? This is something I worried about before I came. I am struggling so hard to develop a vision of what I can accomplish.

I can see that I can be an extra pair of hands to help out - playing with the children, cleaning, and teaching English.

I can be a friend to the children and the staff. I can listen and let them know that they are not alone—that there are people who care about them and their futures. And I think I should try to be a good role model for the children and the staff – demonstrating

kindness, gentleness, cleanliness, helpfulness, sincerity and a desire to understand ourselves and the world around us – no easy task.

But I would like to accomplish other things too. I am beginning to formulate some ideas.

I see projects around me that need to be undertaken. The mattresses the children sleep on smell awful. The small children wet them at night. I suggested to Kala that we air them out. She agreed and both yesterday and this morning we did just that. Even though we aired out the mattresses for five or six hours, the odour persisted. So we are airing them out again.

I noticed the children share combs. They often get head lice and sharing combs will simply ensure everyone gets them. I spoke to Kala and asked her if I could buy new combs for everyone and put their names on them. She agreed. Tomorrow or Monday, I will buy combs for everyone.

I have been thinking about the need for a local support group, composed of interested citizens of Gandhinagar. They could provide advice to Kala and organize extra services and goods for the home. It would take a lot of effort on my part to organize such a group.

I also think my work includes acting as an observer and reporting back to Bonnie and Fred.

I think my work here involves many factors. My work for Child Haven began long before I arrived. It started when I told people what I was doing. It affected many people in a positive way.

My work will continue when I return to Canada. I will take photos so I can deliver slide shows to enhance understanding of the organization and the problems faced by developing countries. I have some fund-raising ideas for Child Haven: I'll take silk scarves

to Canada and sell them at a profit; go to book clubs to talk about "A Fine Balance," a novel based in India written by Rohinton Mistry; and encourage book club members to donate to Child Haven.

Some of the volunteers I have talked with would like to make an impact on the way Child Haven operates as an organization. This would take time, patience, tact, and a lot of knowledge of development in third world countries.

I think this place is very hard for young volunteers. They want to change the world – they have great ideas and are frustrated when their ideas are not easily accepted.

In many ways I am no different from the young volunteers. I am caught up with the desire to do something productive and tangible. It is so important to me that I am not just another mouth to feed, that my time here is well spent.

I love it here. I love having the time to play, to think, to read and to write. I hope I will feel this way at the end of my stay.

### **Sunday, January 17, 1999**

Yesterday Amy and I were at the local park when an older couple approached us. They told us they had heard about Child Haven and they wanted to know if they could visit the home. We brought them back to the home and we gave them a tour. The couple invited us to their house the following evening. The house was furnished with a few couches, tables and mats on the granite floor. The wife prepared some delicious Indian food for us and served it to us from a small coffee table in front of the couch where we were sitting. We spent two pleasant hours with them. They did not eat themselves, the food was just for us.

I asked them if they thought having a support group for Child Haven was a good idea. They told us about a school for children who were deaf and mute that had local support. They suggested that we visit the school and find out how it was organized. They also gave us the name of two other people who would be helpful.

I was very excited about starting a local Child Haven committee. I spoke to Kala about this and she suggested two other people I should contact for this purpose.

This afternoon Amy and I took the children to the Hindu temple in Gandhinagar. It was beautiful, but very crowded. A line of people followed a set path in the temple. There was a museum on the temple grounds, which covered about an acre of land. It was so crowded. It was incredible—part Disney and part religion

– there were films, water fountains that danced to music, statues of Gods and depictions of the lives of gurus. One little fellow, Tarun, was interested in everything, while the other children were less interested. For some of them, this was their first visit ever to such a place.

We rode to and from the temple in an auto rickshaw, which is a three wheeled vehicle – one wheel at the front and two at the back. It starts like a motor boat by pulling a cord, and has a canvas or plastic roof covering a metal frame. I love riding in them but I worry that a child will fall out because the rickshaws are so poorly made. One boy sat on the bars that enclosed the passenger seats, until I insisted that he sit on the seat. The outof-context Canadian mother in me was reacting to a situation in which I felt uncomfortable. This is a common way of sitting in rickshaws in India, but it would be so easy for an accident to happen.

When we arrived at the temple a booth was set up at the entrance to the grounds. Nurses were handing out oral vaccine for polio to children under five. I was hesitant about having the children take it because I was not sure whether the process was legitimate, and if so, whether our children already had the vaccine. When I returned home, Kala told me this was how the Indian government ensured all children were vaccinated. I suggested we take the young children to a doctor later in the week.

Kala came into my room to say good night. She said the home needs a licence – Jane Duncan started this, and maybe the second Jane Duncan can finish it. She called me the second “Jane Duncan.” I felt honoured because she told me everyone loved Jane Duncan. She did so much for the home. Kala was

delighted to learn that my name was not really Trish but Patricia, because Jane's daughter's name was Patricia. She told me she feels strong when she sees me. I am so happy.

Tomorrow morning I am expecting Michael to telephone at around

7:30 a.m. This will be around 10 p.m. in Canada on Sunday night. I don't feel lonely at all, but I have begun to miss my husband.

### **Monday, January 18, 1999**

Michael called this morning as planned. I arose early in anticipation of his call. I had been at the home for only six days. I couldn't believe how anxious I was for the telephone to ring. I sat waiting by the telephone in the office. When it finally rang, I lunged for the receiver. Michael's voice reached out to me. I burst into tears. I told him how important being at Child Haven was to me, and how much I appreciated his support. He joked, saying he hoped I would hold that thought. I talked with each of the kids, and then with Michael again. We spoke for about 40 minutes. I felt surrounded by love. Everything seemed to be going well at home. Leah was not feeling like she's stuck with all the work, although I think Michael sounded tired. Matt and Margaux seemed fine. Margaux told me she's glad I am helping the children at Child Haven. It was so good to hear their voices. I fought back the tears once again.

Amy, Kala and I went to Sector 21, the main shopping area of Gandhinagar. It has a much bigger outdoor market than the one in Sector 7 and there are a few restaurants, clothing stores and other shops as well. Even so, the shopping area only covers a few blocks. We bought some stamps for Child Haven and we looked for some school bags for the kids, which I will buy with some of the money given to me by people in Canada. Kala says the school bags wear out so quickly – just as in Canada. I also took photos with the camera Michael had given me for Christmas.

In the evening Amy and I visited Dr. Chitannia, who is a co-signer of cheques for the Child Haven home in Gandhinagar. He was most helpful. I was interested in hearing his views on starting a support group for Child Haven. He suggested we write an article

for the local paper and Amy suggested preparing pamphlets. It seems Jane Duncan had tried to initiate a community group, but her community work stopped when she left.

Dr Chitannia really is a wonderful person. We had a discussion about piles, of all things. He told us about one third of the population of India is constipated due to a diet of rice, spices, oil and too little drinking water. He said everyone should drink about 4 litres of water each day. Dr. Chitannia philosophized about religion and said, "All religions, one God." He is impressed with Child Haven because it is humanitarian and not a church-based organization trying to convert children.

### **Tuesday, January 19, 1999**

This morning we took most of the children for a medical examination at the Civil Hospital, only a few blocks away from the home. These medical exams are needed in order to renew the licence that will allow Child Haven to operate as a home for destitute children, under state law.

The hospital did not inspire confidence—the medical exam seemed to be a mere formality, five minutes for each child, if that. There were long waits with nowhere to sit except for a few benches. Many people sat on the floor and most of those waiting were very poor. The middle class and the wealthy go to private hospitals and clinics. Waiting time, however, was really no worse than at the Children's Hospital in Ottawa. The children had their physicals and eye examinations in about three hours.

I washed the children's bathroom on the second floor because it stinks so badly, but my efforts didn't get rid of the smell. I don't know what we can do to keep it clean and eliminate the odour.

Tonight we will take the youngest children for their polio vaccination.

### **Saturday, January 23, 1999**

On Friday, I went to the family home of Kala's husband, Mukesh. One of his nephews was getting married and Kala asked me if I

would like to go to the wedding. I was very excited at the opportunity to take part and I thanked her for inviting me. Although I had understood that the wedding was in Gandhinagar, a few days before the wedding she told me it was in a village about two and a half hours away by bus. We would be staying overnight. The day before the wedding she told me we would be staying for two nights. I was anxious about staying away from the home that long, but felt I had committed myself to going. I was worried about where I would sleep, but Kala assured me that I would have a room to myself.

On the bus trip, Kala told me Mukesh's nephew was planning to go to Canada and it would be a good opportunity for him to talk to me. I wondered if this was why I had been invited to the wedding. The bus, like all Indian buses I had been on, was old and rickety and felt like it might fall apart.

Shortly after I arrived, the nephew asked me about Canada and the immigration process. He actually knew more than I did about it. I knew the immigration process for Canada worked on a point system. The nephew told me he had received 74 points. He said he needed a minimum of 70 points to obtain the required documents. He is waiting for the Canadian Embassy in Delhi to tell him he can leave for Canada.

After talking to him and other people at the wedding who were interested in moving to Canada, I wondered why middle class people would want to leave India. They are comfortable here, and they have their families with them. Why would they leave to be alone in a foreign country? Will they be better off? They will miss their families and their culture, and they will face a certain amount of discrimination in Canada.

The ceremonies at Mukesh's family were beyond my understanding. Kala was unable to explain the significance of them to me, so I simply watched along with all the other guests. I did understand that the celebrations we were witnessing were for the groom alone, and ceremonies for the bride were happening at her home. The groom's family was to travel to the bride's town the next day, where the marriage ceremony would take place.

A variety of activities occurred throughout the day. A priest had been invited and he intoned over the nephew, his mother and father. At another point during the day, a paste made of turmeric was spread over the chest and back of the boy's body. All the women crowded into a small room to watch. I was suffocating as they squeezed up against me, but I realized that an Indian's need for space is quite different from that of a western woman. A delicious vegetarian buffet for both lunch and dinner was served. The number of guests the hosts packed into their small home was incredible.

I felt overwhelmed. About 10 women watched me as I put on my sari and make-up, shortly after we arrived mid-morning. They laughed as I brushed my hair because it is so short. All the women have beautiful long dark hair, twisted into a braid or bun that has been brushed with coconut oil until it shines. Their interest in my make-up sparked an impromptu demonstration. Most of the women couldn't speak any English, some spoke a little English, and several people, mostly men, spoke English quite well.

Everyone wanted to talk to me. I managed to cope well all day and all evening by smiling, laughing and answering the same questions over and over again. I had brought photos of my family and friends and showed them to everyone. By 10:30 p.m., I was exhausted. It was time for bed.

Kala had assured me I would have a room to myself. When we arrived at the home of the groom, however, she told me I would be sharing a room with her and Mukesh. Reluctantly, I agreed.

I went to the room that had been assigned to me. It was in a neighbour's house and I had been using this room all day as a refuge from the festivities – a blessed space to myself. About half an hour after I lay down to sleep, the door to the room opened and several women filed in looking for a spot to sleep. Kala and Mukesh came in to sleep too. Everyone was pulling mats out of a cupboard and started to lie down beside me.

I started to panic. I had not said a word to some of these women and they were now my roommates! It was dark outside and the wedding drums were beating. I knew I was the only western

woman for miles around. I felt so insecure in such a strange and unfamiliar environment. Kala realized I was having difficulties. She tried to comfort me and she led me to another room where there were fewer women.

I knew I had to get back to more familiar, safer, ground. I told Kala I would return to Child Haven in the morning. I finally fell asleep at about 2 a.m. and was awakened at 5 a.m. Everyone was getting up to prepare to go to the bride's family for the marriage ceremony.

I talked with Kala again and we agreed I should take the bus back to Gandhinagar. I said good-bye to the host and apologized for leaving. I was worried about insulting him, but I was more concerned about minimizing my anxiety. It appeared that guests were arriving and departing at will. I hoped he would take my leaving in stride.

Mukesh took me to the bus station on his motorcycle at about 6 a.m. It was still dark. He stayed with me until the bus came about a half-hour later. He was very kind. I was still nervous on the bus—it was old and rattled constantly. I worried it might fall apart when it hit a big bump. The roads are extremely narrow and it seemed we missed hitting an oncoming vehicle several times, by a mere inch.

All the way back to Gandhinagar, I worried I was not on the right bus. I could not read the signs on the bus or at any of the stops the bus made. The Gujarati script is totally unlike English and I was at the mercy of the other bus passengers and the ticket collector, none of whom spoke English, to assure me we were going in the right direction. The sum total of our conversation was my question, "Gandhinagar?" and their smiling nod affirming that I was going in the right direction. I did not know the bus route, so there were no familiar signposts.

When I saw the streets of Gandhinagar, I breathed a sigh of relief and started to feel safe once again. Even then, I was not sure I really was in Gandhinagar and not some other similar looking city and I anxiously asked the ticket collector if we were

at my destination. The bus finally arrived at the station, and I walked back to the home. I thought to myself that I had returned to the normalcy of Child Haven. I laughed, realizing that looking after destitute children in India can hardly be considered normal. Did I know what “normal” meant anymore?

As I reflect on the situation I realize I was experiencing culture shock. I felt frightened and alone when, in fact, I was surrounded by very kind and caring people. The only person I could take comfort from was Kala. She actually stroked my arms and back as I lay, almost in tears, on the mat. She said I reminded her of one of the children. I understood how a child feels when put in a new social situation and runs to his or her mother for safety. I really wanted to be near Kala – she represented what was familiar. She was my only security.

### **Sunday, January 24, 1999**

When I returned from the wedding, I was very tired. In the afternoon I tidied up the crafts. So much had to be thrown out and re-organized. I helped the children draw and make designs with stamps sent by another volunteer. Later, Amy and I had the children draw pictures of themselves. I took photos of them to pin on their pictures. Only about 12 children participated. The older children wanted to watch TV.

In the late afternoon, I found four year-old Shital crying alone in the girls' bedroom. I held her in my arms for about 20 minutes until she fell asleep. I put her on a mat where she slept until dinner. Later I found out she had been hitting another child and was being punished by being isolated in the bedroom. Great help I was! But I loved holding and stroking and comforting her. She is such a tiny, precious human being.

This afternoon, Amy and I took about half the children to the local zoo. Calling it a zoo is a compliment. It was more like a park with walking trails. The first exhibit we saw were the snake cages. The first few cages were empty. I wondered mildly, where the snakes had gone. I hoped they weren't hanging around to socialize with the visitors. In the next cage we saw a dead snake in a bottle of formaldehyde. Inside the last cage of the snake

exhibit, was a big, tired, seemingly toothless old snake that looked like he was ready to die. I wondered if a bottle of formaldehyde was waiting for him! The most interesting animals we saw were monkeys. They were not part of the exhibit, but were living in their natural habitat and they are regarded in the same way Canadians regard squirrels.

## **Tuesday, January 26, 1999**

Every time I turn around, I can see something that needs to be done.

When I took the younger children to the doctor to get their polio vaccine, I realized the need for accurate medical records. Although we have a file on each child, we have no ongoing record of their illnesses and what medications they have taken. When children first arrive at Child Haven, a form is filled out indicating what inoculations the child has had. In many cases they have had none at all, or their parents do not know what has been given to the child.

I also think that we need to develop an admissions procedure, which should include having the child examined by a doctor for vitamin deficiency, worms, and lice. The child should get whatever inoculations are needed.

The clothes for the children need sorting. Some of the children are wearing what I would describe as "real rags." I know that there are second hand clothes in good condition which have been sent to Gandhinagar from Canada. They are stored in a locker in the office. The ayahs are not taking the time to sort through the clothing. The clothes the kids are wearing could be vastly improved by mending them properly. The ayahs do some mending but they do not do a very good job. They often use thread that does not match the colour of the cloth being mended.

Last night I found a new dress for Shital amongst the clothes that have been donated to Child Haven. The dress she wore most of the time was ripped at the waist and many of the buttons on the back of the dress had fallen off. Shital was delighted to be trying on a new dress with pink smocking and rosebuds all over

it. I led her to the mirror and a big smile came over her face. Shital is the tiniest, cutest little girl imaginable.

I also found Tarun a new pair of trousers. His trousers had ripped and he looked like, of all things, an orphan! Maya told me he was delighted with his new clothes. I worry that the children look scruffy, especially those who go to school. I want the children to look cared for. If school authorities know that we look after our children well, then they will too. I do not want them to suffer the disdain of their school-mates because of their clothes.

We need to organize the medication prescribed to the children. Yesterday we took more children to the hospital for their medical examinations. Some were given medicine or pills. The pills are wrapped in newspaper with no identification on them whatsoever

– neither the name of the child, nor what the pills are for, nor how they are to be taken. It would be a good idea to save containers for film, label them, and put the pills for each child in his or her own container. I worry about a mix-up of medication.

Tonight we are going to look for school bags again. The kids' school bags really are falling apart. Mukesh says he knows of a tailor who can make good ones for the children. I wonder if the tailor is a friend and Mukesh wants to give him some business. I really don't care and as long as he does a good job at a reasonable price, I will be happy.

I can see how it would be helpful to spend more time here—maybe a year or two – but of course that is impossible for me at this point in my life.

### **Wednesday, January 27, 1999**

Today was frustrating. I kept running into roadblocks.

I have started processing the adoption of an 11 year-old boy who has been at the Child Haven home for many years. Child Haven and the Gujarat Voluntary Association for Adoption had searched for a suitable family for this boy in India after his mother had decided to place him for adoption, but without success. Bonnie and Fred knew of a Canadian couple who wanted a child.

Child Haven does not normally get involved with adoptions, so it is unusual for volunteer interns to be involved in this kind of activity. The adoption process to place this boy with the Canadian couple started over a year and a half ago. A number of volunteers have been involved in the case.

A few days ago, I telephoned the social agency that is handling the adoption for us, to find out the status of the case. Child Haven is not licensed to process international adoptions, and that is the reason for working through another agency.

Amy had understood that the organization had agreed to process the adoption and that the required papers had been forwarded to CARA, the monitoring agency of the central Indian government, for approval and issuance of the "No Objection Certificate." When I spoke with the agency's social worker, he told me that the Board of Directors of the agency had not yet agreed to process the papers.

I was concerned about this, because I knew that this step should have been taken some weeks earlier. I telephoned Mr. Patel, the lawyer in Ahmedabad who was representing the agency in the adoption. He did not realize that the agency had not yet agreed to process the adoption papers. Mr. Patel informed me that an Indian policy exists that requires each orphanage that processes adoptions to ensure there are an equal number of in-country adoptions and inter-country adoptions. Mr. Patel thinks that there have not been enough in-country adoptions to allow the adoption to proceed. Mr. Patel told me he would telephone the agency and find out what was happening. He asked me to telephone him the next day.

Later in the day, Amy, Kala and I went into Ahmedabad to meet with another Mr. Patel, Natubhai Patel. He is the Chairman and Managing Trustee of ISSW, Siddharth Foundation, a social service agency that runs, among other things, an orphanage. We were meeting with him to discuss renewing the licence for Child Haven to allow it to operate as a home for destitute children. He is a friend of Child Haven, according to Kala, but I do not know the history of the relationship. He can help ensure Child Haven gets its licence renewed. It took us an hour and a half to

get to his office, but he did not appear for our meeting. Mr. Patel was not at work that day, because his uncle had died.

We then went to the e-mail shop, to receive another dollop of frustration. Much of the time at the computer was spent waiting for the system to find my Hot Mail address. When I finally reached my mail, I read my letters quickly because of the cost involved. I tried to return e-mail to my friend, and lo and behold, the system failed to function. The last time we were in Ahmedabad, the system was not working either.

I did receive an e-mail from Michael and the kids which I answered. I told them I missed them and that I was giving up on e-mail. I would send hard copy letters to everyone. Hard copy letters are much better if there is no urgency in writing. I feel pressured by time constraints when using e-mail knowing that each minute is costing money. Writing in hard copy allows me to take the time to write carefully. As well, I have time to savour hard copy letters that are sent to me.

We ate in a restaurant in Ahmedabad—the food was delicious. We ordered what is called a thali—a variety of vegetarian hors d'oeuvres served with rice and a selection of Indian breads. It was a nice change from the beans and rice that we eat at Child Haven everyday. Kala, Amy and I got into a discussion about crying. Kala said she saw crying as a sign of weakness. This really worried me because I had been upset, just short of crying, at the wedding this past weekend. I had been worried that by letting her know I was upset, I would lose her respect as a strong and capable woman. Our conversations at lunch confirmed this for me. When Amy went to the bathroom, I told Kala my concerns. She said that after the weekend, she realized I was not a strong woman. Being strong is very important to her. I said this concerned me because I was afraid she would not trust me with the activities of Child Haven – especially helping with the adoption and renewing the required licence for Child Haven. She assured me that she knew I was quite capable, but not strong. I felt somewhat better after our conversation, but evidently I have lost some stature in her eyes.

That night Mukesh showed us a sample school bag that the tailor

had made. It looked really strong. The tailor promised to make all the bags in 10 days. We have to give the tailor half the money now and half the money when they are completed. They will each cost 200 rupees (\$8) – a reasonable price compared to the school bags we saw in the local shops. I thought Kala's daughter should receive a school bag like all the rest of the children, although she is not officially a Child Haven child. I want to maintain good relations with Kala, and this will help.

