

On November 24th I left Seattle, travelling first class on Alaska Airlines for Denver. I had been saving my Alaska Airline miles and purchased the extra miles needed to fly first class domestically and business class internationally for this transcontinental journey. It was an ideal way to travel that distance as I was able to extend my seat to recline completely from Denver to London and from there to Mumbai. Gratefully, I made use of the board rooms in Denver and in London on my stopovers.

It was after midnight when I arrived in Mumbai on November 26th, the morning of the Mumbai terrorist attacks. I waited an interminable length of time for my bag to wind its way on the conveyer belt, along with a mob of Indians pushing their way forward to spy their own bags. Ah! The scents and smells of eau de Boeing and India intermingled in the heat of the airport terminal... Outside a throng of greeters, family and taxi drivers waving signs, none with my name on it, assaulted me as I stepped outside. The area was cordoned off by wooden horses, forcing the tired travelers to go in one direction. As I waited, searching amongst the throng, a kind man who was promoting a nearby airport hotel offered to call the KARE Ayurvedic Retreat center to inquire about the whereabouts of my driver. He appointed himself my guardian until the driver and I finally connected after several calls between the Good Samaritan, the Retreat center, and the driver.

The drive through Mumbai was slow and tedious. It was nearly 2:30 am with so much truck traffic and even people wandering the streets. Mumbai was as dismal as I recalled from my flight attendant years in the early 1980's: people living under tarps, sleeping under the highway, in their rickshaws, just behind a bush...anywhere. Sad. I heard that Mumbai's slums are worse than Calcutta's. I tried to nap but the ruts in the road and the constant honking as my driver tried to pass everything in his path prevented me from getting the rest I wanted. After a few hours we wound up hill and it became quieter, at least there were no people on the roads. Mysteriously the driver stopped and picked up a man waiting on the roadside in the pre-dawn hours. He sat beside him for the remainder of the journey – less than an hour. I got the impression that the driver relied on the other man to give him directions to my destination!

KARE: <http://www.karehealth.com/mullake.php>

The Retreat center was dark at 5:30 am when I arrived. I was greeted by a night watchman who shone his flashlight along the steps leading down to my room, K1, as I followed closely behind him. Later, after the sun had risen, I discovered it was one of the better rooms. I had a lovely view of Lake Mulshi, which is actually a reservoir that was made by Tata, a large corporation that has its hand in *everything*, providing electricity to the area. Electricity does shut off intermittently - typically in the afternoon and evening for several hours at a time. After the first time without electricity I understood why each room was equipped with a plugged in emergency flashlight right by the bed.

After taking a cold shower I slept in until 10 am and then went up to the dining area for breakfast: a fruit plate, a dosa with coconut chutney and herbal tea. Then it was time for my Ayurvedic consultation. I am amazed that after feeling my pulse for 15 seconds the doctor asked whether I had cramping in my calves! Actually, it was my hamstrings that were cramping from being still for so long on the journey, but my calves have *always* ached for as long as I can remember. He asked questions of my habits, prescribed my treatment, weighed me and I was off.

They kept us on quite a busy schedule, so there was very little free time. We awoke at 6am, shortly thereafter herbal tea was delivered to the room; yoga began at 7 until 9 and was taught by one of the Ayurvedic doctors or three times a week by Mr. Shah, a man who has studied with B.K.S. Iyengar the longest and is quite the disciplinarian. Class always started with 12 sun salutes followed by standing poses, backbends and inversions.

After class everyone rushed to the dining hall to eat. The dining hall was really an outdoor covered veranda with a table that sat 10 people and another that sat 6. Breakfast consisted of a variety of sliced fruits, herbal tea and a grain dish we would normally have for lunch or dinner in the States. Before each meal Charlotte, a German girl who was doing an internship at the center, or Jessica, the Ayurvedic nutritionist, would lead us in a prayer.