#### **Thursday, January 28, 1999**

Today I telephoned Mr. Patel, the lawyer, about the adoption, but he was not available. I asked that he return my call. I also urged Kala to call Natubhai Patel to set up another appointment to discuss renewing the licence for Child Haven. He agreed to meet us tomorrow.

I am going to e-mail Bonnie to find out if I can travel with her to the other projects when she arrives in February. Her regular visits ensure the homes are functioning properly. I also want to know when a new volunteer will be arriving, as Amy will be leaving in a few days. I was going to do this yesterday, but I didn't have the energy for some reason. Perhaps because I felt depressed about the conversation with Kala about crying.

I spend a lot of time with the smaller children because they are home more than the older ones, and they are more open with the volunteer interns and staff in general. This is not surprising. Small children everywhere are more open to making friends with new people.

Of course I react differently to each child. Most of the children are very sweet and it is easy to love them. A few are very clingy and I find myself feeling annoyed with them. I feel badly about this. I'm attempting to deal with it appropriately.

I have thought many times that western child psychologists should spend some time here. These children call into question the whole notion of mother deprivation. They have had very tough lives. Most children only have one parent, and many of them have not seen their parents for months. There is very little consistency

amongst the adults in their lives. The staff turn-over is high and volunteers come and go every three months, although a few stay longer. Some children have contact with their parents, who come and visit them periodically. Some of the children have siblings right here in the home. What all the children have is a structure to each day, guaranteed meals, a roof over their head and the friendship of other children.

It is wonderful to see how the children look after one another. Often two children will sleep curled up together on a mat. Older children will look after the younger children. When I have taken the children on outings, 15 year-old Meghna has proved invaluable in helping to keep everyone together. Of course the children also fight, like children everywhere.

I finally know all the names of the children. It has taken me over two weeks to learn them because the sounds of the names are so unfamiliar. I have also interacted with each child alone or in a small group at least once. I love doing this because it gives me an opportunity to see the strengths and weaknesses of each child. When I deal with children in large groups, I feel I am involved in nothing more than crowd control.

Often, before school and after dinner at night, I invite a few children who have finished their lessons into my room, where I teach them English, or play with them. I close my door so that we can have a quiet time together and not be distracted by what is going on in the main room. I am trying to do this with each child to ensure fairness. The children view this as a treat. Normally, the children are not allowed into interns rooms, but as I have a room to myself I am not disrupting the quiet time of another volunteer.

This morning, I invited Rohan, a three year-old and the youngest child at Child Haven, into my room. For some reason I did not close the door. He indicated to me that he wanted the door closed. When I got up and closed the door a big smile came over his face. The door had been closed for other children and he wanted it closed for him, too.

I got out the coloured markers and some paper for Rohan to draw. I put his name in the upper right-hand corner of the paper as I do for all the children. He took about seven or eight markers out of the box, took the caps off, lined the markers up all pointing

in one direction on one side of him and put the tops on the other side of him. So, he's an organizer, I thought to myself. He then proceeded to take each marker and write wiggly lines over his name.

When he finished this, he stood up to leave because he heard the other children going downstairs. I indicated that before he left he had to put the markers back in the box. He shook his head "no". I indicated that he had to do it, and I sat him down in front of the markers. He wasn't co-operating. I am sure he could tell I was annoyed with him. When he said in Gurjarati, "One minute," I thought he might have to go to the bathroom so I let him leave the room. I realized when he headed downstairs instead of towards the bathroom that he simply wanted to be with the other children. I took his hand and led him back to my room, where I started handing him markers and tops. His mother, who works here as a child care worker, followed us into the room and encouraged him to put the tops on the markers. I praised him for completing the task and he left the room. I wonder how he will respond to me after this incident.

### **Friday, January 29, 1999**

Today, Amy, Kala and I visited Natubhai Patel at his office in Ahmedabad to discuss renewing our licence. Kala told us that he might provide us with some insight into how we could speed up the adoption process for the boy going to Canada. He knows how the social service system works and he has a lot of contacts.

While we were in his office, Natubhai Patel telephoned the Social Defence Department about the licence. The Social Defence Department is comparable to a provincial Welfare Department. The official at the Social Defence Department said that our written request for a licence that was sent to them in September, 1998 had never been received. Luckily, we had a copy of the letter and Natubhai Patel advised us to have it re-typed with a current date on it.

Having the letter typed was quite an experience. I expected that Natubhai Patel's secretary would type the letter, but Kala told me that it would be inappropriate to ask him to do this. We walked

to the nearby courts to find someone who would type the letter. At least 40 or 50 lawyers were milling around. There were rows

of tables underneath canvas and corrugated iron roofing held up by poles. Some of the lawyers were sitting at these tables obviously discussing cases with their clients. Signs advertising their services were either sitting on their table or hanging from the make-shift roof above them. Another area was filled with men sitting at typewriters, some typing and some waiting for business. They too were set up at tables outside the courthouse and some had typewriters balanced on low stone fences. The typewriters were 1950s vintage. I thought of the description of the courts in Rohinton Mistry's book "A Fine Balance." It was exactly as described. I could not believe it. I felt as if I had walked into the book.

We found a man who agreed to type our letter for 20 rupees. We took the newly rewritten letter back to Natubhai Patel who said he would forward it to the Social Defence Department for us and organize a meeting with them about our licence. He told me to telephone him next week about a meeting.

We asked a few questions about the adoption process. I asked him about the quota requirement and whether it was enforced on an agency-by-agency basis, or on a country-wide basis. He told me that it was a requirement that each adoption agency ensures at least half of the adoptions processed were for Indian parents. He said he thought the agency we were dealing with had processed the required number of in-country adoptions. He also explained some of the personal dynamics that existed. This helped us understand how to approach officials involved in the adoption. After he answered a few more questions, we left, feeling somewhat more informed about how the adoption process worked.

After the meeting, Amy expressed concern about our conversation with Natubhai Patel. She felt that he had been quite open with me and that older volunteers were given more respect than younger ones. I explained to her that my age and experience might have had something to do with it. On the other hand, Natubhai Patel might simply have been in a talkative mood.

Amy has expressed similar concerns before. She feels that because of my age, Kala is more likely to listen to me than to young volunteers like her. I laughed when she told me this and said it was nice that age was a valuable commodity in India. In North America, aging women are devalued. I said that young, attractive women like her were the sought-after people.

We later went for lunch at a restaurant in Ahmedabad and ate a Gujarati thali. We went to the e-mail shop and I sent a short e-mail to Bonnie asking about the arrival of the next volunteer. I sent a few messages to friends.

When we returned home, I tried to contact Mr. Patel, the lawyer, but again was unable to do so.

### **Saturday, January 30, 1999**

Amy is leaving tomorrow and the kids drew good-bye cards for her. She has gone out for lunch with a friend of Child Haven. When she comes back we will eat the oranges and candies I bought with the money given to me by my friends and colleagues in Canada.

I am anxiously awaiting the arrival of the new volunteer. I do not like the thought of being the only Canadian at the home.

### **Sunday, January 31, 1999**

The send-off for Amy went well. I think she was really pleased with the cards the children made for her. I felt depressed on Saturday night knowing that she was leaving and I would be alone. I was worried about how I would cope with no one to speak English to, in any meaningful way. Amy and I had many interesting and lively conversations and, as much as I get along with Kala, our discussions are limited because of language barriers.

Amy had trouble sending a package home – it ended up costing her almost \$80 dollars. I had told her earlier that I would not be able to take her things home for her because I had already promised Jane Duncan that I would take to Canada clothes and

photo albums she had left in India. I also need room for the gifts I plan to buy. I felt badly when I learned she had to spend so much money. I am taking a few small things for her.

Kala and I got up early this morning and sent Amy on her way. I spent the morning moving downstairs to her room. I decided to move downstairs because the volunteer bathroom is attached to this room and the office is next door. The home gets locked up early at night and when I come in late, or go to bed late, I disturb all the sleeping children upstairs.

The children helped me to move which was a lot of fun. I went through a lot of old stuff—clothes that have been left by other volunteers that the kids and ayahs can use, broken crayons that are no more than stubs, games that have most of the pieces missing. I either set it aside for the children and the ayahs or got rid of it. Of course the children found things they wanted in the junk.

I am a little anxious about being alone downstairs, although Kala and her family are in a room downstairs with its own separate entrance. I worry that if someone decided to kill me, they could do it a lot easier here than upstairs. The windows are barred, but a shot gun could easily be pointed through the bars at my bed, which is right under the window. I moved the bed so that a smaller portion of it was directly under the window. I am sure this sounds absurd. I have thoughts like these at home in Canada too, when I am sleeping alone in my house. It is pretty scary knowing I am probably the only western woman for miles around in a culture that is so foreign to me. My sympathy for new immigrants deepens by the minute.

This afternoon, I took those children to the zoo who had not been last week. I went with Ayah Hari Priya, who helped with the 10 children. I dragged my feet through the zoo, feeling lonely. Not even the sight of the chattering monkeys swinging in the trees could make me laugh.

**Monday, February 1, 1999**

I decided to go to Ahmedabad, both to take a day off for myself and to visit a few museums I thought the older children might be interested in. I visited the Gandhi Ashram and the Calico Museum of Textiles. Only a few of the older children might be interested in the Calico Museum, because the tour guide gives a fairly academic presentation about textiles and needlework. However, I found it fascinating.

More children would enjoy the Gandhi Ashram. It was Gandhi's home for about 15 years after he returned from South Africa. It had a very peaceful feeling and I felt quiet and rested from the moment I entered. I took time to read everything carefully. Because I have just completed reading Gandhi's autobiography, I found the Ashram particularly interesting.

Although I cannot agree with everything Gandhi says, I think his philosophy is fascinating. I am attracted to his pursuit of humility. In his book "Experiments with Truth" he has written that we must make ourselves as humble as possible. He wrote:

"In renunciation, it is not the comforts, luxuries and pleasures that are hard to give up. Many could forgo heavy meals, a full wardrobe, a fine house, et cetera; it is the ego that they cannot forgo. The self that is wrapped, suffocated, in material things – which includes social position, popularity and power – is the only self they know and they will not abandon it for an illusory new self, for a different life, shorn of material trappings, which they may never attain, which perhaps does not exist, not for them at any rate, and not in their surroundings."

Humility is such an elusive characteristic. It is hard to put it into practice in a society that places a strong emphasis on self and identity.

Gandhi was a man of principle and he did not seem to let compassion get in the way of his principles. I find this aspect of his personality troubling. For instance, he would not follow the advice of doctors and give his very sick son some chicken broth or eggs. He was a vegetarian because of his principle of non

violence, including non-violence to animals. He would not let his wife keep some gifts given to him for her, because of his work in South Africa. He felt the gifts would compromise his neutrality.

I understand his concern about the gifts, but I couldn't withhold food from a sick child, especially when a doctor had recommended it. I would be too frantic. Gandhi's wife, Kasturbai, said, "Women understand the language of sorrow better than men." I think she was right.

## **Tuesday, February 2, 1999**

A dark cloak of loneliness has wrapped itself around me.

I miss Michael. I cry when I think about him and the children. I feel overwhelmed by the fact that I am so lucky to have such a wonderful family. I feel so fortunate that Michael has been a willing partner in this adventure.

When I told Kala how I was missing Michael, and what a wonderful person he is, she asked if I always felt the same way when I was with him everyday in Canada. I laughed. Kala's right—of course we don't always see eye to eye. Kala has such a wonderful way of making people face the truth.

Last night Bonnie telephoned to say I could travel with her while she was visiting projects in India. When I had sent her the e-mail a few days ago asking if this was possible, I didn't have any particular hopes that this could come to pass. I was asking so near to her time of departure for India.

I am so excited about travelling with Bonnie. Although I had thought of doing some touring of India for a few days, I was not anxious to do it on my own. I would far rather see the other Child Haven homes than be a tourist. Seeing the Child Haven homes will allow me to see India, but with a purpose. This trip will give me an opportunity to spend some time with Bonnie, find out how she views the organization, the role of volunteers, what problems and difficulties face Child Haven and if there is anything useful I might do for the organization when I return home.

Although Bonnie asked if I would like to go to Mumbai, where a new home is being built, then to the Hyderabad home and finally to the home in Tamil Nadu, I have decided not to go as far as Tamil Nadu. I think the expense and extra time of going to Tamil Nadu would be too much. However, I think a week away from the home will do me good.

Knowing I will be travelling with Bonnie really helps to give shape to my time in India. Bonnie told me last night that the new volunteer who was to arrive in Gandhinagar this week has cancelled her trip. I will be alone until Bonnie comes in about two weeks. I think I can handle two and a half weeks by myself.

I tried all day to fax Bonnie about my decision to go with her to Mumbai and Hyderabad, but it was impossible. I went to a nearby shop in a large office complex where the public can use fax machines and telephones. When I got there, about two or three men were there. It is amazing how such small shops survive economically.

The owner tried several times to send the fax for me but to no avail. The men told me there was a problem with the line to Canada. I couldn't believe it. I was sure they were probably not operating the machine correctly. How could there be any problems with the line to Canada? The owner told me I owed him 200 rupees for his efforts. I was incensed. How could he charge me when I had not received any service, I demanded. "This was not fair," I said, as I handed him the money. I promised never go there again.

In an effort to appease me, the shop owner said he would try again to send my fax at no cost to me. He tried, but again to no avail. The small group of men that had been there when I first arrived had expanded to about seven. One of the men explained that the method of payment was legitimate – that the Indian postal service charged suppliers of a fax service every time they tried to fax a document, whether or not the fax was sent. "This," they said, "is the system." When I finally realized that no one was trying to take advantage of me, I paid the owner the costs for his last effort. I apologized for my behaviour, smiled at everyone, and left.

I tried to send the fax later in the day at a different shop that offered fax services, but again, it was impossible and again, I was charged for the effort.

I decided to telephone Bonnie later in the evening. When I reached her, I told her I had tried to send her a fax but without success. She told me she had also tried to send a fax to India but could not send it. Evidently there was a problem with access between Canada and India, something that the men in the first shop had told me at 10 a.m. that morning.

Not listening to the men caused me some grief, and made me look foolish too. Funny, how I thought I was right.

### **Wednesday, February 3, 1999**

Today I organized the files for each child at the home. There is a precise way these files must be organized to meet government standards. They must be in order when the government officials come to inspect the home for our licence. I had Maya help me, and the task took about five hours to complete. All of this activity was highly productive.

Later in the day I decided to take the little ones to the park. At first Rohan, the youngest child in the home, wanted to come, then he lost interest. His mother Tara was trying to pressure him into going with me. As a result I felt I had to convince him too. Normally I would leave a child at the home who does not want to go to the park.

From the facial expressions and gestures, I could understand that there was some problem with his shoes. His mother told Shital, who has no shoes, to go and get some shoes for Rohan in the backyard, where shoes and thongs are kept for those children who have them. Some of the children either have lost their thongs or broken them. Rohan would not put on the shoes that Shital brought him. Tara then tried to get Kajul, another of the little girls who had thongs on, to take them off and give them to Rohan. I protested, "No, Kajul can keep her own thongs."

I decided to leave for the park with the girls. Rohan could come

along if he wished. Rohan's mother urged him into accompanying us. He cried for the first 50 feet. I marched Rohan back to the home because I was not interested in having a crying child with me. I explained in a very pleasant way to his mother that he was crying, and therefore I would not take him to the park. She swiftly hit him. I should have realized what her reaction to him would be, and kept him with me.

I am concerned about the pandering to Rohan. I also felt annoyed that the little girls were being asked to attend to Rohan's needs. Girls in India are second class citizens – as they are in many countries, but far more so than in the west. It angers me when little girls are treated that way. I felt angry towards Rohan. He was getting preferential treatment because his mother works at the home, and because he is male.

It bothered me that I felt so upset with Rohan. I wondered what was getting into me. The day before I was angry with the people who ran the Fax shop, and today I was angry with Rohan. I must control my feelings. I am, after all, a role model for the children and the ayahs. Because I represent Child Haven in the community, I feel I must be above reproach.

#### **Thursday, February 4, 1999**

This morning 14 year-old Ghanshyam, had a stomach ache. I noticed Hari Priya, the child care worker, and Meghna, the oldest girl, walking with him outside the home. I called to them and asked what they were doing. They said they were taking him to the hospital. I could see Ghanshyam was in considerable pain, so I thought it would be better to take him in an auto rickshaw than have him walk to the hospital. I called Kala who decided she and I should take him to a local doctor, Dr. Patel, who is "a good doctor."

Dr. Patel was quite a sight. He was different from any doctor I had ever seen before. His office seemed so make-shift, and for that matter, so did he. There was a small, old battered desk, and some medication sitting on old shelves. The shelves were located next to cement walls that had been painted green at some far distant point in their past. The doctor shuffled in wearing rubber

thongs, a pair of old white cotton pants, an old sweater, a knitted ski toque, and a pair of aviator sunglasses. I was glad he was a good doctor!

The toque was the most unusual item of the doctor's apparel, as it was about 18 degrees Centigrade outside, and would warm up to a high of about 25 degrees. Indians seem to have little tolerance for cold. Many wear hats during their winter, although it is as hot as our Canadian summer days.

Dr. Patel diagnosed the problem as worms, and gave Ghanshyam medication. We discussed the need for everyone to be treated because worms can pass easily from one person to another. When I asked Kala if we could afford to give everyone the medication, Dr. Patel said he would reduce the price from 10 rupees to eight rupees, because the medication was for Child Haven. He said this was not an emergency and he would come to the home next week with the medication for everyone. I laughed and said I considered this to be an emergency.

We then had a discussion about the need for good hygiene. Dr. Patel said the children should wash both their hands and their feet before they eat. He explained the Indian custom of washing feet before mealtime. Indians generally eat on the floor, and their feet are near the food. They always take off their shoes before entering a home and walk barefoot inside. He explained the life cycle of worms to both Kala and me. Good thing I am not the squeamish type.

On my way out I asked Dr. Patel if he would come and explain the need for good personal hygiene to the children. Kala and I could talk to the children, but they would listen to him more attentively, because he is a doctor. I had been concerned about personal hygiene in the home. This was the ideal opportunity to deal with it. He agreed, and said he would speak to the children when he brought the medication.

Dr. Patel then said he could see I had really involved myself with the institution, and that my work was much appreciated. I am amazed at the number of people in India who have said this to me. Each time I have taken the children to the hospital, the doctors

have said essentially the same thing. It is unexpected and kind. I always reply that I am the one to be thankful for having this wonderful experience.

When we got home, Kala discussed the need for good hygiene with the ayahs, Chandu, the cook, and Koki, our 18 year-old cleaning lady. Kala asked Chandu to cut his nails, which the doctor had recommended as a means of preventing the spread of germs. During our discussion, I mentioned that we were the most important people in terms of washing our hands and feet, because the children watch us and follow what we do. My comments did not have much impact. Kala sat down to eat lunch without washing her hands. She laughed when I pointed this out to her. She promised to wash them before dinner.

After lunch, we talked to the children. We told the boys not to urinate on the floor in the bathroom, but to use the toilet - or at least the hole for the drain, and then wash it with water. The little boys have been whizzing directly onto the bathroom floor instead of into the toilet. They would then take a bucket of water and throw it over the floor. It was an ineffective method of keeping the bathroom clean. This is what had caused the bathroom to smell so badly.

We emphasized the importance of washing their hands after going to the toilet, and washing their hands and feet before eating. Although they do wash them now, it is a very cursory washing. We are improving, one baby step at a time.

Later, Kala and I asked Koki to clean the upstairs bathroom thoroughly. Although Koki's job is to clean the bathroom every day, she has not been doing a very good job of it. I decided I would help her. I put on the rubber gloves I had brought from Canada, and a pair of rubber thongs. When Koki, the ayahs and Kala saw me they all started to laugh. The gloves were a subject of great hilarity because they had never seen them before. After I spent about five minutes helping Koki, she indicated that she wanted to wear my gloves and thongs while cleaning the bathroom. I happily gave them to her. She was immensely pleased.

I felt positive about my intervention. Kala was informed by the doctor about personal hygiene in a non-threatening way. If only a few of the adults or children are convinced of the need for good personal hygiene, the effort will have been worthwhile. The topic created much laughter throughout the day. It was fun for all of us, and my Gujarati vocabulary now includes, "Sabuti-a-dowah" - wash your hands with soap.

I fear we have missed the opportunity to ensure the adoption of the boy going to Canada. Kala telephoned the social worker handling the adoption to ask for an appointment. He said he was busy. I am having trouble getting through to both the social worker and Mr. Patel, the lawyer working on the case.

My telephone calls go mostly unanswered, although Mr. Patel, told us a few days ago, that the adoption case will come before the Board of Directors at their next meeting. We have been given no definite date when this meeting will occur. I am worried this will happen before we have an opportunity to see the social worker one more time. It is so important to have his goodwill to help ensure this adoption gets processed as soon as possible. I am beginning to think that the adoption is not meant to be.

### **Friday, February 5, 1999**

Today we took Vijay and Pravin to the hospital for their checkups. These two little boys are brothers. They recently returned to the home after several weeks absence to attend their father's funeral. They missed going to the hospital with the other children.

The pediatrician was not available to do the medical check-ups. We were, however, able to see the eye specialist after a two-hour wait. The eye doctor said that Pravin's eyes were healthy, but Vijay could not see well at night. He said Vijay's condition was caused by a lack of Vitamin A and he needed more leafy green vegetables in his diet. The doctor prescribed some pills for him that we received free of charge from the hospital pharmacy.

When we returned home, I asked Kala if we had enough money for more vegetables. She said she would spend the money if it

were necessary. The season for green vegetables was winter and they would become more and more expensive during the summer. Should the children have vitamin pills, or is this an absurd western idea in this setting?

In the afternoon, I took the little children to the park. It is amazing to see how much Shital and Rohan have improved. The steps to a slide have been left standing in the park and the children use them as a climbing structure. Only a few short weeks ago, Shital would climb up two steps and then climb down. A few days ago, she climbed up higher to the bar from where the children jump into the sand. She jumped into my arms and I put her into the sand. Yesterday she jumped without my help. I could tell she was so proud of herself from her ear-to-ear grin. Rohan has progressed to the point where he will jump into the sand with my help. A few weeks ago, he wouldn't go near the climbing structure.

In the evening, we held a ceremony to hand out the new school bags to the children. The tailor had finished the job as promised, and he had done excellent work. Kala invited each child to the office one by one and she asked each one to hand in his or her old torn school bag before receiving the new one. This little ceremony was to impress upon the children the importance of looking after the new school bag.

At one point during the evening, Bhailu, Kala's two year-old son, found a marble that one of the children was playing with and put it in his mouth. Mukesh came to me and said, "Dangerous," in a gruff voice. I really felt terrible, because of course I know that marbles are dangerous. Although the older boys were supposed to return the marbles to me, three were not returned. I have decided to throw out all the marbles, because it would be so easy for Bhailu to choke on one. I also feel badly because I fear I may have lost some respect in the eyes of Kala and Mukesh. It is so important that I maintain their respect in every way possible because only by having their respect will I be able to help the home.

Today Rohan used the toilet instead of the floor in the bathroom and washed his hands. That's wonderful – when something like that happens I really feel like I am making a difference. Kala



Clockwise from the top: Leah, Margaux, Michael, Matthew and myself



Bonnie Cappuccino and the children outside the Child Haven home (S. Wires)



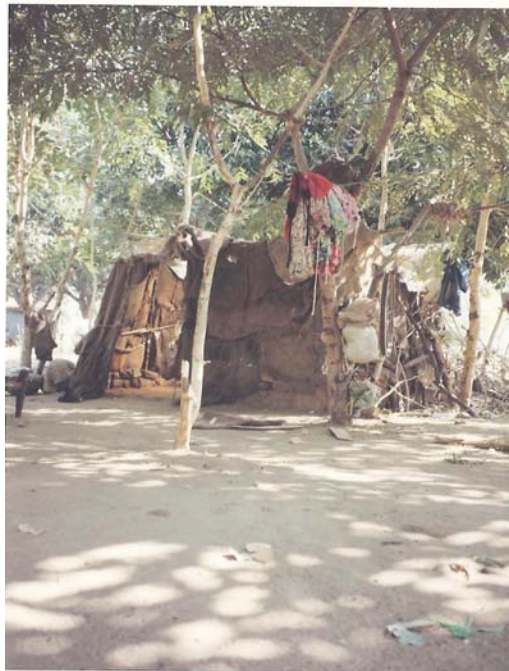
Kala, the manager of Child Haven in Gandhinagar at the local market.



The exterior of the Child Haven home



Hari Priya, washing dishes at our outside tap.



The neighbour's home.



Four boys, dressed and ready for school



Amy Sister, getting out of an auto rickshaw

developed a schedule for the children to take turns washing the bathroom in the late afternoon. Koki has been reminded to wash the bathrooms in the morning.

### **Saturday, February 6, 1999**

Today I took it easy. I wrote a fair amount, I took the children to the park, did some washing, read a bit, and taught the older kids English after dinner.

The children went to school today with the new school bags on their backs. They looked so cute, all with the same brand new navy blue school bags.

I had a great telephone conversation with my kids this morning. I had asked Leah to telephone me so that I might wish her a happy birthday now that she is 18. Although we can receive long distance telephone calls at the home, we cannot make them. This is a security measure to ensure that Child Haven does not pay for long distance calls made by volunteers and staff.

Leah seemed so happy. She told me Margaux had awakened early to make her breakfast in bed, and Matthew had given her a card that he had made on the computer. I was pleased to hear how others in the family were helping her celebrate her birthday. Michael left for Australia this morning. I was worried there would be no celebration for Leah today. Michael had assured me that Leah's birthday would be celebrated when he returned from Australia.

I spoke with both Margaux and Matthew. Margaux told me she received 81 percent in history. Matthew is sick with a sore throat and a cold. He didn't sound very happy. I spoke with Michael's sister, Judith, who is looking after the kids while he is away. I am always thankful for her – she has been such a big help to us. She really loves the children. I told Judith that we had bought the children new school bags with the money she and others had given for the home. I think she was quite pleased.

During the morning, Kala called me and said I had a visitor. It was a man I had met at the hospital on Friday when we took the

children for their check-ups. At the time he asked if he could visit Child Haven, and I had given him our address. He asked me a few questions about the place, but his authoritative manner was off-putting. I wondered what he wanted.

I decided to remain standing, even though he was sitting on the bench outside the front of the home. I wanted to indicate to him that I was in control and had authority myself. After a few minutes, the man said, with some impatience, "Sit down, sit down, you don't need to stand, you are an old woman." I looked at Kala, and we both burst out laughing. She hit the palm of my hand with the palm of hers, as is the custom in India to express common understanding, or happiness.

I realized that my standing was seen by the man as a sign of deference and not as sign of authority. I quickly sat down. The man continued his questioning for a few minutes and asked Kala a few things. He left shortly afterwards. Later Kala told me that he wanted to see the records for each child. She had told him it was impossible.

In the evening I taught the kids English using my lap top computer. I had vowed I would not let the kids touch my computer, but I have broken my resolve. The computer belongs to the federal government. Because I am not sure where it can be fixed in Gandhinagar, I have been very cautious about letting anyone use it. However, the older kids are dying to know how to use a computer. As I show them how it works, I make them say every operation they are doing. They are learning English at the same time. Some of them will need to use a computer as well as English when they find jobs. Teaching them is such a pleasure because they want to learn. It's gratifying to see how much the children love being taught.

I fought loneliness much of this week. I wanted to go home so badly. I felt I had had enough of this. I miss the conversations I had with Amy. Despite the fact I have been quite happy so far, and I have been here only three and a half weeks, I count the days at least three and even four times a week until I can go home. The novelty of being here is wearing off.

I am in good spirits during the day as I keep myself busy, but at night loneliness creeps in. After dinner, I usually teach some of the children English for about 45 minutes. Then I read. I am often tired and I struggle to stay awake. Sometimes I go for a walk. Sleeping is such an easy way to avoid loneliness. I know if I sleep too much, I will wake up in the middle of the night. I must remember that on occasion, I feel like this in Canada.

I am surprised at how much I miss Michael. When he is away on a business trip and I am at home, I do not miss him as much as I do now. I long to be with him.

I am sometimes anxious about my safety. When I arrived, the other volunteers told me there had been an outbreak of violence against Christians in December, here in the state of Gujarat. The Canadian Embassy in New Delhi had telephoned to see if everyone was all right. Amy said they had heard nothing about the violence and that it was based mostly in the villages.

However there have been stories recently in The Times of India about anti-Christian activities. One article described a nun who was raped in Orissa and there were several stories about political activity in Ahmedabad. The Vishnu Hindi Parisad (VHP) is holding a convention there. It is agitating for laws against the killing of cows, and the recognition of Hindu and Moslem marriage customs. Concern is also expressed about Christian schools and the VHP wants Hindu oriented schools built near Christian-based schools. I think I will telephone the Canadian Embassy in Delhi and ask them what advice they are giving to aid workers.

Organizations such as the VHP say that Christian missionaries are corrupting the Indian culture and way of life. Although I understand this concern, it often masks the economic and social reasons why some Hindus dislike Christianity. Many of the Dalits, formerly known as Untouchables, are converting to Christianity as a way to extricate themselves from the caste system, which is based on Hindu religious writings. This means that upper caste Hindus do not have this group to depend upon, to do the most menial and lowest paying jobs. Inter-caste violence is not uncommon in India.

When Michael telephoned on Monday, he told me that a Christian missionary family had been burned alive in the Indian state of Orissa. If violence were to break out in Gandhinagar, I am sure I would be targeted. As far as I know, I am the only white woman living here. Gandhinagar is not part of the usual tourist route in India. In fact, the entire state of Gujarat is not often visited by tourists. I can go into Ahmedabad, Gujarat's main city, and not see another white person all day.

Even though Child Haven is strictly humanitarian in nature, and I am not a Christian, I'm sure most people think that I am. I asked Nitin, a friend of Child Haven who visits the home occasionally, if the home had the support of the community. His answer was not comforting. He said that most people did support Child Haven, except for a few who thought it was a religious-based organization. It is those few who refuse to listen to the truth, who take the worst action.

Whenever people in Gandhinagar ask me what I do, I am at pains to explain that Child Haven is strictly a humanitarian organization, not based on religion. I explain that if children arrive as Hindus, they leave as Hindus; that if they are Muslim when they arrive, then they are Muslim when they leave. I often have an opportunity to explain my work here, because everyone is so curious about the presence of a white woman. This week, I explained my work to a group of people waiting in line for a doctor at the hospital, two doctors, and a woman in the bank. I gave out Child Haven cards. I worry that because the address is on the cards, the home may become an easy target.

I am beginning to feel that India is crazy. I also wonder about my own sanity.

### **Sunday, February 7, 1999**

I took the five oldest children to the Gandhi Ashram in Ahmedabad today.

I had visited the Ashram a week ago to ensure I knew exactly how to get there and what to expect when I took the children. I anticipated everything would go smoothly. But it was not to be.

The bus from Gandhinagar got us to the Ashram as planned. It took less than 45 minutes. We spent a little over an hour at the Ashram. The kids were vaguely interested, but did not read all the inscriptions thoroughly.

When everyone was ready to leave, we crossed the street to where we were told to get the bus back to Gandhinagar. We waited for about 10 minutes, but no buses stopped. This surprised me as they usually leave Ahmedabad every five minutes. Ten year-old Mayuri decided she needed to go to the bathroom. I felt a little exasperated. She could have used the toilet earlier while we at the Gandhi Ashram. I quickly remembered how my own children would decide they needed to use a bathroom whenever none was readily available. The boys suggested she go behind a nearby food stall in the street. This was a place where other people had evidently relieved themselves. I objected and took her to the Gandhi Ashram bathroom, five minutes away.

When we returned we waited another 15 minutes, but no bus appeared. The boys and I were having a lively discussion about what to do, when two young Indian women advised us to go to another bus stop closer to Gandhinagar. I always feel inept in these situations. Should I take the advice of strangers, and the children who have only been to Ahmedabad a few times, or do I go with my own instincts. My uncertainty was evident to the children, and they tried hard to convince me to go to the bus stop closer to Gandhinagar. It was one I was unfamiliar with.

I decided to take a rickshaw to the bus stop called "Income Tax." This actually meant we'd be going farther away from our destination, but I knew buses stopped there for Gandhinagar. We waited for another half an hour at the second bus stop. Several buses came by, but none stopped because they were full. A young woman suggested that we go to another bus stop even farther away from Gandhinagar. She said we would be sure to get on a bus. I decided not to take her suggestion, as the location was totally unknown to me. She said she would take a rickshaw to the other bus station with us, but I declined her offer. I wondered why she wanted to do this. The fact that she may have been genuinely concerned for us, had not yet entered my mind.

Eventually a bus stopped. I called to the children to get on the bus. I had experienced Indians running to a bus before, but the crush of humanity that occurred when this bus stopped was too much to bear. At one point, I cried out, "My children!" when I saw how Mayuri was getting shoved by the crowd. I thought the rush of people would trample them.

It was incredibly difficult to get into the bus, although we were right at the door. People kept pushing past us. Meghna was the first to get on the bus, followed by two of the boys. Mayuri was behind me, and Ghanshyam behind her. I managed to get Mayuri in front of me and pushed her on the bus. When I put my arm out to protect our way up the bus stairs, I thought someone would break it. Ghanshyam called to me to get on the bus and he would follow. We got on and more people pushed in behind us. I counted the children to ensure all were on the bus, and asked how each one was. They all looked upset, but I was relieved to be on the bus, and going home.

When we got off the bus 45 minutes later at Gandhinagar, everyone agreed that the trip was quite an adventure. By the time we arrived at Child Haven, the children were laughing and joking about our trials and tribulations on and off the bus. They proceeded to regale Kala and the ayahs with their stories. It was then I found out that, while I insisted on Mayuri going to the public washroom, the boys had relieved themselves behind the food stall near the bus stop. This fact caused a great amount of laughter. What could I do, but laugh along with them?

The Gandhi Ashram was wonderful, but it's the bus trip that will be remembered.

### **Monday, February 8, 1999**

My level of frustration today was enormous.

After breakfast, I taught the little ones some Gujarati. I have bought a book with Gujarati numbers and letters. I have learned to say the numbers from one to ten, as well as some of the larger numbers. I use the book to help the kids say and write the numbers. The older children wanted to become involved. This

took them away from their lessons with Hari Priya, which clearly annoyed her. The ayahs do not like it when the children want to spend time with me while they are meant to be doing homework. I wonder why, however. The children are often doing nothing more than sitting with their books in front of them, and staring into space. I decided to extricate myself from the situation by going downstairs to my room, where I played with the little ones

– Sonel, Shital, Kajul and Rohan. Then I took them to the park for half an hour.

Later in the morning, Kala and I went to the courthouse in Gandhinagar to finalize the adoption of two children that had been placed two years ago with an Indian family in another city in Gujarat. All proper procedures had been followed, but the judge had yet to take the final step of signing the papers. Kala had gone to the courthouse last Friday to get the required papers signed, but the family court judge told her to return on Monday. I couldn't understand why the judge had not signed the papers on Friday. I thought I might be of some help today if there was a problem, so I accompanied Kala to the courts.

We arrived at 11:00 a.m. when the courthouse opened. We were fourteenth in line. Kala did not think this would be a problem, and so we waited for our case to be called. We waited for seven hours until 6:00 p.m., when the courthouse closed for the day. Kala insisted on staying throughout the day, although I kept urging her to leave. As I know nothing of the legal system here, and do not know Gujarati, I felt I should take direction from her.

At 6:00 p.m. Kala went into the courtroom, now in the process of being closed, to talk to the family court judge. He asked her why she waited all day, when the clerk had told her to go home earlier in the day. The judge also told her she did not need to return to the court, as it was the responsibility of our lawyer to get the required papers signed. He told her all she needed to do was to follow-up with the lawyer.

We had wasted seven hours! The whole system moved at a snail's pace and I could barely stand it.

And yet...and yet... I had spent the whole day with Kala, and we

talked and we talked and we talked. Kala told me so much about herself: her children, her marriage, her family, her in-laws and her work. I shared some of my life with her too. The exchange was a gift from heaven. What a miracle that she and I, despite our differences, understand one another so well.

Before going to the courthouse, I had telephoned Natubhai Patel to inquire about the licence for Child Haven. I was told to call back at noon, but I couldn't. We were at the courthouse, and there are no available telephones. I telephoned his office as soon as we got home shortly after 6:00 p.m., but he had left for the day. Kala and I telephoned his home later in the evening, and were told to call his office the following day.

And so it went. We were on a merry-go-round of missed calls and lost opportunities.

I can't decide if I am being too aggressive or not aggressive enough in my pursuit of getting things accomplished. I want to ensure the adoptions take place and the licence is renewed. I worry alternately that I am not making enough contact with officials, or that I am making too much, annoying them with a constant barrage of telephone calls. It is so difficult to know what is appropriate, in a perplexing culture that is not my own.

I had hoped so much to be able to make a difference on the adoptions and the licence but, given the bureaucracy and my limited time at the home, perhaps my expectations are unrealistic.

I want to visit the school that the older children, Rakesh, Ghanshyam and Megnha attend. It was time to talk with the school principal about their academic futures. His assessment of their potential would be helpful in determining the kind of help they need to prepare them for the labour force. Kala was in agreement. I am so dependent upon her when I want to undertake anything. So much of what I want to do depends on my ability to communicate with her, and get her on-side.

Michael called from Australia. He was only going to be there for a week. Imagine the jet lag this guy was going to have – travelling into tomorrow, then back to yesterday again! He said he really

missed me. He would be glad when I was home. I told him that I liked being here, but I was constantly counting the number of days until I would be back home. This separation has been good for both of us. We appreciate each other more. Perhaps absence really does make the heart grow fonder.

## **Tuesday, February 9, 1999**

I felt quite depressed when I woke up this morning. The feeling stayed with me for about half the day.

I went upstairs to help get the children dressed.

It was clear right from the beginning that the ayahs do not want the volunteers to help the children take their early morning showers. However, I like being with the children at that time and I usually go to the room where they have their showers and get dressed. I have often helped comb the children's hair, which involves putting a small amount of coconut oil in it and then combing and brushing it. I love doing this, but I sense the ayahs disapprove of even this small thing. I do not understand why. So I have limited this activity to a small number of children. I play games and talk to the children who are ready to go downstairs for breakfast.

This morning, Shama, who is 10 years old, was having difficulty sewing a split in her sweater. I offered to help, and suggested she take off her sweater. As the girl was about to comply, Maya shouted at her to cover herself with a towel, which she did. I finished fixing the sweater. Maya ran to the basement where I found her looking for a new top for Shama in the used clothes box that had been sent from Canada. "Your problem solved, Sister," she said.

Had I done something wrong in trying to help Shama? Perhaps they felt a 10 year-old girl was too old to be exposing her chest. Shama had shown no reluctance whatever when I suggested she take off the sweater. Perhaps I had violated a cultural norm.

The ayahs see my role in a very limited way. They are happy if I do the administrative work, or take the children to the park or on

outings. They're not pleased when I involve myself in tasks they consider theirs, and theirs alone. This even includes sweeping the floor. It seems they are always saying, "No, Sister, no." I had been warned of this before I came to India, but it is upsetting. I need to talk with Kala and the ayahs about this. I wonder if they are worried that if the volunteers participate in their work, their jobs will be taken away from them.

After breakfast I decided to take three small children to the photocopy centre, to make a copy of the weekly Child Haven report I had written for Bonnie. Kajul lost her thong in the middle of a busy road and ran back to get it. I almost had a heart attack. Heart pounding, I ran back to get her. Then we all crossed the road safely.

When I returned home, Kala said that we should go to the older children's school to see the principal as I had suggested. "You forget, Sister," she said. I had done no such thing, of course. I just despaired that it would actually happen and I was waiting for her to suggest it. When we got to the school, we were told the principal was unavailable. The teachers suggested that we come back on February 16 at 8 a.m. I have my doubts that we will actually see the principal then.

When we got back from the school, all the children, the ayahs and I, went in rickshaws to a large home in Sector 22. A lunch had been prepared by a wealthy family for the poor children in Gandhinagar. It was their custom to do this on an annual basis, to honour the memory of their father. It was a strange sight to see so many poor children and their mothers waiting outside a wealthy home. We were let into the courtyard soon after we arrived. The children were given their food in the courtyard. The ayahs and I were ushered into the front room where we sat on the floor and ate our lunch, as is the custom.

A young, attractive woman introduced herself to me in English. I didn't know whether to stand up or stay sitting. I stayed put, and said "Namaste," the traditional Gujarati greeting. She told me she and her husband had spent six months in Toronto, and were planning to move there permanently. The young woman and her sister-in-law asked questions about my reaction to India. I replied

that India was a wonderful country with a great civilization. When her sister-in-law asked if I had any fears or concerns about India, I repeated that I thought India was a great country. It was impossible for me to answer her honestly, because I feel anxious about my safety. I felt it would be unwise to share my fears with her.

The young woman stayed and watched while we ate our food. She stood while the rest of us were sitting cross-legged. I am sure she was trying to be kind. I may have misunderstood the cultural norm, but in reality, I felt humiliated. I felt the power and class difference between us. I disliked the patronizing of the poor. I reminded myself that if I ever prepare food for the poor, I must eat with them, and be one of them, instead of standing back and watching. This was a lesson in both humility, and in how to treat those who have less than myself.

When we returned home, I telephoned the agency that is processing the Canadian adoption. The social worker agreed to meet with Kala and me in his office for 15 minutes, at 2 p.m. on Thursday. I'll believe it when it happens.

Before dinner I went outside to play with the boys in the field behind the home. They had wooden tops that could spin fabulously, even in the dirt and on the palms of their hands. I tried several times to get a top to spin in the dirt without success. On my fifth or sixth try I was successful. A huge cry of support came from the five or six boys I was playing with. The moment was immediate, and my feeling of attachment to, and involvement with them was strong. I was aware of nothing except the fun I was having playing with a group of boys in the dirt in India.