Annapure sadapurne
Sankara pranavallabhe
Jnanavairagya
Siddhayartham bhiksam
Dehi ca parvati
Aham vaisvanaro
Bhutra praninam
Dehamasritah.
Pranapana samayuktah
Pacamyannam
Caturvidham
Om santih santih santih

At some time during our meal a staff member came to inform each guest of their treatment times for the day. The first day when I arrived for my treatment, I was led to a changing room where Bethida, who would be my therapist throughout my stay, instructed me to remove my clothes and change. I was dumbfounded! There was a small 6x3 inch piece of folded cloth and a string laying on the bench, nothing more. Evidently I was to wear this cloth. She and another therapist who was standing outside the changing room in the hall, giggled. I had to ask how it was worn which sent them into more laughter. She indicated that the string tied around the waist and the cloth once unfolded was quite lengthy and worn as a loin cloth. After donning my modest garment I wondered: why bother? The string was untied for the massage and retied when you turned over.

Every morning after breakfast I received Shiroabhyanganasya, a full head and body coconut oil massage then a 20 minute steam in an upright box that looked like a coffin, followed by an incredibly wonderful, hot shower. I developed a great rapport with my therapist. I learned that her husband was the chef in the kitchen; they both live within the compound. I was surprised to learn that her mother takes care of their young son, Cheddi, while she and her husband work during the busy season. She showed me several photographs of her young son on her cell phone.

After the morning treatment there was only 30 minutes until lunch, followed by a 'minor' treatment. I was prescribed all different types of minor treatments...basti, an oil enema, was always scheduled right after lunch. You knew when someone had that treatment as they hurried through their lunch to dash off to the therapy room. I would burst out laughing when they would emerge with a slightly strained look on their face as we were told to go sit in the dining hall for 45 minutes after the treatment to retain the liquid and resist the urge! I warned them not to sit near me because I would make them laugh too much and they might explode.

In the afternoons I had Njavarakizhi, a hot fomentation treatment; a bag of rice wrapped in muslin is dipped in heated oil and herbs and is pounded and rubbed along an affected area. In my case I was hoping to relieve an old injury to my lumbar spine and hip which has been an issue for me for nearly 18 years. After 4 days, I experienced greater flexibility and less pain in my left hip - no doubt due to the daily 4 hours of yoga and the various treatments I received, as

well as the diet. They suspended the treatment when my skin began to develop a rash from the applied heat and too much friction.

After telling one of the doctor's that I was experiencing vision distortion that usually comes as a precursor to a migraine, he prescribed Nasya/Shiro virechana, a nasal oil drop treatment. That was just awful! It was administered while your head remained tilted back in a CPR position for 15 minutes so the oil pooled at the back of the throat. Ugh. The next day, I begged my therapist to just give me a drop and not the entire tube full of oil. She kindly acquiesced. When I was walking past the doctor after yoga class I asked him why that symptom presented itself and was told it was due to too much pitta - fire. I then informed him that I did not eat spicy foods as it does not agree with my body - pitta increases with spice. The Indians did not think the food was too spicy, but some of the dishes were for my palate. Most times the food was excellent. We were served several dishes at each meal and the flavors were amazing. I never got a migraine, just the vision distortion whenever I had the spicy food! I would test the food to see if it was too spicy and wouldn't eat it if I felt it may cause undue suffering. Camilla, one of the women who I befriended couldn't get enough spicy food, so I offered her mine! Finally they started to modify some of the spicier dishes for the remainder of my visit. The cooks would make a separate pot of a dish while the rest of the guests would have the full on spicy version.

With just a few days left, I was asked what other treatments I would like to try. I chose Shirodhara, a treatment where a container that hangs overhead swings slowly and rhythmically back and forth while oil drips across the forehead. I felt as though my face was being cradled by two warm hands. It is said that the Shirodhara stimulates the third eye; others who had the treatment had strange visions and even headaches. Thank goodness the effect was beneficial on me. Facials and foot reflexology rounded out some of the other treatments I tried before I left the retreat.