Ashvin found a bloody tampon in the dirt. He held it up and said, "Look Sister." I managed to maintain my composure. I looked and told him to put it down. I wondered afterwards if he was testing me, even though it is hard to imagine that these kids would want to throw anybody off balance. Much of our garbage from the home gets dumped into this field. It's fortunate we do not have a lot of waste, given this field is also one of our playgrounds.

Jessie, the young volunteer who left about two days after I arrived, told me a similar experience had happened to her. Her story had prepared me, and so I was able to act nonchalantly with the boys.

I got a letter from my mother today. She is my most avid writer. It pleases me to no end, to get letters from her.

### **Thursday, February 11, 1999**

Yesterday was not a good day. I seemed to be plumbing the depths of despair.

Although I did a number of things throughout the day, taking the little kids to the park; playing with some of the older kids; shopping with Kala and Maya for some food; and cleaning the rice, I felt as if I was not contributing anything of importance to the home. That night I felt awful. I thought the other volunteers were right – there really is no role for volunteers here. I remember Amy telling me I should travel while I was in India, because the home really didn't need volunteers.

I missed Michael and I asked myself what I was doing here, when my family was back in Canada. I was tired of having the ayahs say, "No, Sister, me Sister," every time I tried to do something. I felt thwarted at every turn.

I tossed and turned all night. I told myself not to give up now. I had got off to a good start, and should keep on trying to do what I knew had to be done. I got up in the middle of the night and made a list of activities to work on. I decided I must talk with Kala about the role of the volunteer, as there were problems.

This morning I got up and wrote down the daily schedule of the children's activities. It will help me to know exactly when I can interact with the children without disturbing their schedule with the ayahs. It also will be useful for volunteers who come after me.

I took the little children to the park, and then I got ready to visit the social worker dealing with the Canadian adoption. When I

telephoned to confirm our appointment for that afternoon, I expected him to say he was too busy. To my surprise, he was quite pleasant, and said he expected us as planned.

Kala and I left around noon and went to Natubhai Patel's office. He was not there, but his assistant was able to provide us with needed information. Kala talked to him in Gujarati . He told her that Natubhai Patel had done some work on getting the licence for Child Haven. He then informed us the adoption had been approved by the Board of Directors.

With these encouraging words dancing in our heads, we proceeded to the social agency. The social worker was working at a desk in the front office. There were four other people in the same room. I was very polite. I thanked him many times for seeing us, and told him I knew he was a very busy man. I smiled a lot. Surely this would charm the man into action! He proceeded to outline the adoption process for me. Contrary to what Natubhai Patel's assistant told Kala, the Board of Directors of the social agency had not yet approved the adoption. But he did say that it would meet in late February or March and likely would make a decision in favour of the adoption. It is so hard to sort through the conflicting information.

We were making progress of sorts. I felt quite elated by the time we got home, because I felt we were having some success both in terms of obtaining the licence and in ensuring the processing of the adoption. Kala and I agreed that we were confident the adoption either had passed, or would shortly come to pass. Kala translated a Gujarati expression for me. "Often you do not know from which tree the fruit comes, but you eat it anyway." Wise Kayla. It's a good saying!

### **Friday, February 12, 1999**

Friday also turned out to be quite a positive day. I suggested to Kala that I take Vijay and Pravin to the hospital for their medical examination. This was the last step in having all our medical records on each child up to date for the licensing inspector.

Once again, the pediatrician was not available, so we saw the

general practitioner on duty. He looked quickly at Vijay and Pravin, and then told me he could not fill out a portion of the medical form that dealt with inoculations because he did not know what inoculations the children had received. When I came back home, I looked at our medical records. We had only sketchy information. I thought I would ask Dr. Patel what to do when we next saw him.

I walked the children to school as usual. When I returned, I decided to call one of our contacts in the community to see if I might visit with him. He agreed to see Kala and myself at 3 o'clock. I had been told he was a benefactor of other social institutions. Although he did help other organizations, it was clear from our visit that he did not have any money to donate. He offered to arrange a meeting with other social agencies in Gandhinagar for us. This is very helpful because it keeps us visible and garners community support.

After the visit, Kala and I went to the Pooja Parlour, for the third day in a row, and ate some ice cream, a specialty in the state of Gujarat. There are wonderful flavours made with fresh fruit—mango and pineapple are my favourite. I have also learned to love lassi—a thick sweet yogurt-like drink often topped with bright pink rose water syrup.

Dr. Patel called later in the day to say he could come to talk to the children about personal hygiene. We agreed Saturday at

3:30 p.m. would be a good time because all the children will be home from school. I had just about given up hope that he would actually visit the children. I have never been a patient person and it is a quality I need in abundance in India. Nobody here operates on western time.

This evening I sat with the children while they were doing their homework or their “lessons,” as they call it. It is absurd that the ayahs expect them to do homework from 7:15 to 9:00 p.m. every night. Seven year-old Tarun was practically falling asleep at his books. Yet, I am reluctant to say anything to Kala because the message might be communicated poorly to the ayahs. I have no desire to either threaten them, or to undermine their authority. I wish I could speak with them directly.

There are so many things that happen which I can have no part in because of my lack of Gujarati. Incidents happen in the home that sometimes upset me. Occasionally someone shouts at a child, or I see a child crying. I have no way of knowing exactly what has happened and so I am hesitant to bring every incident I witness to Kala's attention. The ayahs may feel that I don't trust their judgment. In fact, I don't always trust their judgment, but I have to be very careful. The ayahs need support and encouragement, just as we all do.

### **Saturday, February 13, 1999**

This morning I walked to a travel agency at the nearby Suman Towers to change my return air ticket to Canada from April 7 to April 5. The change of departure will give me a few extra days at home, before I return to work on April 11. I am concerned that there may be a delay in getting home. Airport employees are now on strike and the departure and arrival of airplanes is often delayed. Even if the strike is over by the time I leave, I may face unanticipated delays. I want to have some time at home before I return to work to make a slow, gentle re-entry into western civilization and to give some undivided attention to my family.

The agent insisted that I leave my ticket with him so he could check the availability of flights, and change the ticket if possible. I was very anxious about doing this, but he assured me I would have my ticket back on Monday. I told the agent I feared the ticket would get lost. He reassured me several times that would not happen. I worry that I will get a telephone call from Canada informing me one of the kids is sick, or that my father is unwell, and I need to return to Canada immediately. If the agent has my ticket how will I leave India quickly? With great trepidation, I left my ticket with him. My overall anxiety level, which is already high, rose some more.

In the afternoon Dr. Patel came with the medicine to de-worm everyone. He chatted with each child individually. He then gave a short talk on how important it is to wash hands and feet before eating, and to wash hands after going to the toilet. Everyone seemed happy when he left. Later that evening, we took the required medicine.

Before Dr. Patel arrived, Kala and I discussed how we would pay for the medicine. Kala had assumed I would pay for it. There had been no previous discussion about the payment. When I expressed surprise, she quickly said she would take care of it. I was worried that there had been some miscommunication and, in fact, she didn't have enough money. However, I clarified that with her and she paid for the medicine.

While Dr. Patel was here, I asked him about inoculations for the children. Of all the possible inoculations, Dr. Patel said that the children only needed one for tetanus. He said other inoculations were unnecessary. The children were unlikely to get the diseases that inoculations were designed to prevent, as they were over five years of age (polio and whooping cough); or the disease had been eradicated (smallpox); or the disease, if contracted, could be easily cured (malaria).

He looked at each child's arm and could tell from the scar left there that they had all been inoculated for tuberculosis. I shall mark this in each of their medical records. My impression was that Dr. Patel thought I was overly concerned. He said that I must understand that Child Haven children are much better off than most children in India.

Dr. Patel was very helpful, and said he would come by to give the children their tetanus inoculations. It would cost 500 rupees. We discussed a date next week. The following day, I asked Kala if it would be cheaper to go to the Civil Hospital. In fact, they might give the inoculations free. We decided to go to the hospital to find out.

After Dr. Patel left, three of the older kids and I got in a rickshaw to visit the two pools in Gandhinager to find out if we can go swimming. One was closed and the other was open. It was beautiful. It is getting so hot. I can hardly wait to take a dip in that inviting pool.

After dinner, I found Sejula crying. I found out she was itchy and had some ointment to put on her skin. The bottle said Scabent, so I assumed she had scabies. I applied the ointment very carefully and gently. I realized Sejula needed to be covered with

a whole lot more than ointment. She needed to be covered with love. I had her put on clean clothes and I tucked her blanket around her. The next morning she was feeling better, but still scratching. I was very careful to wash my hands.

Since I have been in India, my thoughts and feelings have consisted of three main themes.

The first is my desire to do something worthwhile while I am here. I want to make a difference to the lives of these children. I feel some urgency about accomplishing something. I want to make a success of these three months.

The second theme has to do with wanting to savour the world, and being immersed in what I am doing; enjoying the sights, sounds, smells and touch of India. This includes my feeling of attachment to the children as we walk to school, the joy of riding in a rickshaw, the smell of coriander at the market, the feeling of dust under my feet, the sight of camels and their drivers on the street. Everything I am doing in India is exciting, novel and even romantic. I cherish the time I am spending here. This is when I am happiest.

The third theme is my sense of loss – not being with Michael and the children. I feel lonely and I count the days until I go home. I ask myself why I am here, and I worry about my relationship with my children. Will this hurt our relationship in any way? Will they move away from me as a result of this? Will Matthew, because he is only eleven, feel insecure and not trust that I will be there for him? I am less worried about my relationship with Michael. I think this trip will make us stronger as a couple. I feel grateful to Michael for his support. I will better understand how he feels when he travels, and he will understand how I feel when he is away.

These three themes are with me every day. Sometimes one predominates more than another. If I feel I am helping the children here or the organization, I miss Michael less than when I feel I am not serving any useful purpose. Even when I feel I am making a contribution, my concerns about my family are always present.

## **Sunday, February 14, 1999**

Today I didn't do much.

This morning, I rode one of the bikes to the pool, hoping that I could go for a swim. I looked at a small map of Gandhinagar before I left. I surprised myself when I found the place without difficulty. The guard at the gate of the sports complex told me the pool was closed. I replied, I had been told that the pool was open today, but to no avail. I will try again tomorrow.

One of the ayahs and I took 11 children to the big park in Sector 28 this afternoon. It was packed because today was a holiday to honour a Hindu God. I came home with a headache and was in no mood to do anything else with the kids.

This evening I spent about 45 minutes each with Rakesh and Ghanshyam teaching them how to use the computer. It is a wonderful tool to teach both computer skills and the English language as well. The kids love to push the buttons.

## **Monday, February 15, 1999**

By late this afternoon I was calling this a "God-forsaken day," in a "God-forsaken country". I felt that everything I tried to do was leading to a dead end. I lay on my bed and cried.

I bicycled to the pool in the morning—again— to find out how much I would have to pay to swim, for myself alone, and with the children. I talked with two people. The second person told me to come back to talk with yet another person. But this man was out of the office because he had "been blessed with a son." It was my third visit to the pool. Will I ever swim there? The days are getting hotter.

Kala and I had planned to go to the hospital in the afternoon to find out about the cost of tetanus inoculations. Kala slipped out of the home at about one o'clock and by three o'clock she had not returned. She had gone to visit her aunty. (Nobody says aunt in India, it is always "aunty," a term of respect for older women.) I telephoned Kala at her aunty's place, to find out if she was still

interested in going to the hospital. She said she would be back soon.

I went to the travel agent to retrieve my ticket, while waiting for Kala to return. He had promised to return it today. Of course, he didn't have it. He had sent my ticket to Ahmedabad to find out if it could be changed. There was a delay because the computers were not functioning. Alarm bells were ringing loud and clear. I should never have given my ticket to him.

Kala finally returned from her aunty's home. I told her about my concerns for my ticket and how anxious I was to have it back in my possession. She telephoned the travel agent, whom she has dealt with many times on behalf of volunteers. She explained that I was not comfortable leaving my ticket with him. "This is a new kind of volunteer," he said to Kala. He promised to get the ticket back by tomorrow, although this would mean the departure date would remain unchanged. I guess other volunteers are not such worry-warts.

I asked Kala if she wanted to go the hospital. She told me she had visitors and we would go when they left. About 4:15 p.m., we finally went to the hospital. We discovered the hospital will give the injections free of charge to the children. They agreed with Dr. Patel that the only thing the children needed was a tetanus shot. The tetanus injection at the hospital is combined with diphtheria and whooping cough, unlike the one Dr. Patel said he would give the children. Dr. Patel said an inoculation for whooping cough was unnecessary because it only affected really small children.

On the way home, Kala told me the doctor at the hospital said he would come to the home and provide the injections for a small fee, which would be much less than the cost quoted by Dr. Patel. I said I was worried about our relationship with Dr. Patel, since he had offered to give the inoculations. Dr. Patel had frequently provided medical care to both the children and the volunteers and it is important that we maintain a positive relationship with him. Kala said, "Don't worry Sister, don't worry." That is what she always says when I have a concern. We agreed to do nothing until I come back from my trip with Bonnie to Mumbai and

Hyderabad.

We went to the local market to buy some rubber thongs for those children who had no shoes. We bought 12 pairs for 130 rupees.

Both before and after dinner I taught English to a few of the children, using the computer.

There was a big storm last night – thunder and lightning and lots of wind. It is very unusual for this time of year. The weather reflected my mood.

### **Tuesday, February 16, 1999**

I had planned to go into Ahmedabad today. I really felt I needed some time to myself, but the weather looked uncertain, so I decided to delay my day off. I do not want to be caught in a tropical rainstorm in a third world bus. I have visions of the damn thing overturning on the road.

Kala and I went to visit the older children's school this morning, as planned. The principal was not there, despite the fact that we had made an appointment. We did talk to some of the teachers. They said all three children were capable of going to university. I had difficulty getting Kala to act as a translator. Throughout the conversation, I would ask a question and Kala would give me her opinion without asking the teacher. My frustration was mounting.

Meghna's teacher spoke English, so we had a very fruitful conversation with him. He felt she was capable of going to university and becoming a school teacher if she worked hard. This was news to me as Kala had said she was not very capable of doing academic work, and she had plans to become a tailor.

After the interview was over, Kala said she did not think that Meghna has the capability to go to university. I expressed concerns about Meghna becoming a tailor, as more and more people are buying ready-made clothes. Kala seemed convinced there would be an on-going market for home-made clothes. I must speak to Bonnie about Meghna.

I spent the rest of the day in my room, with the door closed. This was so unlike me. I later found out that Kala had told the children and the ayahs that I was preparing for Bonnie's visit. But in reality, I was worried that if I interacted with anybody, I would snap at them. I thought of the physicians' dictum: first, do no harm. The best thing I could do was keep away from everyone.

I feel so brittle. I am not relaxed. I am upset easily about situations over which I have no control. I can't make decisions. I wish the weather had been better today so I could have gone to Ahmedabad.

I am so full of worries. I worry that I am not accomplishing enough and that I will feel my time in India has been a waste. I worry that I am asking too much of Kala, because of my desire to get things done. I worry about being attacked because people think I am a Christian, or because Hindu fundamentalists think this home is religious-based. I worry about getting sick because of the food and the water. I worry that I am not drinking enough liquids and that I will get dehydrated. I worry about being constipated.

I worry about getting malaria because of the increase of mosquitoes. For the last few nights I have been up swatting flies and mosquitoes for a couple of hours. In the middle of last night I put up my mosquito net.

I worry about not getting my ticket back from the travel agent.

I worry about losing Dr. Patel's goodwill if we do not get him to give the children their tetanus inoculations.

I worry about my family at home.

And today I worry that I am going slightly mad.

### **Wednesday, February 17, 1999**

Bonnie arrived today. I got up early to go to the airport. When I saw her, I thought I would cry. It is amazing how important a familiar face can be – even when the face is not that familiar. Later I realized that although it had only been two and a half

weeks from the time Amy left, it was difficult for me to be alone.

Bonnie came back to Child Haven, and we sat down and talked for a while with Kala. Then she visited with the children. We had lunch with them, and then went to the Gandhinagar Branch of the Gujarat Social Defence Department to discuss the renewal of the licence. The official we were hoping to meet was not there.

When we returned to the home, I picked up my ticket from the travel agent, and apologized for the trouble I had caused him. He was very polite, but I could see he thought I was unnecessarily concerned. Although I felt silly about insisting about getting my ticket back, I felt much more secure having it in my possession.

That evening, Bonnie, Kala, and I were invited to a restaurant for dinner by the couple whose family had provided lunch for Gandhinagar's poor children and their mothers. The man's family owned a variety of businesses, including coal mines and cinemas.

This couple was interested in funding the costs for a bright child to go to private school, and then to university. The woman, who was only 22, was clearly the decision-maker. Bonnie explained that we did not want to single out any child for special attention, but proposed the couple could pay for an excellent tutor for the older children. After some discussion, this proposal was accepted. I will be in touch with them in March about the cost of a good tutor.

By the end of the day, my spirits had really lifted.

#### **Thursday, February 18, 1999**

Thursday was very busy. I spent some time in the morning talking to Bonnie about Child Haven. We discussed concerns about the role of the volunteer, my perception of the children, and how the home was operating. Bonnie gave me instructions on how the files on each child must be organized. I will finish this task when I return after my trip to Mumbai and Hyderabad. I found it easy to be open and frank with her. We had a good discussion.

One of the children we talked about was Meghna, and what the

future held for her. I told Bonnie how her teacher was convinced that she had the capability of going to university. We decided to talk with her to find out what she wanted to do. Although we told her about her teacher's high regard for her ability, Meghna insisted she was not interested in going to university, or in becoming a teacher. She said she really wanted to become a tailor. So we agreed that one of the volunteers would try to find a good tailoring course to help her develop this marketable skill. Who knows, perhaps she'll become the next female Versace of India.

Dr. Chittania, whom Amy and I had visited shortly after I arrived, came to the home this morning. We spent about an hour with him. He was very talkative, and invited me to go to the leper's hospital with him. I can't say that I look forward to it. I am sure it will upset me and I can't do anything for the lepers. However, Bonnie said she had gone on a previous visit and enjoyed it. Well, perhaps I should go. Then again, I probably won't.

Bonnie, Kala and I went to court to talk to the family court judge about finalizing the adoption of the two former Child Haven children who have been living with their adoptive Indian family for the last two years. They live in a town several hours away by car from Gandhinagar. I hoped we would have more luck seeing the judge than Kala and I did when we waited seven hours! This time, luck was with us and we met with the judge in his office. He sat behind his desk in a small room furnished with several well-worn chairs for visitors. The door to his office was a piece of fabric and the floor was made of cement. This is a far cry from a judge's office in Canada!

The judge was uncertain whether he could sign the court order finalizing the adoption for the two children.

He read his law books, while we waited quietly. He read aloud a section that stated only the legal guardian could give up a child for adoption. The law also stated the legal guardian was the person or persons having the care and responsibility for the child.

In the judge's opinion, the legal guardian for one of the children was the grandfather. This meant only the grandfather, not Child Haven, was in a legal position to give the child up for adoption.

The grandfather was the person who had brought the child to the home almost two years earlier. He had signed a document asking that Child Haven provide care for his grandchild. One of the parents was dead and the other had disappeared and no one in the family would take responsibility for the child.

The judge wanted us to find the grandfather and bring him to the court. If the grandfather had died, we needed to obtain the death certificate before the judge would sign the papers. We wondered how we would ever find the grandfather to ensure the adoption papers were signed.

The judge emphasized he was a “sticky” judge. Although he could sign the adoption papers for us, he was concerned that unless everything was in order according to the legislation governing adoptions, trouble could exist for the child in the future. The judge said he was concerned if he did not follow the letter of the law, a relative could contest the adoption at some future date.

The judge did not have the same apprehensions about the second child being adopted by the same parents. Bonnie had a letter from the mother of this child asking Child Haven to find suitable adoptive parents. The judge simply wanted a letter from Bonnie stating she had not seen the mother since the child was brought to the home several years earlier.

We left the judge’s office to sit in the courtyard. The hot sun beat down as Bonnie wrote the required letter by hand. The letter confirmed she had discouraged the child’s mother from requesting adoption, but the mother had insisted. We found a typist in the courtyard, where all the typists and lawyers sat waiting for business.

Because the letter was in English, the typist asked me if I would type it on his machine. Kala was not impressed by my typing. It’s difficult to use a 1950s style typewriter after you’ve become accustomed to inputting text on a computer. After clunking along with this effort for several minutes, we asked the clerk to type the letter. We carefully spelled out the difficult words for him. The required letter was finally completed.

We hired a taxi to search for the grandfather in Ahmedabad. Kala had his address but it had been two years since he had signed the papers asking Child Haven to raise his grandchild. Ahmedabad is a city of over four million. I felt we were looking for a needle in a haystack.

Kala and the driver found the area where the grandfather's home was located with little difficulty. Bonnie suggested that only Kala and the driver visit the family. She thought the family might think they could get some money from us when they saw our white faces. White faces are very unusual in Ahmedabad, and when they do appear they are most often the faces of either wealthy tourists or business people. We sat at the side of a very busy street in the van, while Kala and the driver searched the slum for the grandfather.

While Kala and the driver were looking for the grandfather's home, a group of children gathered to look at our strange white faces. Bonnie was very nice and waved to the people. At first I did not mind, but as the crowd grew larger, and the children banged on the windows, I started to become concerned. Some adults tried to shoo the children away, but to no avail. Soon the crowd included adults.

Just as my fear was mounting, Kala and the driver, who had been gone for an hour, returned. They told us they found the grandfather's family at the same address, but the grandfather had died a year and a half earlier. The family had his death certificate. We went off to make photocopies. The family did not ask about the child.

I was amazed at how easy it had been to obtain the required document. I had been convinced we had been on a mission impossible.

We then visited the local branch of the Social Defence Department in Gandhinagar to find out about renewing our licence. The officer spoke mostly to Kala, in Gujarati. We tried to phone the director in Ahmedabad to make an appointment, but he is away for two days. We agreed that I would see him when I returned from Hyderabad.

Following our adventure tracking down the grandfather, and the visit to the Social Defence Department, we went to our appointment with the lawyer who is working on the Canadian adoption case. Although I had talked with Mr. Patel on the telephone several times, this was the first time I had been to his office. It resembled a western style office more closely than anything I had seen so far. Although we had to climb dark and dingy stairs to reach the office, once inside, the place was bright, large, and clean. There was a large reception area where the receptionist asked us to sit down on a bench. Other people were also waiting to see Mr. Patel.

We waited for almost two hours. I'm learning that waiting is just part of the normal business day – regardless of whether an appointment has been fixed for a specific time or not.

Mr. Patel finally emerged and we spoke with him for about five minutes. He told us there had been some problems in arranging the adoption. He was trying to regularize the situation, but we must realize that no adoption would get preferential treatment. Bonnie said she was not looking for preferential treatment and reminded Mr. Patel the case had been ongoing for almost two years. The lawyer assured us our case would be taken care of. I felt we were getting mixed messages.

Mr. Patel related a dreadful story of a woman who tried to adopt a child from India and was running into roadblocks. It upset her so badly she committed suicide. Later her case was approved. The poor woman would have been able to adopt the child. The decision was rescinded, of course, because she was no longer alive.

We finally got home at about 8:30 p.m. Exhausted, we ate some dinner and went to bed.

### **Friday, February 19, 1999**

We got up early to meet a new volunteer at the train station who wants to volunteer at the home for about a month. The station is a large, solid structure, with one side opening to the outside. The floor is made of grey stone or granite. The train station was

packed with people lying on the floor, alone or in small groups. I stepped over and around several people to get from one end of this very large station to the other. They were eating, sleeping, and talking. I had read whole families camped out in India's train stations. Here was first hand evidence. Several men were washing and brushing their teeth at the large public sinks.

The volunteer was not on the train. We wondered if Rakesh, who had talked to her on the telephone, made a mistake about her arrival time. We asked the ticket agent when the next train was due to arrive from Mumbai. The train wouldn't arrive until

3:30 p.m. We decided to return at that time.

The new volunteer, Shannon, was on the train as expected. She is 24 years old, and was travelling in southeast Asia, when she found out about Child Haven.

A third volunteer is to arrive on March 4. I do not think there is enough work for everyone. I worry that the volunteers may become unhappy because they feel they aren't making a meaningful contribution.

I conveyed my concerns to the two women. Bonnie suggested the possibility of Shannon going to Hyderabad. However, Shannon wanted to stay in Gandhinagar.

### **Saturday, February 20, 1999**

Again we went into Ahmedabad, this time to meet with Natubhai Patel to discuss renewing the licence for the home. He requested an annual report, which I will write when I return from my trip with Bonnie. I am to phone him on March 2 about the licence.

We then visited the social worker to discuss the Canadian adoption. The meeting was very brief. The social worker wanted me to tell Bonnie what he had told me in our meeting a few weeks earlier. He told Bonnie the adoption would be approved by the Board of Directors, later this month or in March. Everything would probably be final in June.

### **Sunday, February 21, 1999**

Today is my 23rd wedding anniversary, and the day Bonnie and I leave for Mumbai.

I awoke at about 4:00 a.m. and decided to get up. I knew I would never get back to sleep. Bonnie wanted to leave the home at

5:30 a.m. to get our 7:25 a.m. flight for Mumbai. I spent the time on the flight developing a work plan for March. I had over 60 days of work accounted for so I was sure there would be enough work for three volunteers.

We were met at the Mumbai airport by Suehas, the sister of a Canadian man, who is donating money to build another Child Haven home. It will be located in the village of Savarsai, where he grew up. Savarsai is about two and a half hours south of Mumbai. Bonnie has been to the village several times. This time her visit was to discuss the purchase of the land, and to gain the support of local officials for the project.

We rented a car with a driver for the next few days, and we drove with Suehas to Pen. It was a large town about 15 minutes from Savarsai. At Pen, we met Makunda, a close cousin of Suehas. He is so close he's called "cousin brother." Makunda is selling his property for the Child Haven home. We ate lunch with him and Suehas at a local restaurant. I was worried about the safety of the food, but Bonnie was eating it, so I followed her example.

Makunda is a dour, short, heavy-set sixty-five year-old, who has been involved in social action projects since his youth. He spoke about being a freedom fighter during the time of Indian independence.

After lunch we drove to our accommodations. It is a guest house in a housing compound built for workers constructing a nearby dam. It is in a beautiful rural location. The housing project can accommodate more than four dozen families and it is a little community unto itself. The project is made up of row housing that includes one-room and multi-room units. A verandah extends across the row housing we are in. One large room is used as a dining area.

When we arrived, Bonnie stayed on the verandah and talked with the people who were overseeing the project. It was early afternoon and very hot. We stood and smiled, and stood and chatted. I thought I would die of the heat. All I wanted to do was lie down on my bed. For the first time in my life, I had some sympathy for royalty.

I realized that Bonnie was being more than just nice. It was important that we gain everyone's support for the home. Each person we met must be treated well, to ensure no one would derail the project.

We napped during the afternoon. Our driver then took us to Makunda's house in the village of Savarsai. We waited about 45 minutes with Makunda's wife and a few neighbours, before he arrived. We talked for a bit – as much as we could, given we didn't speak the language. Then we went to see the land Makunda has for sale.

The proposed spot for the new Child Haven home is a beautiful plot nestled in the hills not far from the village of Savarsai. It would frighten me to stay there because of the isolation, but I am sure some hardy souls would love it.

We returned to Makunda's house where we chatted until about nine o'clock, when we went out for dinner. It turned out to be the same restaurant we had gone to for lunch. While at Makunda's, the lights went out for about an hour. Fortunately, they had an emergency light. While we were sitting in the dark, my thoughts returned to my family in Canada. I wanted so much to be with them. All the waiting and chatting had worn me down, the hour was late, and I had become weary.

### **Monday, February 22, 1999**

Today we went to see the official known as "The Collector." He is the representative of the federal government who administers programs at the local or district level. Although he is considered to be relatively low in the public service hierarchy, The Collector has a lot of status in the district where he works. The term "Collector" is left over from British rule during which time this

person was the tax collector. There are Collectors in districts throughout India.

Outside The Collector's office was a list of names of people who

had previously held this position. Names in this particular district dated from the late 1800s. Until about 1920, all the names were British, from 1920 to 1947 there was a mixture of British and Indian names and after independence from the British in 1947, all the names were Indian.

Like every other appointment, we waited for several hours before we saw The Collector. Finally, we were ushered into his office, along with a dozen or so other people. We sat close to his desk while the others waited their turn to speak with The Collector. People waited seated on chairs lined up in rows in his large office.

The Collector was a young man in his early thirties. He was composed, pleasant, and supportive of the proposed Child Haven home.

In the evening we stopped in Pen, at a young couple's house. They have a four year-old daughter. They are directors of a home for children attending a nearby school. They are also involved in a great deal of community work, including self-help groups for tribal women. They teach the women to gather and sell their fruit at the market so they can participate in the market economy. Tribal people are descended from the original inhabitants of India who preceded invasions from the north, thousands of years ago. They are among the most impoverished of India's people.

The young woman was in the midst of planning activities for International Women's Day on March 4. I thought about all the activities I had planned for International Women's Day over the years, and how bored I had become with the event. It was wonderful to feel this woman's enthusiasm, and to know that International Women's Day really does connect women all over the world.

Some of the children staying at the home where the young couple were working, had witnessed a murder committed by a Hindu. Because the couple helped the child testify in court, the wife is

receiving personal threats from fundamentalist Hindus who were claiming she is trying to convert the children to Christianity, and that she is an agent of the CIA. Her husband is a Christian, although she herself is a Hindu.

The threats have caused a great deal of worry for the couple. A few years earlier, some Christians were murdered by Hindus in Pen. The couple seem to have accepted these threats as part of the life they have chosen. They are refusing to let them interfere with their work. Their dedication and commitment was inspiring.

These last few days have been tremendously interesting for me. They have caused me to reflect on my life in Canada. Not only have I had the opportunity to meet people I will never have the chance to meet again, but I have witnessed Bonnie's commitment and dedication to her work. I find it hard to imagine myself being that committed to any cause. I enjoy the advantages of living an upper-middle class life too much. I like drinking wine, I like going to the theatre, I like a variety of foods, including meat. I'm sure I would tire of the daily grind very quickly.

So where does that leave me morally and emotionally? I would certainly feel uncomfortable about turning my back on the Child Haven organization after being whole-heartedly a part of it. I do not want to act as if this experience was a mere blip in my life, an anomaly that has no meaning beyond the present. And yet I do not know how to integrate what I have experienced into my life in Canada.

### **Tuesday, February 23, 1999**

We met the honorary chairman of the state committee that chooses model villages, at Makunda's house. The honorary chairman seemed impressed with Bonnie's work, and looked forward to having a Child Haven home in the village of Savarsai.

The model village concept was developed in the early 1990s in the state of Maharashtra where Savarsai is located. It was designed to encourage Indian villages to become economically self-sufficient, and thus provide a desirable alternative for young people who are moving to the cities in search of work.

All villagers are required to take an oath to refrain from drinking alcohol, to keep cattle confined to prevent them from destroying gardens, to become involved with community work, to refrain from cutting trees illegally, and to participate in family planning.

Saversai was one of the villages chosen to be included in this program partly because of Makunda's contacts with the state government. Makunda says the system is working well. Over 100 villages in the state are participating and other states have adopted the system.

The honorary chairman and Makunda took us to a school that had been built for tribal children. Each class was in its own building and the cluster of buildings gave the impression of a small village. We were taken into most of the classes. The children in each of the classes greeted us with three or four short synchronized claps.

We returned to Makunda's house where Bonnie tried to settle the details of the proposed Child Haven home. Makunda will be working with the architect.

We drove back to Mumbai. There were only a few hair-raising minutes on the road, but as usual, I felt as if I was taking my life in my hands when I was in the car. The driver went about 80 kilometres per hour on a two-lane road. Two or more cars often travelled side-by-side in a single lane. When the driver tried to pass in such a situation, I was never sure if we would get by without an accident. I imagined my hair turning pure white by the end of the trip.

We went to the Columbus Hotel, where I had arranged to stay upon my arrival in India. They confirmed they had received my reservation for January 10. They are convinced that they never received my telephone call the night I arrived in Mumbai. I suspect the two men at the airport Tourist Bureau called the Park Lane, because they receive a kickback for every tourist they send there. I will take this as a learning experience for next time.

Dinner at Suehas' home was excellent. We had a pleasant time, and a good simply prepared dinner. We met her two daughters and husband. They were very kind and gracious hosts.

I have been constipated for days now. I keep trying to drink water in the hope that it will help the situation. But it doesn't seem to be doing the trick. I may break down and take a laxative. Bonnie says many volunteers get constipated. They think rice is the cause but we both agreed that they probably need more water too. Certainly I have to force myself to drink water.

### **Wednesday, February 24, 1999**

Today I awoke at 6 a.m. I went for a walk around Mumbai for about 45 minutes. It is much the same as Ahmedabad – congested, dirty, people everywhere. I saw a man brushing his teeth over a ditch in a busy downtown street. He emerged from one of the shacks at the side of the street – a filthy, dirty shack about five feet wide and eight feet long, made of canvas and corrugated iron. It had no toilet or running water. Yet, he wanted to clean his teeth in the morning. What an act of hope!

I had a conversation with Bonnie about the role of volunteers. She said the ability of volunteers and Child Haven home managers to work effectively together, varies greatly. She thinks the volunteers sometimes wear out the managers with their questions.

Bonnie has considered making six months the minimum length of time volunteers must spend in a Child Haven home. It would, however, cut out many competent people. She feels giving volunteers experience in the third world is important. She knows every volunteer benefits the lives of the children.

I find it very hard to get Bonnie to talk about herself. I don't know if she's just a very quiet, private person, or is saving her energy for her work. She is almost 65 years old. Although she moves slowly, she has amazing stamina.

This afternoon, we went to visit one of Bonnie's friends, Dina. Our driver had a difficult time finding the location of the apartment near Juhu Beach, but eventually we arrived.

As we were climbing dirty stairs on the outside of the building to Dina's apartment, I was reminded of Dina, the tailor in the book,

“A Fine Balance.” I was shocked when we entered her apartment and saw pattern pieces, and dresses everywhere. When she told me she was a tailor, and hired men to work for her, I thought once again I had become a character in the Rohinton Mistry novel.

But unlike the Dina in the novel, this Dina was no ordinary tailor. She designed exquisite salwaar-kameezes and saris for wealthy customers. She employed around 10 tailors to do the embroidery work that she designed. The work was so stunning it took my breath away. The fabric was embroidered with beads, glass pieces, and thread. It was the most exquisite hand-work that I have ever seen. Dina has been nominated for a national award for her work. She will shortly find out if she is the winner.

Dina’s work was an inspiration. Perhaps Meghna will follow in her footsteps.

At the Mumbai airport I considered changing my return ticket to Ahmedabad so I could stay a few days longer in Hyderabad to visit some tourist sites. I had been trying to make up my mind about my return date ever since I bought the ticket. I couldn’t decide what to do. My indecision resulted from numerous irrational fears, such as the possibility of terrorists on the plane, and the chance that my ticket would get lost if I left it with a ticket agent. I finally decided to return as planned.

#### **Thursday, February 25, 1999**

We arrived in Hyderabad last night without incident. Ramchandra, a member of the Board of Directors met us at the airport. One of the kids from the Hyderabad home drove back in the taxi with us.

Bonnie and I slept with the three female volunteers in one room that was jammed full, with five beds lined up against one another. The sight of spiders and webs on the ceiling above my bed sent chills running up and down my spine. My skin crawled at the thought of one of them falling on me in the middle of the night. The other women didn’t seem concerned. The three male volunteers slept in a separate room.

Bonnie stayed up most of the night with one of the female volunteers listening to her concerns. The volunteers are having difficulty getting along. They are fighting over small things like who should control the use of certain items. Unfriendly remarks are being made to one another. The volunteers also have divided loyalties towards the staff. Some of the staff members are not co-operating with one another. The volunteers are backing one or another staff member, and lobbying for him or her with Bonnie.

I occupied my time at the home in Hyderabad by playing with some of the children.

Loneliness was creeping around me again. Thoughts of home in Canada were tugging at my mind. Michael telephoned in the morning. We would both be glad when I was back home. Neither Leah nor Margaux was there when he telephoned. I guess they are getting used to being without me. I knew this would happen. I worried again about the possible long-term impact on our relationship. I don't want them to grow away from me.

### **Friday, February 26, 1999**

This morning I visited Golconda Fort with two of the volunteers. In the afternoon, we went to Ramchandra's home for lunch. His wife had been up since 6 o'clock cooking for us. I feel so badly when that happens because I know how much work is involved in preparing food for others.

### **Saturday, February 27, 1999**

Today, as usual, was quite a day. Sarah, a 24 year-old volunteer, and I went to the Charminar, a shopping district of Hyderabad.

Sarah suggested we get some fresh pineapple juice from a nearby roadside stand. Without thinking, I agreed. When I saw the make-shift stand, I became apprehensive. The glasses were still wet from being washed in unfiltered water. I could only guess how long it had been since the squeezer had been cleaned. Like an idiot, I kept my fears to myself until after we had some of the best freshly squeezed pineapple juice I have ever tasted.

Sarah was unconcerned. She drank freshly squeezed juice from roadside stands regularly, and usually had no problems. However, she had food poisoning before, including an occasion when blood and pus were mixed in her stools. She was not overly anxious about it, and told me that antibiotics had cured her quickly. So,

this is one of the differences between 24 year-olds and 51 yearolds!  
It must be wonderful to think that you are invincible!

At lunch I decided to have a bottled soft drink, and some packaged peanuts that I knew would be safe—a rather silly attempt to compensate for my poor judgement earlier in the day.

After lunch Bonnie and the other volunteers picked us up in a van and we were taken to a Village Reconstruction Organization project outside Hyderabad. The organization was started by a Jesuit priest. About 200 small communities have been organized in rural parts of India to educate and train children in the ways of village life.

It is very Gandhian in concept and application. The boys and girls are taught academic subjects as well as practical skills. They learn how to weave, do crafts, sew, and make bricks and tiles for housing. At the village we visited there were about 100 boys and girls. The goal is to have the children return to their villages after they finish high school, instead of flocking to cities where they would, in the words of the administrator, only create more slums.

At the village we were shown a solar cooker. It was a large concave dish with a span of about four feet. It was made out of aluminum strips placed on a stand. The dish was pointed in the direction of the sun. We were told that two kilograms of rice could be cooked in one hour by placing a bowl filled with rice and water in the centre of the solar cooker.

It appears there are two conflicting strains of thought to solving India's problems. The first is industrialization, westernization and urbanization. The second is a return to a simple, rural village life.

We were given a very simple meal at the project, which was delicious. It was very hot. I was very thirsty, but afraid to drink the water that was offered with the meal. Bonnie, another older

volunteer and I, didn't drink the water. All the young volunteers did, providing more evidence that older people are more cautious. On the way home, I asked if we could stop the van so I could buy some bottled water. I was absolutely parched and desperate to drink something.

### **Sunday, February 28, 1999**

I am sitting in a plane on my way back to Gandhinagar late on Sunday night. I cannot believe that I have already passed the mid-point of my three-month sojourn. To think I have only six weeks left! I still have so much work to do.

I need to see the director of the Social Defence Department about the licence. I have to get the annual report written and approved by Bonnie and Natubhai Patel. Work must continue on the adoptions. The kids must be inoculated for tetanus. Research needs to be done for Megna's tailoring course. Items need to be bought for the kids with the remaining donated funds, et cetera et cetera. It's a never-ending story and what a privilege to be part of that story. I'm beginning to think I've found my niche.

This morning we had a meeting with the Board of Directors. Only one member, Ramchandra, turned up. We discussed a number of issues. I wish the action items were assigned to someone specific with deadlines to complete the activity. Perhaps that is hard to do when most people at the meeting are volunteers. Bonnie can only hope that someone will take the initiative and do the proposed activity.

Bonnie warned volunteers and staff not to become involved with a nearby Christian mission, because of the possible danger to all at the home. If Hindu fanatics thought the Child Haven home were part of the Christian mission, the children, staff and volunteers could be at risk of violence. I worry the volunteers do not realize the seriousness of the situation.

I talked with a new young volunteer about how to help out in the home. She was having difficulty finding her niche. I advised her not to get her information through the other volunteers, but to deal directly with the manager. She should help out the manager

in whatever way she is asked. The girl replied that sometimes the manager asked her to do work which was really the work of the manager or the ayahs. I don't think I got through to her.

In the evening, Bonnie took us all out for dinner. Two men from Australia, a brother and a friend of one of the volunteers, who have come to build a patio at the Hyderabad home, joined us. It was a wonderful meal.

Even though I am content with what has transpired so far in this adventure, I miss my children very much. I will be so happy to see them again. I should remember what Philippe, a young volunteer in Hyderabad said to me about being anxious to return home. The first time he was away from home travelling for a long period of time, he counted the weeks until he would see his friends again. But once he was at home, he realized that nothing had changed, and he had not missed anything. On this trip he decided that he would live in the present.

Nonetheless, as I sit in the airport, I think to myself I can hardly wait to go home. It is being away from Michael and the kids that is the most painful and difficult thing for me. I think about them all the time.

### **Monday, March 1, 1999**

I am glad to be back at the home in Gandhinagar and to feel productive.

In the early part of the morning, Rakesh came and talked to me about a problem he was having with his father. His Dad wrote him a letter telling him he was not to beat his cousins, Megnha and Mayuri. He does not understand why his Dad thinks he has been hurting the two girls. His father chastised him for asking for 50 rupees for his birthday. I was very touched that he felt comfortable telling me about his problems. We talked again and played some cards in the evening.

I wrote a fair amount in my diary. I typed all the loose hard copy pages I had written during my trip with Bonnie. I worked for a few hours on the annual report, and managed to almost complete a

first draft.