Every afternoon they offered a two hour restorative yoga class that always followed the same sequence. The first few days I was in that class, I would nod off and wake up with a jerk as my body began to sway. Later I observed that most people would also fall asleep when they first arrived as their bodies adjusted to the time zone change. I skipped the class one afternoon to take a hike with Jake, a documentary filmmaker, to the Ganesha temple at the top of the hill. He had been to the KARE retreat many times before so led the way. The temple faced the lake and the surrounding hills. What an awesome view!

Jake had arrived the same day as I had. I learned that his parents were senior Iyengar yoga teachers and he was in India to meet his father to film the events that I was also attending. Andrea, a German consulate attaché stationed in Calcutta also arrived the same day. The staff kept confusing us as she and I both had dark hair and eyes, but her skin was lighter than my olive complexion. The next day, Camilla arrived in a flurry just as I was settling in to read a book. She is a Texan who has been living in Vienna for 20 years as an interpreter and speaks several languages. The four of us had rooms on the same level and we wound up sharing many meals and much laughter during our stay. My conversations with Andrea and Camilla were always entertaining as we would often switch from German to Spanish to English.

Some of the other guests at the retreat were two sister-in-laws and a couple from Poland, Elisabeth and Carlos, a couple from Spain, Dr. Throat, an Indian philosophy professor from Mumbai whose wife was in the government. She was lecturing across the street from one of the hotels that was commandeered by the terrorists and could hear and see what was occurring. She called her husband who informed us immediately what had happened. Shortly thereafter, the phones went out at the retreat. No incoming or outgoing calls could be made for days. They did not have internet at the center at all. Camilla and Andrea took a taxi, 1.5 hours to Pune, to

get on the internet, which is when I sent a message to my daughter, Alicia, to forward that all was well with me.

As for yoga...I tried to blend in with the other students, but Mr. Shah knew right away that I was a seasoned practitioner and suspected that I was a teacher. Darn. He pointed out my bad habits and would go off on a tirade, "you teachers! blah...blah...blah...not putting your toes down in standing poses..." His discourse would continue as he paced back and forth across the room speaking to the surrounding hills and lake while we held poses for what seemed like an interminable length of time, never hearing his diatribe.

Often he would bark out a pose in Sanskrit and when no one moved he would ask me or Cheryl, an Iyengar teacher from Australia to demonstrate. Of course, then we would be in the pose first - waiting for the others to join in. I listened to his underlying messages with an open mind and heart as this would be my sole yoga instruction while I was in India.

The last two mornings I awoke at 5 in order to do my yoga practice from 6 until 7, as Cheryl and I asked to assist the resident teachers in the class. They never did adjustments or corrected students so we wanted to help our fellow guests who had been regaling us with questions about yoga during our meals. They very much appreciated the attention to detail that we were able to provide for them and we were both very happy to help them. One of the doctors had asked me if I would teach the class, but I deferred. He respected the fact that I had been practicing yoga longer than he had – the question was never raised about seniority level.

On December 3rd, my 51st birthday, I left the idyllic setting to journey into true India. The two lane road became four; we passed the proverbial cows, dogs, motorized rickshaws, women walking in their dusty sari's with their heads piled high with bricks, small vehicles jammed with more people than it could hold, chairs in the truck bed occupied by extra passengers, no stop lights, cars careening, passing, honking all a jumble. Somehow there was an order to the chaos and miraculously traffic fatalities are minimal. No attention is paid to the lines marking the lanes on the road. The 6 lane road allowed for at least 5 cars abreast of one another going in each direction! I never watched when the driver passed on the other side of the road, which was more often than he was on the left.