Later in the afternoon, I went for a bike ride with Mayuri, and I started to teach our cleaning lady, Koki, how to ride a bike. It is amazing that at eighteen years of age, Koki does not know how to ride a bike. She had a hard time with the concept of pedaling in a forward motion. She wanted to pedal forwards, and then backwards. But of course, she has never experienced riding a tricycle.

In the evening I played cards with Rahul. I then worked with Meghna on the computer for about 45 minutes.

I am beginning to realize that Shannon and I will need to work hard communicating with one another. We are very different kinds of people. Shannon stayed in the home working with the children while I was travelling with Bonnie. It is important we work effectively together for the good of the children. We chatted about our different styles of communication. I think that was helpful.

### **Wednesday, March 3, 1999**

Shannon and I went to Ahmedabad today. I wanted to get my e-mail and I wanted to try to change my return home from April 7 to April 5. I thought I would be able to change my ticket without leaving it with a travel agent if I dealt directly with British Airways, the airlines I am using. But all seats were booked. It is high season in India, and the start of the summer holidays.

I bought a few things for my kids and Michael. I would like to find a rug for Michael. I know he would like one with birds and flowers in it. He had seen one in Ottawa that he loved and I hope to find a similar one here.

### **Thursday, March 4, 1999**

Kala and Maya and I went to Sector 21, the Gandhinagar shopping district, to buy small metal suitcases for some of the children. Usually each child has his or her own suitcase in which they keep all their belongings, such as a change of clothes and a toothbrush. However, we do not have enough for every child,

so some children are sharing. Two of the ayahs need suitcases too. We went from store to store comparing prices and quality, and finally settled on one kind. All over India people carry these little metal suitcases when they are travelling. We bought nine – seven for the kids and two for the ayahs.

I can hardly believe I have only four and a half weeks to go! I'm sure it will fly by. I am no longer as anxious as I was to return home. I am much more secure in the knowledge that Michael and the kids can cope without me. And of course, just knowing that I will be returning home soon, minimizes my sense of separation from my family.

This sojourn in India has helped me. It has given me time to reflect on the past, and plan for the future. I have spent my time on matters that I value most.

I am developing a new vision for our family. I would like to have a close relationship with my kids when they grow up. I realize in order for this to happen, I must not be overpowering, but still provide the vehicle for both fun and serious discussions.

I'm glad we bought a small cottage last year. It will really help keep our family together. I'm grateful I can think about the future life of our family now, when I still have some time to do something about it. When Amy talked about her family, it helped me formulate ideas about how a family can be, when the children are grown.

### **Saturday, March 6, 1999**

Fred Cappuccino telephoned to tell us the new volunteer we were expecting, would be delayed for a week.

Shannon and I have started swimming at the pool. Finally! We made it to the pool. The cool, wet, refreshing, pool. How I love swimming. It will cost me 500 rupees or about \$20 to swim there from now until I leave for Canada. The pool is part of an incredibly well-equipped sports centre in Gandhinagar. It was created to develop talented children from Gujarat and several neighbouring states into top-notch athletes. The children live, study and hone their sports in the centre. Everything is paid for by the state.

I finished writing the annual report for Child Haven. I'm so thankful to have the lap top computer with me.

I went to a nearby computer training centre and asked the manager to print out the report for me. I offered to pay for the print-outs, but the manager insisted he would do it for free, since it was for Child Haven.

We will take the report to Natubhai Patel on Monday for his comments and then I'll send it to Bonnie for her input. Writing this report has been an enjoyable exercise.

### **Sunday, March 7, 1999**

Yesterday morning Kala and I went to court to get a copy of the adoption documents for the two children living with Indian parents. The papers had not yet been signed by the judge. We will go back to court on Tuesday and then Kala must execute a deed of adoption. We'll do this through the lawyer.

This afternoon, Dr. Patel came and gave the kids their tetanus shots.

For the most part, the inoculations went smoothly. However, Chandu, the cook, decided to force Kala's children, Bhailu and Shivani, to have the shots. He picked them up and slung them over his shoulder like two sacks of potatoes, and brought them into the office.

Bhailu screamed. Shivani was so terrified, the doctor decided not to give her the shot. Some of the other kids became frightened and began to wail. It was quite a challenge to calm and quiet everyone down. Next time, Chandu will have to be advised to mind his own business. Kala had left the home because her mother had come quite unexpectedly for an eye examination. We really could have used Kala's help.

Despite the difficulties, all the kids are now inoculated against tetanus. They will need booster shots in six weeks, and a third shot in six months. I have prepared a notice for future volunteers and posted it on the wall beside the desk in the office.

Rohan developed an allergic reaction to the tetanus shot. He had a high temperature and a rash all over his body. Only one person in 1000 develops an allergic reaction to these shots. That one in one-thousand was in our small group of 28 children. Fortunately, Dr. Patel was able to administer an antidote. Rohan's mother Tara watched him carefully all night. I got up several times to see how he was doing.

The boy was much better today, but he still had a slight rash on his skin. I was not worried. I could see he was greatly improved from the previous day.

Around mid-day, Kala came into my room and confided she and Tara were very worried. Rohan had not completely recovered, and she had sent the boy and his mother to a different doctor. I was horrified. The new doctor would have no knowledge of the antidote that Dr. Patel had given Rohan. In addition, we were trying to develop a good relationship with Dr. Patel. This action could jeopardize the relationship.

Kala and I had a serious discussion about the appropriate course of action. For the first time since I arrived, I really dug in my heels. When I discovered Tara and Rohan were visiting a friend on the way to the doctor, I insisted we telephone Tara, and tell her to come back to the home. We would visit Dr. Patel.

All of us—Tara, Kala, Rohan, Shannon and myself—hopped into an auto rickshaw that took us to Dr. Patel's office, ten minutes away. Dr. Patel assured us Rohan was on his way to recovery. The tea he offered made everyone feel better.

Today I have a cold, and feel absolutely lousy. I had been up half the night, keeping an eye on the children for adverse reactions to the inoculations. I have not been swimming for the past few days, but I may go tonight if I feel better.

### **Monday, March 8, 1999**

Today Shannon and I went to Ahmedabad to see Natubhai Patel. I took the annual report to show him. I think he was actually impressed by it. He said he would look at it more thoroughly. He

would drop by our home on Wednesday with any suggested changes.

I tried once again to change my ticket back home. The interesting thing is, I am now not sure I want to return home a few days earlier than originally planned. I'm beginning to feel very nostalgic about India. Every day here is becoming more and more precious to me. I know I'll miss India when I go home and I may never have the opportunity to return. In any case, it's impossible to change my return date. All flights are fully booked.

Michael called this morning. The family had a rough week. There had been snow, ice and rain-storms, one following another. Michael had been in Rio de Janeiro throughout it all. His sister Judith, was looking after the kids. She had a hard time dealing with the elements, the kids, and frayed tempers. Michael asked if I intended to work for Child Haven again. I assured him it would not be for a long time. I sensed he was having a difficult time. I think he wants me back home.

I just saw a lizard on the wall as I am writing this—I hope it doesn't run in my direction.

### **Tuesday, March 9, 1999**

Today I charged around Gandhinagar with Kala to finish off the paper work for the Indian adoption. I had made several telephone calls to the judge this past week, and ring the bells! He finally signed the papers. We had to get copies in order to execute a deed of adoption. It was one of the last steps in finalizing the adoption.

We went to the courthouse where, after an hour of running from office to office, we finally got a copy of the signed papers. We were then told the deed of adoption had to be executed on official paper. A variety of official papers exist. We had to ensure we had the right kind for this transaction. The paper has rupee notes of different denominations printed across the top. Depending upon the transaction, a specific amount of rupees must be paid, which is indicated by using paper with the same amount of rupees printed on it. The lawyer was unsure of how many rupees were

required.

We hopped into an auto rickshaw and beetled over to The Collector's office. We were told fifty rupee paper was required. However, fifty rupee paper was not available at The Collector's office, so we returned to the court house where this paper is normally available. But none was available there either. We were told to return the next day.

It would be so much simpler if everyone had a telephone. Our tasks could have been completed in minutes, instead of hours. It is a fascinating experience to see how Indian government offices function.

While we were trying to find the appropriate paper, Kala revealed one of the lawyers helping us with the legal aspects of the adoption, was not being paid. This lawyer would do the work whenever our own lawyer was not available. Kala thought it would be a good idea to give him a small gift. I thought it seemed like a reasonable thing to do, knowing that gift-giving is often a part of the normal way of doing business in India. We looked for something in Gandhinagar that would cost around 300 rupees, but found nothing.

I suggested getting a small soapstone carving, similar to the one I was bringing back to Canada. Later that evening, I showed it to Kala and Mukesh. I could tell that they were not impressed. They suggested buying a brown plastic wall hanging of Ganesh, the Hindu God of Wisdom and Good Fortune. I thought it was extraordinarily tacky. No doubt, Indian sensibilities are quite different than western ones. Surely lawyers' tastes would be more sophisticated (do I mean western?) than Mukesh's and Kala's. I could be wrong, of course.

Kala also wanted to know if I thought we should take something to the family court judge, now that he had signed the adoption papers. I agreed and we decided to buy him some good quality sweets.

**Wednesday, March 10, 1999**

Something wonderful happened today.

The social worker from the agency handling the Canadian adoption, telephoned to tell us the Board of Directors has agreed to process the required papers. They will be forwarding them to the central Indian agency for a "No Objection Certificate". A certificate means the Indian government will allow this intercountry adoption to take place. One more hurdle has been passed in terms of finalizing the adoption. It's likely the boy will be in Canada by early fall!

We were asked to come to the agency to sign documents, and to bring the boy with us. Kala, Shannon, the boy and I left for Ahmedabad this afternoon. I was thrilled to sign the required papers as Child Haven's representative and to know that another small step forward has been made towards finalizing the adoption. It helps me feel that my time in India has been worthwhile. I know how much the Canadian couple longs to have this child with them.

Working on this adoption has been one of the most heart-rending experiences I have had in India. I've made numerous telephone calls to both the agency and the lawyer handling the adoption. I talked to the boy about his feelings regarding the adoption, and with the adoptive father, when he telephoned from Canada. I have sent the boy's adoptive parents e-mails to keep them upto-date on the progress of the adoption. I understand so well the parents' frustration and desire to be with this boy, who is a wonderful, full-of-beans kind of child. It's gratifying to have had the opportunity to help ensure, along with many other volunteers, the adoption of this boy.

Sometimes I feel as if I've had more impact here in three months than I have had in my government job in a year. During the Child Haven orientation, volunteers are warned they may feel as if they have made no difference because they cannot change anything in three months, six months, or even a year. I think the same advice is more appropriately given to our Canadian public servants.

We had a staff meeting with Kala and the three ayahs, Maya, Hari Priya and Tara. There were a number of issues we needed to discuss as a group. Tara has been giving special attention to her son, Rohan. It has been upsetting Shannon, the other two ayahs and myself. Sometimes Tara gives him extra food, or she washes his plate after meals, when all the children wash their own. We thought it was important to address this with Kala.

Shannon and I have also been concerned about Shital. She has been withdrawing from the children, volunteers and staff.

The meeting around these issues was fascinating. Although only Kala spoke both Gujarati and English, we had an incredibly fruitful meeting. Everyone participated. Kala acted as translator, and I facilitated. It is amazing how well people can communicate when they really want to – even when they have no common language.

The discussion about Rohan was very positive. Hari Priya said she was giving Rohan less attention than the other children to compensate for the extra attention he was getting from his mother. I commented I was reacting to the situation similarly. Tara undertook not to give Rohan extra privileges, although I think everyone realized how hard this would be for any mother to do.

We agreed that Shannon would focus on Shital for a few days in order to determine the cause of her withdrawal. Shital has always been more withdrawn than other children. Her lack of interaction has been particularly evident during the past few weeks.

I was glad Shannon agreed to watch Shital closely for a few days. I knew this was a task I should not do. From the moment I arrived, I fell in love with this little girl. I could easily pack her up and take her home with me. She is so vulnerable and adorable.

From the beginning, I knew it was important that I not pay special attention to Shital. It would be very difficult for us both, when it was time for me to leave. Giving her extra attention would be unfair to the others, but I found it very difficult to maintain my distance. I have had to order myself to disengage.

The trip to Mumbai and Hyderabad provided a much needed

break from the little girl. When I returned, Shital was at her own home celebrating Holi, a Hindu religious festival. I did not see her for almost two weeks. Upon her return, she did not respond to me as warmly as she had before. This has allowed me to maintain a certain distance. I am both saddened and relieved by the change in our relationship. Still it is hard to let go. I want to hold her in my arms, help her develop skills at the playground, and tuck her in at night. Sometimes, it is hard for me to watch Shannon and the ayahs take care of her. Yet I know I must, as that is what is best for everyone.

Last night, as I was sitting in the office at 3 a.m. writing in my diary, we received a telephone call. The new volunteer, Carolyn, had arrived. Shannon and I went to the airport to welcome her.

#### **Thursday, March 11, 1999**

After I went swimming today I felt ill. I was terribly worried I would not be able to do the work I hoped to complete before leaving India. My throat was so sore, I could hardly speak.

There is so much I want to accomplish before I leave. I want to prepare the files for the licensing inspection; complete the medical records for each child; include Bonnie's and Natubhai Patel's comments in the annual report, and hand the finished product to the Social Defence Department. I want to redo the volunteer information book to include more information. I want to spend more time playing with the children. I still have some of the donated money left, to spend on items needed by the children and the home. If I can get those things done, I will be happy.

The volunteer information book is put together by volunteers at the Gandhinagar home. It's placed in the office for new volunteers to read when they arrive and it is critical to their quick integration. It provides a fascinating insight into the evolution of the home. I am surprised at how some volunteers viewed the children as being very difficult. Have they really changed so much in six months, or do some volunteers have unrealistic expectations of how children ought to behave?

It is unbelievable that my time here is almost over. I hope I get

the work done, have fun, and leave on a high note.

I felt better a little later in the day, and went into Ahmedabad with Carolyn. I sent a draft of the annual report to Bonnie for her input. It cost 650 rupees to send it by fax. I hope she received it. I am so pleased to have finally sent it.

When I came home, I played carrom, an Indian board game, with the kids. Then I played chess with Rakesh. He beat me.

### **Friday, March 12, 1999**

Shannon, Carolyn and I went to see a movie called, "I Live in Your Heart." It was a Hindi movie made in Mumbai. It was fun—three hours of pure schlock. It was interesting to see the Indian version of beauty. The actresses were a little on the plump side by western standards. Lean and muscular is a sign of poverty, while plumpness is a sign of wealth. I wondered how Indians would react to our deathly thin models and television stars.

Shannon made an interesting comment today about the use of the term "Sister." When I returned from my trip from Mumbai and Hyderabad, she found herself slightly upset about sharing the name with me. I understood immediately. I told her that when I had been the only volunteer in the home, I had encouraged the children to say "Trish Sister," instead of simply "Sister." I hated being called "Sister." I felt it was an annihilation of my individuality, and I was no different than any other volunteer. I think about Catholic nuns, and how they must feel at being called "Sister" and what purpose that practice serves in the church.

### **Saturday, March 13, 1999**

I am feeling very lazy today. I went swimming this morning with Shannon. It was wonderful. I love to bicycle to the pool. It takes about 18 minutes. We swim for about 40 minutes, then we bike back home. I feel so relaxed after the swim. The weather is so lovely in the morning. It's not too warm, and the temperature of the water is perfect.

Natubahi Patel had promised to visit our home today to make

sure everything was suitable for renewing the licence. He also planned to give us his comments about the report. However, he was not available – just as he was not available on Wednesday and Friday. We had rolled up our sleeves to clean the place for his visit. It was gleaming. When I telephoned him, he said it was end of fiscal year, and he was very busy. I suggested that we meet at his office so we can at least get his comments on the draft annual report. He agreed to see us at 11 o'clock on Monday.

We took the kids to the park. Upon our return, I worked on updating the files. Shannon reported that Shital was behaving like a normal four year-old, and is having fun with everyone. We think our worries and concerns about her were unfounded.

Carolyn seems to be really nice and quite open about her feelings. She has been sick since she arrived. It must be so difficult for her. I know I would be upset if I were in her position. I would be anxious about getting involved quickly in the life of the home.

Four of the boys are playing in the office while I am writing this. I love having them around me, even when I am not directly interacting with them.

### **Monday, March 15, 1999**

This morning, the kids telephoned from Ottawa. Michael called from Toronto where he is attending a business meeting.

The kids seemed in great shape. I spoke with Judith and told her I sympathized with her about the difficulties she had with the kids during the ice storm. She said they had only one bad day and it had blown over.

When Michael called, he announced it was time for me to come home. He would, however, give me another three weeks in India. He asked me to check for business-class seats so I can come home a few days early. I promised to try.

Later in the day we went to Ahmedabad to get Natubhai Patel's comments on the annual report. He spent an inordinate amount of time looking for the report amongst his other papers. When

he finally found it, he said it was “fine.” Mr. Patel’s final approval was a bit of a let-down. A non-event. I was not sure if he had actually read the report. I did not care, as long as we had his approval.

We then went to the e-mail shop. Bonnie had sent a message with a few suggestions for the annual report.

Shannon and I went to British Airways to see if there were any business class seats for my return ticket. There were some available, but they had to be booked from Canada. I sent Michael an e-mail telling him this.

It was lots of fun, as always, to visit Ahmedabad. I love the life, the colour, the camels, the congestion, the rides in the auto rickshaws, the masses of people. I feel so exhilarated after I have been in the city. But I am always glad to come back to the peace and quiet of Gandhinagar.

On Monday night I telephoned several people about the Canadian adoption. Much to my chagrin, the social agency had not yet forwarded the papers to CARA for the “No Objection Certificate.” I had telephoned CARA several times since we learned the Board of Directors had agreed to process the adoption. CARA informed me that they had not received the papers.

I telephoned the agency to find out why the papers had not yet been forwarded. I wasn’t getting the clear answers I wanted. The social worker told me the documents had been sent and CARA told me they have not received them. I have a very clear sense that the papers are not lost in the mail. Why have they been held up? What in the world is going on?

I finished incorporating Bonnie’s comments into the annual report. I telephoned the Director of the Social Defence Department to arrange a meeting to show him the report. The only day he was available this week is tomorrow.

**Tuesday, March 16, 1999**

I got up early, checked over the annual report to make sure I hadn't made any mistakes, and took it to the nearby computer training centre to get it printed. The computer centre that printed the first draft was unable to print my updated version due to computer problems. Another computer centre agreed to print the report, again without charge. I am always touched by people's generosity when they forgo charging us because the work is for Child Haven.

Once the report was printed, I went to a nearby hotel and had a western-style breakfast consisting of fresh pineapple juice, toast, marmalade and coffee. I had been dying to have a taste of home for a while, and even the instant coffee was welcome.

Carolyn and I went to Ahmedabad and saw the Director of the Social Defence Department about the licence for the home. He gave us information that differed from what Natubhai Patel had told us. According to the director, we did not need to renew our licence in order to operate as a home for destitute children. However, he continued, if we wanted to become an adoption agency, we had to make a separate application to the department. He outlined the specific information we would have to provide in order to ensure our application would be accepted. Fortunately, most of the required information was in the annual report. When we got home, I wrote a letter to confirm our conversation, and made copies of the letters to keep in the home, and to give to Bonnie.

We then went to Natubhai Patel's office to give him a re-drafted copy of our annual report. We got into a discussion about the Indian Council of Gujarat, which he helps to manage. He told us that local government funds were drying up and they were looking for international funds. I offered to send him a list of agencies in Canada that provide funds to developing countries. He seemed pleased and promptly gave each of us a calendar.

We visited the social worker at the agency processing the Canadian adoption. Kala had to give him the required processing fees. I hoped our presence would remind him to send the papers

to CARA in New Delhi.

When I came home I went swimming. It was so peaceful. The pool doesn't seem that well chlorinated, which is a detail I normally would not think about. However, it was Michael's first question when I told him I was swimming in a local pool.

### **Wednesday, March 17, 1999**

The last few days have been wonderful. I feel so exhilarated. I can hardly believe I have only three weeks left. I feel so nostalgic about this place.

This afternoon I finished the medical histories for each child. The records will go into each child's file. They will contain information on the major illnesses and on inoculations the children have received.

While I was working on the files, Kala and the ayahs came into the office. We discussed the medicine the kids are taking to alleviate their fevers. They have been sick for the past week. We looked at the bottles. Ashwin is getting chloroquine, which means he has malaria.

We talked about the symptoms of malaria, hookworm and other diseases. We discussed precautionary measures that should be taken to avoid contracting these diseases. I brought out information I had been given at the Child Haven orientation, as well as the information I received from the Travel Clinic I attended before I left for India. I read out the information. Kala translated, and we all became more informed. We joked, and laughed ourselves silly. Once again, I marvelled at how lucky I am to be a part of the lives of these women, who, in one way, are so very different from myself, and in another way, are just like me.

### **Thursday, March 18, 1999**

Today I took the little kids to the park by myself. I really enjoyed it. It reminded me of my early days in India, when I spent so much more time with the children, and less on administrative work.

I'm surprised at how much time I spend on administrative work. Perhaps I really was meant to be a bureaucrat. I like spending some time with the kids, but all day is simply too much. I'm much happier spending the afternoon on paper work, attending meetings, or discussing the home with Kala.

Before lunch I played the card game, "Memory," with two of the seven-year old boys, Tarun and Indiatj. The boys are cute as buttons. They were so pleased when they each turned up pairs of matching cards.

That afternoon, Kala and I went to visit Mr. Modi, the local officer of the Social Defence Department in Gandhinagar. We told him the director of the department (Mr. Modi's boss) had said we didn't need to renew our licence. Mr. Modi said he would help us make our application to permit the home to process adoptions, if that is what we wanted to do.

Before coming back to the home, Kala and I went shopping in Sector 21. I bought rings for Leah and Margaux.

When I came home, I lay down on my bed. A few minutes later, Pravin, walked into my room and said, simply, "Sister." He sat down on my bed. He seemed so sad that I sat up and put my arm around him for about 10 minutes. I thought he was going to burst into tears. He then asked me to teach him some English. We worked on his English and played games for about 40 minutes and found other children to play with.

I was touched. Pravin, an aggressive, confident, intelligent and bossy little boy, wanted, like everyone else in the world, simply to be held. Because of my lack of Gujarati I was unable to talk to him about his reasons for feeling sad. It must of had something to do with the death of his father, about six weeks earlier.

It was a moment of need for him. I was so glad to be there for him.

### **Friday, March 19, 1999**

Almost all the children have had fevers, chills and bad coughs over the past week. Carolyn and Shannon are both sick now. Most of the children are on the road to recovery. Shannon spent a lot of time nursing them back to health. She went to a film shop to pick up empty film containers for the kids' pills. This is so much better than keeping pills wrapped in newspaper, the way they were given to us at the hospital.

### **Saturday, March 20, 1999**

Shannon and I took Meghna, Mayuri and Shama to the Calico Museum of Textiles in Ahmedabad on Saturday afternoon.

The outing worked out extremely well. The buses were not too crowded, and the tour around the museum was just the right length. There were only a few other people on the tour. I think the girls really enjoyed themselves. I saw beautiful wall hangings based on various nineteenth century Indian works of art. I would love to buy one.

### **Sunday, March 21, 1999**

Today is Sunday, a quiet, restful day. This morning I took four of the boys to the large park in Sector 28. It is well-equipped with play structures. Because it was early in the morning, there was hardly anybody there, and it was still cool. This was so much better than going at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, when the park is packed with people. I bought each of the little fellows an ice cream cone—the highlight of the trip.

At lunch, Kala approached me. She had asked Chandu several times to make a curd and tomato salad. The salad would be late, and she wanted me to ask Chandu why he had not prepared it. Shannon had requested a curd salad be made because of the health benefits of raw vegetables. She has been particularly concerned with the potential loss of vitamins in the vegetable stews. They are cooked for hours in a pressure cooker.

Shannon expressed concern that Kala had discussed the matter

with me instead of her. After all, it was her suggestion to make the salad. Shannon has said more than once that Kala listens to me because of my age. This is something Amy had said to me as well. It's nice to know that there are some advantages to being older.

### **Monday, March 22, 1999**

Michael telephoned as usual, first thing Monday morning. Matthew had been in the hospital on Friday night because of stomach pains. Michael had taken him to the nearby Rosemount Clinic. The doctor said he had the symptoms of appendicitis, and should be taken to the hospital. As it turned out, Matthew's pains were the result of a virus and he would be fine. When I talked with him, he seemed quite nonplussed about the whole thing. Michael repeated he is tired of being alone, and wants me back home.

I am beginning to think about reintegrating at home in Canada. Will I find it difficult?

When I return to Ottawa, I want to play tennis. I will join the Rideau Club, if that is where Michael is playing squash. Then we can go to weekend events together. I want to spend as much time at the cottage with the kids as possible. Margaux will be away for the month of July at a leadership-in-training course for camp counselors at the YM-YWCA camp. Matthew will be away for two weeks at Camp Otterdale. I wonder if Leah will find a job away from home. If so, it will be a strange summer for us, with the kids spending so much time away.

Again, I thought about finding ways of maintaining a family life as the kids get older. I plan to work hard at having some kind of family life this summer. This time away has helped me gain a perspective on my life, and what I want out of the next few years.

Kala broke into my reverie. She asked for help with the development of a form to be used as a monthly financial statement. A new method of recording finances has been developed by the home in Hyderabad—where the Child Haven Board of Directors for India is located. All homes need to record

expenses in the same way, for the sake of consistency. Although I made several suggestions, Kala had her own ideas and developed the form around them. I am glad she was able to bounce her ideas off me.

Later in the day, Carolyn, Shannon and I went shopping in Sector 16 to look for a rug for Michael. Kala had suggested I go there, but I found only small cheap carpets. We did find the Gujarat Tourism Office, and a fellow there sent me to a carpet wholesaler a few minutes away by rickshaw. There were very few carpets there, but the salesperson knew of a few shops in Ahmedabad that sold rugs. I am beginning to sense I will have a hard time finding what I want. If I cannot find a rug, I will buy some wall hangings, for Michael and myself.

### **Tuesday, March 23, 1999**

It's early in the morning, and I have been up since about 5 o'clock. I am sleeping in the office because Shannon is sick. I do not want to catch her cold.

I feel displaced. Not only am I sleeping in the office, but both Shannon and Carolyn are using the bedroom as a playroom. The kids are often in the room when I want to be there. I used to invite children occasionally into my room, when I was not sharing it, but I now have no control over when the children come and go. I really feel the need to talk to the women about it.

Both Shannon and Carolyn are still sick. Neither has any energy. I feel badly for them, especially for Carolyn since she has not been well since she arrived. What frustration she must be feeling!

Right now I feel as if I have climbed a mountain, and I am now almost back to the base. I feel as if I only have a few loose ends to tidy up, and I can spend the remaining time as I wish. I will finish buying gifts for my family. I am thinking about taking a small trip outside of Ahmedabad to see some tourist sites. I am not sure I have the energy for it.

On Tuesday I went to Ahmedabad to look for a silk rug for Michael. I could find nothing. I was advised to go to either Bombay or

Delhi to buy a carpet.

I decided to go to the Calico Museum to buy the wall hangings I had seen there earlier. On the way there, the rickshaw driver got lost. He wanted to charge me 40 rupees for a ride that took half an hour – when it should have taken 10 minutes. When I complained about the price, he said the museum had recently moved. I knew that it had been located at the same spot for at least 10 years. There should have been no confusion about the address. I had given him a pamphlet published by the museum with its address on it.

The driver was deliberately taking advantage of me. We settled on 25 rupees. But he was not a happy man. I was not happy either because he had wasted my time. Then he had the nerve to try and charge me extra! I was disappointed that I was unable to resolve this in an easy-going, happy way.

The notion of bargaining for everything is very tiring. It is so much easier to have a set price and pay it. But everyone is expected to bargain for everything in India.

It's fascinating to watch Kala bargain. She is a master at it. She laughs and cajoles the person she is dealing with until they come to an agreement about the price. She never upsets people by being too aggressive or insulting. It's an art.

I try to do the same, but of course I am hampered by my lack of Gujarati. I always remind myself that the person I am bargaining with needs the money more than I do. When I ask myself the question: "Who needs the money more?", there is no debate about what I should do. Paying more than would normally be asked doesn't worry me. I think the person's family may eat a little better that day. So it was surprising that I reacted as harshly as I did with the rickshaw driver. It was not my normal way of dealing with such situations. I had forgotten to ask the right question.

While in Ahmedabad, I found the shop I had been looking for since Amy left. Amy and I had gone to this shop soon after I arrived. I had seen some hand-embroidered scarves I wanted to bring back home. Although I had looked for this shop many times,

it had eluded me every time I tried to find it.

I had actually walked past the shop several times, but had not seen it. I had been convinced I had bad karma that resulted when I said I was unable to take Amy's parcels home with me. But my karma must have changed after my last visit to Ahmedabad, when I bought her a beautiful rust-coloured scarf, a colour that she loved. I had decided to buy her this silk scarf as a small measure to compensate for not taking her things with me. This time when I looked for the shop, I found it without difficulty. It was right where I thought it was. Amazingly, it had remained hidden for at least three previous searches. What a relief to have finally found it! I bought three lovely scarves for 650 rupees – a real bargain.

At the end of the day I bought myself a small gold pendant of Ganesh, the Hindu God of Wisdom and Good Fortune. I wanted this pendant to remind myself of my experience in India – and because I need as much wisdom as I can get.

I had a wonderful day hopping around Ahmedabad by myself. I am beginning to know the city and I felt confident I could find my way around. During one of my rides in the rickshaw, I thought we were going to get hit by a car. We were making a U-turn across traffic, and a car was heading straight for us. I screamed. The rickshaw driver turned around to look at me as if I were crazy. I guess by Ahmedabad standards we hadn't even come close to an accident.

Tonight Kala asked me if I would go to Massana, the town where she grew up. Her family still lives there. At first I was reluctant to go. I knew I would be in a strange house with strange people, and it would be very difficult for me. Kala urged me to go. It was the only way her husband, Mukesh would let her see her family. He doesn't like her to be away from him and their children very often.

Kala told Mukesh I wanted to see her town. And so, he agreed to let Kala take me there. He wanted me to visit his family in another town as well. But I knew I should only go away for one night. I remembered the wedding all too well. I didn't want to get myself

into a situation I couldn't handle. One night in a strange environment was enough for me.

### **Wednesday, March 24, 1999**

Today, we received a telephone call from the Indian couple who had adopted the two children who had lived in our home. They said they would be coming to Gandhinagar to sign the adoption papers. This would make the adoption final and complete.

I had been worrying about them. If they did not sign the adoption documents within a month of the judge signing the papers, the adoption would become null and void. The long and difficult process of obtaining the judge's signature would begin again.

Kala had tried to contact the couple several times by telephoning the children's uncle and asking him to relay a message to their parents. It was no simple matter trying to contact the uncle. Each time we tried to telephone, we had to go to the local market to use the public telephone. It was a long distance call, and the children's uncle was often not at home.

When we didn't hear from the children's parents, I sent a registered letter telling them they needed to sign the adoption papers. At that point, I felt we had done all we could.

It was a great relief when the couple telephoned to let us know they were arriving Friday to sign the papers. We had to make sure our lawyer would be available to prepare the required papers. We knew our "official" lawyer was unavailable this week, so we set about to ensure our "volunteer" lawyer could help us.

The courts were closed today for a religious holiday. We knew we could not reach him there to confirm the appointment for Friday. Since the lawyer does not have a telephone in his home, Kala and I had to go directly to his house to arrange the meeting. We hopped into a rickshaw and drove through the countryside to his village, which was about 30 kilometres outside Gandhinagar. The drive in the countryside was beautiful. Huge piles of picked red peppers – at least five feet high and nine feet wide, were sitting in the fields waiting to be taken to market.

People were working in the fields and buffaloes were bathing in ponds.

The lawyer's village was incredibly picturesque. It was full of one-story row houses made out of brick situated along very narrow, winding and bumpy dirt roads. A central communal area was part of the row house where the lawyer lived. His two rooms, one behind the other, were at the far end of this common area. We sat in the small back room. It served as the bedroom and sitting room. A tiny kitchen was the front room. I was amazed that a lawyer, even though a young one, would live in such a simple way. We met his two year-old son, and his wife.

Pictures of Hindu gods were hanging on the whitewashed cement walls of this home. Prominent among them was the hanging of Ganesh that Kala and I had given to him a week before. Kala was right – it was an appropriate gift.

How important it is to listen to the voice of experience. I had wanted to give the lawyer a soap stone carving, but Kala and Mukesh thought the wall hanging of Ganesh would be a better choice. When I saw pictures of other gods hanging on the wall, I realized they were right.

What a clear lesson this was for me to listen to and act upon others' suggestions and advice. I thought, as I have so often in the past few months, how important it is to clearly demonstrate respect for the ability of others, and their way of doing things. I thought about how it helps to gain their trust which paves the way to working with them.

I thought about the gold pendant of Ganesh I bought for myself, and how much wisdom is needed to do this work. I thought about how much I value Kala's friendship and her help during the past few months.

Later in the day, Shannon, Carolyn and I went into Ahmedabad to get train tickets for Udaipur. We looked forward to visiting a few tourist sites there.

We decided to go to Udaipur for two days – the city is about 300

kilometres from here. It's billed in "The Lonely Planet" travel guide, as the most romantic city in India. It took us a fair amount of time to get the tickets. The lineups were long. Right now, we have only one-way tickets because of a computer shut down. The darn things crashed while our tickets were being issued. However, I don't think we'll have too much trouble getting return tickets. We have to return by Tuesday night, because we are meeting a new volunteer at the airport.

While in Ahmedabad we went to a restaurant that was built in the style of a Gujarati village. For 200 rupees, we had a fabulous meal. It was served on leaf-plates and bowls. We sat at low tables on mats on the floor. We had that ubiquitous Indian dish, a "thali"

– a plate full of vegetarian hors d'oeuvres, made with the typical herbs and spices of Gujarat: coriander, cumin, garlic and heaven knows what else. Needless to say, I stuffed myself.

Connected to the restaurant was a museum of utensils used by Gujarati villagers. The items were exquisitely displayed in a large building. A guide provided us with an explanation of the many items found in the museum.

The complex also featured a craft shop where I bought a beautiful red shawl, and a Rajasthan puppet.

#### **Thursday, March 25, 1999**

Kala and I went to Messana and had a great time. We watched a parade on the town's main street during the afternoon. The parade, in honour of a Hindu god, consisted of a variety of floats and elephants that were highly decorated and painted. It had become very hot and I was glad to return to Kala's house.

In the late afternoon, Kala's uncle drove us to his farm. It belongs to Kala's father and his two brothers. They have about 10 buffalo and they grow wheat, vegetables and plants used to make castor oil. Indian peasants look after the land for them. They were very gracious when I asked if I could take their photos. Kala's uncle and father insisted that they take a picture of me milking a buffalo. I am dying to see this photo.

Kala's family's home consisted of a main room, which doubled as a bedroom at night; a side room, where the family received visitors and sold buffalo milk; a kitchen, which included a small sitting area; a porch; a toilet, and shower, each located in separate

rooms. All the women slept in the main room at night. I had no idea where the men slept. Further, I had no idea where they slept when they desired a little togetherness.

There was very little furniture anywhere. I observed a few plastic chairs in the main room that were exactly the same as the chairs in my garden in Canada. Some thin mattresses were piled together in a cupboard. People sat on the floor or on the one bed that was in the main room. When we ate, we sat on the floor in the kitchen, and ate with our fingers.

At night, Kala's mother brought out the mattresses and laid them out on the floor of the main room, for all the women to sleep on. We all bedded down together. In the middle of the night, Kala's 18 year-old sister threw her arm around me and snuggled up. I wasn't fazed at all, even though I had met her less than 12 hours earlier. After lying against me for a while, she decided to rearrange herself – using my stomach as a pillow for her head! Her closeness didn't bother me, although her activity did disturb my sleep.

I realized I had come a long way in adapting to Indian culture.

### **Friday, March 26, 1999**

When I arrived home from visiting Kala's family the next morning, the Indian parents who were adopting the two children, were waiting to go to court and sign the papers. They had brought their children with them. We left them to play with the other children in the home, while we went to the court house. It took about an hour and a half to get everything signed, and get copies of the documents made. Carolyn and I went for ice cream with the parents after the signing. It was a celebration. They were so nice when they left, and so profuse in their thanks. I took photos of the parents at the courthouse, and a photo of them with the children. I will make sure they get copies.

I am so glad the adoption of these two children is finalized.

### **Saturday, March 27, 1999**

Canadian Christian missionaries came to the home today to give us blankets, books, toys and craft materials for the kids. They also bought a sewing machine, which will be delivered in a few days! They had come to visit the home earlier in the week. During our conversation I mentioned that we needed some new clothes for the kids. The clothes are in poor condition and the lady suggested that a sewing machine would be helpful. I agreed, but said I had not discussed this with Bonnie and Fred. I couldn't believe it, when today they said they had bought us a sewing machine. Now we can mend the kids' clothes properly.

I am very lazy today. I have packed for our trip to Udaipur. I am really looking forward to it. It's so hot – close to forty degrees. Our train does not leave until 11 p.m., so I'll be up late. We will be there only two days, but for me, that will be enough. We will be back on the thirtieth. Then I leave for Canada, seven days later. Gulp.

I have started to dislike the food here more and more. I was quite happy eating it when I arrived. But I feel if I see one more plate of beans, I will throw up. I still cannot distinguish the taste of one kind of bean from another. I dislike them all. I eat as little as possible at mealtimes. I don't mind the white rice. I like the chapatis and the vegetable stew – but the spicy rice and the beans make me feel sick. I have started eating raw tomatoes. I wash them carefully with soap and water, and rinse them with purified water to ensure they are not contaminated. I am also eating bananas, oranges, peanuts and dates.

Before I left for India, the idea of eating food that was not available to all the children really offended me. I have been unable to keep to my resolve of eating only what they eat, although I often share my treats with them.

I wonder how much weight I have lost. I have tried on my skirt several times to see if I am losing weight. It continues to get looser. I have not had my period since I arrived. I have talked to

other volunteers and discovered many of them have not had their periods while in India. At long last, I am no longer constipated. Just as I am ready to leave India – success at last. More fruit, less rice, and drinking at least three litres of fluid a day did the trick.

### **Monday, March 29, 1999**

Shannon, Carolyn and I had a wonderful time in Udaipur. The air in Ahmedabad was so polluted on our ride to the train station, we thought there must have been an industrial accident. We arrived at the station by about 9:30 and had to wait for our 11:00

p.m. departure.

We got some food and something to read. It is always an experience just being in the train station. People were sitting everywhere on the floor. Entire families were sleeping on the floor, waiting for their train, or for someone to arrive.

I remember the first time I went to the train station. When I saw all the people lying around I was somewhat shocked at their obvious poverty. When I saw them on this trip, however, I simply saw people waiting for their train. It is amazing how westerners associate sitting on the floor with poverty. It's also amazing how quickly normalization occurs.

We had second class tickets on the train. Shortly after we boarded, we settled on our berths for the night. The berths are very simple boards covered in padded plastic. They flip up or down above the seats. In each compartment there are six berths. I slept for about four hours without waking, and then slept fitfully until about six o'clock, when I got up. It was so peaceful—mostly everyone else was sleeping and the passing scenery was beautiful. The mountains were very close to the train tracks. In many places, the rock had been blasted away to make room for the tracks. There were very few trees on the mountains. The terrain was mostly dusty and dry. There were a few homes scattered in the hills, and a few small towns on the way.

I had the scenery to myself until 8 o'clock, when others began to wake up. We arrived in Udaipur an hour later. Imagine. We had

spent a total of ten hours on the train to go 300 kilometres. We found a cheap hotel –150 rupees or six Canadian dollars per night, for the three of us. It was simple, clean, had an attached bathroom, and was centrally located in the old village. What could be better?

Udaipur lived up to its reputation as a lovely city. It had been the setting of a James Bond film called Octopussy. White buildings and the man-made lake sparkled in the hot sun. Colourful wildflowers grew in profusion. India's poverty and dirt, however, were still evident everywhere – garbage, foul smells, and old and sick people were the backdrop for this beautiful city. Or was it the other way around?

We went to the City Palace, an amazing piece of architecture filled with beautiful stained glass windows. We took a boat ride to an island castle. While there, another tourist offered to take a picture of Shannon, Carolyn and myself. She dropped my camera when she handed it back. It hit the cement with a sickening crack and rolled into some mud. The camera is now broken. I could have cried. It was the camera Michael had given me for Christmas.

Early in the day we met two young men in their twenties at an art shop. I was thinking about buying a hand-painted wall hanging from them, but I really wanted to save my money for a rug. One of the fellows said he knew of a shop that had beautiful rugs. We agreed to meet at 11 o'clock the next day and he would take me there.

Quite by accident, we ran into these same two fellows after we had finished our sightseeing and were trying to decide where to eat dinner. They were insistent. I must come and look at the carpets immediately. The next day was a holy day for Muslims, and the shops would be closed.

Shannon, Carolyn and I all hopped into their auto rickshaw, and off we went to the rug shop. We climbed up the stairs of an old building. Once inside, we discovered a large carpeted area filled with oriental rugs. A few velvet-covered couches were at the side of the room. Several men were there to sell their rugs, but

there were no other customers. We sat on the couches and the men brought us clear spiced tea in china cups and saucers. It was the best tea I have had in India. With a flourish, one man threw down a variety of carpets in front of us. One caught my

eye, but I was unsure if Michael would like it. When I relayed my uncertainty, he dropped the price from 9,000 to 7,000 rupees. I was still uncertain. While the carpet was beautiful, it wasn't the like the ones Michael had admired in Ottawa. We left the store.

As we were descending the steps, the fellows from the art shop suggested we go to another shop. Off we went to another part of town in the rickshaw. We had tea there too. It was the same good, hot, clear, spiced tea. And again carpets were thrown at my feet. I rejected one after another with a nod of my head. I felt like a nineteenth-century Mumsahib, drinking my tea and examining oriental carpets for their beauty and worth. I could not find anything I was sure Michael would like.

The next day I kept on thinking about the carpet. I wanted so much to bring back a carpet for Michael. I knew there was no easy answer. If I bought a carpet, I would feel disappointed because it was not exactly what he wanted. If I didn't buy it, I would still feel disappointed. I knew this was my last chance. I would not find a carpet in Ahmedabad.

I thought I would check the shop where I saw the carpet to see if the store really was closed. So I left Carolyn and Shannon shopping in the centre of Udaipur. Sure enough, the store was locked, along with many other shops.

As I was walking along the street wondering what to do, one of the young men from the art shop came bombing up on his motorcycle. He had unexpectedly met Carolyn and Shannon, who told him I was still looking for a carpet for Michael. The fellow from the art shop told me he would get the carpet dealer. I was not sure I actually wanted to buy the carpet, and I did not want to disturb the carpet dealer on his Muslim holiday. The young man insisted. His friend lived only a few minutes away. He would fetch him.

I was asked to hop on the back of the motorcycle, but I refused. Driving on motorcycles is an extremely dangerous activity in India

– no helmets, wild traffic, and crazy drivers. So we both walked back to the carpet shop – he pushing his motorcycle along. As soon as we arrived at the carpet shop, my young escort went off on his motorcycle with a roar to find the carpet dealer and bring him back to the shop. A few minutes later, I was once again looking at the carpet, with not only the carpet dealer, but three or four men from the carpet dealer's family. It looked as if they jointly owned the business. I sat and looked at the carpet. I hummed and I hawed. I thought about Michael and what he would like. And I looked at the carpet again. I couldn't decide.

The carpet dealer reminded me he had lowered the price by 2,000 rupees the night before. I told him it was not the price I was concerned about, but my husband's reaction to the carpet. He replied, "Your husband will honour your gift because it comes from your 'side.'" ... My "what?" These charming colloquialisms could tie your brain into knots.

I could see he really thought I was bargaining for a lower price. He asked me what I was willing to pay. I was very hesitant to name an amount. I was not sure I wanted the carpet at any price.

I decided to state the ridiculous sum of 5,000 rupees, despite my fear of offending the fellow. The carpet dealer flatly refused to sell it for 5,000 rupees and told me the carpet was worth much more than that. He brought out a book and showed me copies of receipts for carpets he had sold to people all over the world, and the prices they had been willing to pay.

I said I understood his position, apologized for disturbing him, and started to ease myself out of the room. He tried to convince me again to buy the carpet for 7,000 rupees. I repeated that I understood the value of the carpet. I knew he would want to sell it for a higher price. I turned around and left.

As I was walking towards the city centre, the guy from the art shop once again came bombing up on his motorcycle. He conveyed the message the carpet dealer was willing to bargain further, and asked if I would return to the shop. Once again he

asked me to get on his motorcycle. Once again, I refused.

When we arrived at the shop on foot, the carpet dealer shook his head in disbelief. He greeted me with, "You're really tough." Negotiations started, but I quickly understood the carpet dealer was not going to come close to my offer of 5,000 rupees. He offered 6,000 rupees but I just didn't want the carpet that badly. I left empty-handed.

As I was walking towards the city centre I wondered when I would hear the roar of the motorcycle, but all was quiet. Just as I turned the corner to lose myself in the traffic, the art dealer arrived.

"Five thousand, five hundred," he said. I laughed and agreed – as long as I could pay by credit card. "No problem, madam, no problem."

I was told to get on his motorcycle. I balked, but this time I complied. When we arrived at the carpet shop, the carpet dealer pleaded with me for 5,600 rupees. I agreed. But when I wanted to pay with my credit card he became very upset. He pleaded for cash or traveller's cheques. I gave him a combination of both, and he seemed grateful for small mercies. Nonetheless, I could tell from the grim look on his face that he was not happy with the deal that had been struck. It had clearly not been a win-win situation.

His brother seemed happy enough, but the carpet vendor was more than unhappy – he was angry. He claimed he had not made any money on the sale. I offered to return the carpet, but the poor fellow was committed, and felt he could not back out of the deal.

The carpet dealer's brother asked if I could give them a gift, since it was a Muslim holy day, and I had received a gift from them. He was referring to the low price of the carpet. "Anything would do," he said, "something like a bottle of perfume."

My backpack was full of essentials like toothpaste. I could think of nothing I had for them so I gave them a Child Haven card. I told them I was working as a volunteer in a home for destitute

children, and although this was not a gift specifically for them, perhaps they might consider my work as a small gift.

I asked the brother if he read English. When he nodded yes, I pulled a novel out of my bag I had been reading about aid workers in the slums of Calcutta. The brother was pleased. The carpet vendor wanted to know if I had a gift for him too. His brother laughed and said they would share the book.

I started to leave, this time with a small silk carpet tucked under my arm. I was thrilled with my purchase. I didn't just have a carpet for Michael—I had something better: a story, and I could hardly wait to tell him. The art dealer offered to give me a motorcycle ride to the train station, but I declined. I knew I would be safer in an auto rickshaw. The sooner I extricated myself from this situation the more comfortable I would feel.

By this time it was almost time to catch the train for home. I took a rickshaw to the station and waited for Shannon and Carolyn. We caught the train, got our berths, and had an uneventful train ride to Ahmedabad. We arrived at 4:30 a.m. and we were finally back in the home at 6:30 in the morning. I was delighted at how well the trip turned out.

### **Tuesday, March 30, 1999**

I got sick last night. Carolyn, Shannon and I decided to take Kala to a restaurant to celebrate her thirtieth birthday. There were very few customers at the restaurant that Kala suggested. I was very hungry and ate a lot. I started to feel unwell a few hours later, did not eat any dinner, and by nine o'clock was vomiting. I felt better after this bit of unpleasantness. Everyone thought I was dehydrated. I drank a mixture of lemon juice, sugar, salt and water that Kala made. I started to feel much better. I continued to drink a lot of water.

At about one o'clock I awoke. I was dizzy and feeling sick. I tried to make myself another drink, but could not. I sat down. My hands started to tingle. Then my legs started to tingle. I was getting really scared. I was afraid that I might have to go to the Civil Hospital to receive an intravenous injection—a thought that

provided no comfort. I called to Shannon and she awakened Kala, who telephoned Dr. Patel. Dr. Patel thought I might have had food poisoning. He came right over and gave me two shots in the rear end – God knows what they were. Then he provided an assortment of five different pills. I was scared stiff about taking them, but did as I was told. The needles and pills took effect. I slept the rest of the night and was well enough to go to Ahmedabad the next day.

Today my stomach seems a little upset again. I might be dehydrated. I'm trying to drink a lot of water.

### **Wednesday, March 31, 1999**

Shannon has left to finish her trip around the world. She will be coming back on Sunday for a few hours to say good-bye to the kids. She was unable to do this because she left when they were at school. I think closure is good for both the volunteer and the kids.

We have another new volunteer, Anne. She is a writer, who used to teach creative writing. I really enjoy talking to her, but I'm not sure she is interested in me. I have to be careful not to impose on her.

### **Friday, April 2, 1999**

Both Anne and Carolyn are using my room as a playroom. I'm not too thrilled with this, but feel it is not worth discussing as I am leaving soon. Anne and I did manage to have a brief, pleasant conversation, however, about having the kids in the rooms. Anne is so easy to talk to—she is intuitive and sensitive.

Kala asked to borrow money. She has not received this month's funds from Bonnie and Fred to run the home. The landlord is expecting 10,000 rupees today for the rent. Kala tried to explain she did not have the money, but the landlord offered no sympathy for her problems. He said, "Kala, you do something." So Kala, with her usual resourcefulness, is doing something.

I gave Kala 2,000 rupees and Anne gave her 3,000 rupees. Kala

also borrowed 5,000 from her uncle. However, the staff will not be receiving their salary, which is normally paid on the first of every month. Tomorrow I am going to Ahmedabad to cash a cheque. I'll give this money to Kala. It will be the last of the funds that were given to me as donations to Child Haven.

It is getting so hot – I can hardly do anything. Today is Easter Friday. We were going to take the kids to the zoo, but it really is too hot, and I do not feel like it. I am so glad I came during the winter. I would find it too hot to work during the summer.

### **Sunday, April 4, 1999**

I can hardly believe it. I have only a few days left before I go. Coming to India turned into a successful venture, in many different ways. I feel as if I contributed to the well-being of the children, and the running of the home. I learned a great deal. I'm so relieved I can tell everyone my time was well spent. I did not want to return to Canada feeling that I had upset everyone's schedules, both at home and at work, for no good purpose.

Kala has still not received money from Bonnie for our April expenses. She has asked the volunteers for more money to buy food. I lent her another 2,000 rupees, and Anne has lent her another 5,300 rupees. I sent an e-mail to Bonnie last week about the money problem. I received a reply thanking Anne and me for lending money to the home. Bonnie confirmed she will send the needed funds. She said that Kala should tell her when she needs money.

There is obviously some confusion. Kala thinks the money comes automatically at the beginning of every month, and Bonnie thinks Kala will tell her when she runs out of money.

Yesterday it was 44 degrees. I find the more water I drink, the better I feel. I perspire – just sitting still. This is so unusual for me, as I perspire so little. I keep trying to drink a lot of water. I don't want to have a recurrence of the episode of heat stroke/food poisoning. Dr. Patel told Kala that my sickness could have been the result of heat stroke. I tend to agree, even though at first everyone thought it was caused by food poisoning.

I got a short note from Michael yesterday via e-mail. He is taking the Friday off that I arrive home (he can be so romantic). He wants to visit a financial consultant (he can be so practical) and have lunch in the Market. He is arranging a hair appointment for

me, as I had requested. It was impossible for him to change my ticket, so I can't come home earlier.

It will be strange to see him and the kids. I can't get over how much less I miss them now, than when I first arrived in India. I ached for them, I worried about them, and now I think of them without angst and without tears. I suspect the reason I am not pining for them is that I know I will see them soon.

I am so confused about how I will integrate this experience into my life back in Canada. I wonder if it will change me in any way. I sometimes think I would like to quit my job and work full time for Child Haven. So much could be done –developing volunteer training, developing ways of using volunteer skills and expertise, and updating records in each home, among many other things. I wish I were independently wealthy and could do just that.

A week from now, I will be back at my job at Human Resources Development Canada. I don't look forward to it, nor do I dread returning. It is simply a part of my life.

I had an interesting talk with Carolyn yesterday. She really didn't think it was important that volunteers say good-bye to the children in any formal or organized way. As a camp director, she knows first hand how children react to the constant shuffling of campers and counsellors. She said the kids simply adjust. I find her perspective interesting. I think closure is so important. I would like to get a handle on the children's perspective on the volunteers; what they would like from them, not only in this matter, but how they use their time while living in a home.

I am waking up very early these days – around four in the morning. It really doesn't matter as I will be going back to a different time zone soon. I read, work on the files, or on my diary, and then get ready to go swimming at six.

The files are finally ready for inspection, and I have finished

updating the volunteer information book.

Anne and I went to the airport to pick up the luggage that had been misplaced during her flight to India. We then went to Ahmedabad to use e-mail, and to buy the judge his sweets. Kala and I will be delivering them today. That will be one more task completed before I go.

I telephoned the agency dealing with the Canadian adoption. The social worker assured me that he has forwarded the papers to CARA. The social worker repeated once again, that he is very busy processing many adoptions. Carolyn will follow up with CARA in a few days to ensure they have received the papers.

### **Wednesday, April 7, 1999**

It is the day I leave!

Anne and Carolyn and I met to review the status of each of the activities we have been involved in, and outstanding projects that have yet to be started. I feel as if I am handing the torch to them. I am sad for myself and excited for them.

Among the many remaining projects, is the renewal of the licence for Child Haven to operate as a home for destitute children. The Director of the Social Defence Department decided, after all, that such a licence is needed.

This afternoon I will give Kala the pair of earrings I bought for her a few days ago. I will give her cards for each of the staff, with 250 rupees in them. Yesterday when Anne asked me if I was going to give a gift to Kala, I told her and Carolyn, who was also in the room, that I hoped neither of them felt I was setting a gift-giving precedent for other volunteers. I realized that most volunteers do not have the money to give gifts. I know Bonnie would disapprove, but I wanted and planned to give gifts. I was grateful to each of the staff members for accepting me. I wanted to let them know how much I appreciated this – and how important they were to me.

### **Thursday, April 8, 1999**

Shortly before I left for the airport late yesterday afternoon, all the kids were home from school. I gave each and every one of them a hug. Carolyn had wanted to have a small going-away party before I left, but she got stuck in Amhedabad. She was

having trouble getting money and had to ensure she received some from Canada. She telephoned from Ahmedabad, in tears. Her tears were for not being able to get the money she needed, and not getting back to the home in time – as she hoped. I understood her frustration so well.

I had to stop myself from crying when I said good-bye to Kala. I had come to love her. I am sure she cared about me too. She came with me to the airport and we said good-bye again. The most memorable part of leaving was waving from the minivan to all the children, the workers and Anne. It was a poignant image that will stay with me always.

When I got to the airport, I tried to check my baggage all the way to Canada. The security officer told me I could only check my luggage to Mumbai. The flight to London had been oversold, and I might not be able to fly as planned. I couldn't believe it! I felt sick and anxious. However, on the flight to Ahmedabad, I simply decided that if I had to stay in Mumbai for a few days, I would make the best of it, and have fun. When I got to Mumbai, however, I checked in at the airport early and had no problem getting on my flight.

I am struggling to make some sense of the past three months. I cried on the plane last night. I can't simply come to India, go back home, and act as if nothing happened. It did happen. I keep seeing Mayuri's face—my big dinghli (my big doll) – her smiling open face. I can feel her easily-given hug. I sense her capability. I cannot walk away as if she and the rest of the children do not count.

There were so many challenges. I was so lonely at first—counting the weeks left as if counting them would make them go faster. I was frightened for my safety. I worried about Michael and the kids. I had to find my niche – finding things that I could do that

would contribute to the home.

It was worth it. I feel blessed.

### **Wednesday, April 14, 1999**

I can't believe it. I am home now. The first few days were very hard because of jet lag. I was so tired all the time. I am finally beginning to feel better. My energy is returning.

It was wonderful to be met at the airport by Michael and the kids. The kids had made a big sign saying, "Welcome home, Mom." I was delighted. It was so unexpected. The girls cried when they saw me and Matthew gave me the longest hug. Long stem red roses were waiting for me at home.

The next day Michael jokingly commented on how bony I was. I weighed myself and found that I had lost eight to ten pounds.

Michael and I went out for lunch on Friday. Lunch at the Market was wonderful. But I felt uncomfortable when I realized the lunch cost more than a one-month salary for one of the ayahs. We looked at carpets and tried to establish if the carpet I had bought Michael was a bargain. To tell the truth, I am not sure he likes the carpet, but he appreciates the story about buying it. We decided against meeting with the financial consultant and wandered around the Market.

Although I am beginning to integrate back into my Canadian existence, I am having difficulty knowing how to weave this experience into my life. The decadence and the unnecessary consumption that exists in North America in general, and in my life in particular, troubles me.

I am trying to eat as little meat as possible. When I do, I feel as if I am breaking faith with the kids. I do not like drinking coffee. I feel like I am putting poison into my system. Today I bought a cup and some tea so that I can make tea at work instead of buying coffee in styrofoam cups – those cups which only create garbage.

I wonder how long these small changes will last. Have I finally been pushed over the edge into doing things I always wanted to do?

I still look the same. I wear the same business clothes. But I feel I'm not the same. I break into tears at the most unexpected times. I feel enormously sad at leaving India and the kids.

I telephoned Bonnie to let her know I had brought back the "Bonnie bag," as she requested and that I would provide her with an update about the funds I had lent and donated to Child Haven. She was very pleasant as always. I told her what a privilege it had been to be a part of the lives of the kids, Kala, and the ayahs.

People ask me if I would like to go back. I always reply, "in an instant." Of course I won't go soon because it would be too hard on my family.

But I will return.

## The Aftermath

Three months after arriving home, I still felt connected to Child Haven.

I developed a slide show and gave several presentations on my experience in India. At the end of the presentation, I handed out envelopes with Child Haven's address to encourage people to donate to the organization. I loved giving the presentations, both because it is a skill I enjoy using and because I needed to talk about my experience.

I gave a short speech at the annual Child Haven fund-raising dinner in Ottawa, and participated in a training session at Bonnie and Fred's farm. I was interviewed on a CBC local radio program. Although I wish I had been livelier, the interview was good publicity for Child Haven.

I'm growing less emotional and more mellow about my experience in India. I hardly ever cry anymore when I think about the children and Kala. I telephoned the home once, and I have sent a package of photos to them. Soon I will send another. I think about them often. I am quite certain I will continue to be a part of the Child Haven experience for some time to come. I am so grateful for having had this experience.

The boy who was to be adopted in Canada arrived here in October, 1999. The renewal of the licence for Child Haven to operate as a home for destitute children has been granted.

Has my experience with Child Haven changed me? Not in dramatic ways, that would be evident to most people.

I am eating meat occasionally, drinking coffee regularly, and slipping more and more into patterns established long before I left for India.

My relationships with my children and husband are much the same as before I left. Perhaps everyone appreciates what I do a little more.

I understand the place that loneliness has in my life. Before I left for India, I tried to avoid it at all costs. I know now, because of the work I choose to do, I will be lonely at times. I can tolerate it.

I know I will need to make a constant effort to keep the unimportant things in my life, unimportant. I need to push myself hard. The struggle remains.

And finally, the Child Haven experience has helped to reaffirm my values. There is nothing more important than to share with and care for others.

## **Advice For Child Haven Volunteers**

1. Read everything you can about India before you go. Make sure you read all the material that Bonnie and Fred give you. Organize your material into a three ring binder, under headings such as health, social and political matters, and Child Haven procedures. You may find the section on health particularly useful.
2. Talk to several volunteers before you leave. Ask Bonnie for names of volunteers you can talk to. Ask them what they found most difficult. It will help prepare you.
3. Get to know the local manager well. Depend on him or her for advice. Do not depend solely on other volunteers for information on how the home works, or ongoing issues in the home. They have only one perspective, and sometimes they are misinformed.
4. During the first few weeks, play with the children and watch closely how things are done. Don't wait to be told what to do. Ask the manager how you can help her and then do what she asks. This will help gain her trust. She will be more receptive to your ideas, once you have been there a few weeks.
5. Expect to feel lonely, isolated and occasionally overwhelmed by the culture. This will be particularly true if you are ever at the home by yourself for any extended period of time. The advantage of being at the home by yourself is that you become totally integrated into the home, but this experience can be very difficult.
6. Plan a short trip of at least a few days away from the home, while you are volunteering. The time away will help refresh you and renew your ability to work.
7. Trust the judgment of the local manager. He or she knows what is appropriate for the Indian culture. Only on rare occasions should there be any need to convince the manager to behave differently than she or he had planned.
8. Use your initiative. However, first gain the support of the manager for your project or idea and then go ahead and do it. The manager will be able to add to your success by giving you tips on how to implement your project most effectively.

9. Expect to have some conflict with other volunteers. It is not easy to live and work in such close quarters without experiencing differences. They can arise around matters such as division of work, use of the volunteer's bedroom, standards of cleanliness, failure to share information or even appropriate bargaining techniques. During these times of conflict, try and remember that all volunteers want to contribute. Their heart is in the right place. It's important that conflict within the home be minimized, for the sake of the children. Everyone has a responsibility to make an effort to cooperate. Volunteers can also be a great source of support for each other. So it is in your own best interests, as well as those of the children, to get along.

10. Expect to have some difficulty re-integrating into Canadian life. One of the biggest lessons for most of us is that people can live with very little and be happy. The level of western consumption can be depressing. You may find yourself unable to enjoy the same things you enjoyed before you left. They may seem unnecessary and frivolous.

11. When you return, try to talk with Bonnie and Fred, as well as with other volunteers, about your experience. No one will understand better what has happened to you, than another volunteer. It is very helpful to discuss your experience with them.

12. Finally, enjoy yourself. Sink into the experience. Let it affect you. You will have the memory of a lifetime.

**The people who were at the Child Haven home, during my sojourn were:**

Kalaben Barot, a living example of what it means to survive with great grace, great strength and good humour.

Ayahs **Maya, Hari Priya** and **Tara**, who shared with me the personal struggles they face as Indian women.

**Chandu**, the cook, **Raika**, his wife, **Koki**, the cleaning lady, all of whom were not yet twenty-one, and had already faced many adult problems.

The children – my inspiration:

Ashwin Pravin Sauaji  
Bhavika Rahul Sunil  
Ghanshyam Rakesh Saresh  
Intiaj Rohan Tarun  
Kuntal Sarala Vijay  
Kaushal Sejal Vishal  
Kajal Shama  
Meghna Shital  
Mayuri Sonal Kala's Children:  
Natavar Sufiaj Shivani and Bhailu

The volunteers who were travelling the same path with me for a moment in time:

Amy Halpenny  
Carolyn Kerr  
Jessie Ketchum  
Anne Montagnes  
Shannon Wires

Good luck to one and all who decide to volunteer for Child Haven or any other organisation in the developing world.