I had looked at maps of Pune before my trip and knew we were in the vicinity of RIMYI, the Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute, but did not locate it on the way to Koregaon Park where my sister in laws parents live. Their lovely home, a villa, was on a road off the main street with a security guard stationed at the main entrance and another guard at an interior crossroad that leads to several apartment buildings and homes. The house had 3 floors; the main floor had a separate quarter where a young family lived just off the carport area, the entrance had a large open area and enclosed laundry under the stairs that led up to the main living space on the second floor. There was a formal living room with a stained glass partitioned wall on either side of the hall that separated the formal room from the family area, an open kitchen, dining and family room space. Rashida, my sister-in-law's mother, spent 3 months making the stained glass walls that are mirror images of each other. A large bathroom and master bedroom completed that level. The third level had 3 bedrooms, each with separate baths and an outdoor patio area. Stairs continued up to the rooftop patio that had many potted plants and a view of the river that was just a few houses away.

Rashida knew it was my birthday when I arrived and had a chocolate cream cake ready after dinner. Oh my! After a week of eating an Ayurvedic diet without caffeine or sugar, I knew what a junkie must feel getting high. My synapses were firing quicker than boiling water. My brain was on overload! Thank goodness she cut very small pieces.

December 4th was my first full day in Pune. Rashida and I drove around town to run some errands. I was always amused at the things I witnessed as I ventured out. As we were driving to one of our destinations Rashida was surprised to find that the street she normally took was now a one way going the other direction. She drove going the wrong direction for a short distance until she could turn around, stopping traffic as she did so. She double parked the car and told me to watch it as she ducked into a shop to buy karakaras, spicy papadum like crackers. As I sat waiting for her, I watched the passers-by. There was a motorcycle with his passenger holding a bicycle from over his head behind his back, another motorcycle with a passenger holding onto a television wedged between them, and a bicyclist who had a 6' ladder strapped vertically to his bicycle!

Rashida insisted that I needed proper Indian attire to wear for the festivities that were taking place the next week. Her niece's tailor was available to make custom garments for me so we were also in search of fabric. It was fascinating to be a customer in a fabric shop. We entered a small storefront, which had four small rooms one after the other with fabric piled high on the wall shelving. We politely declined the tea that was proffered. After indicating what color and type of fabric we wanted to look at, pack after pack of cellophane wrapped packages of colorful fabric was thrown before us onto the floor! I chose three different types of fabric: a gold/maroon brocade, an orange-red cotton/silk blend, and a vegetable dyed cotton that I was informed was the traditional style from where B.K.S. Iyengar was born.

On the morning of Friday, December 5th, the tailor arrived to take my measurements and sketched three different designs after examining the fabrics. Evidently he must have had a fashion show as he showed me a postcard with models wearing his clothing designs. We expected him to return with the completed garments in four days. After the tailor left, Rashida pulled out two boxes filled with beautiful sari's for me to choose from as she insisted that I wear one for at least one of the events.

In the afternoon I ventured out of the neighborhood and continued walking down the main street. Wow! The noise! The traffic! After walking just a short distance I asked a rickshaw to take me to the Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute (RIMYI) in Model Colony. The first driver refused! I learned that if they will be shortly off duty and your destination does not coincide with their way home they will refuse the fare. Subsequently I sat in the rickshaw first before telling the driver of my destination. Only once did I have to disembark to find another driver.

The drive to RIMYI was exhilarating. The jumble of traffic all vying for the front of the line reminded me of New York cab drivers. Of course when I finally arrived at the Institute, it was closed and was scheduled to open in 45 minutes. I took a few pictures of the exterior and then walked back to the main road. There I found Pune Central, a 6 story department store, where I proceeded to do some shopping for my family who I would see in Chicago at Christmas.

I returned to the Institute to locate Chandru who manages the store there, and purchased several asana photos of BKS Iyengar. I spoke with Pandu regarding the logistics of handing out tickets to the events as I was the US representative for the birthday festivities. It was great to finally put faces to names that I had corresponded with for several months. It wasn't crowded there, but I imagined it would be during the festivities week!

The rickshaw ride back was quite amusing. The traffic had quadrupled! I took a photo of a family of four on a motorcycle! Once the father realized that I had taken it, I showed him the image; everyone turned to look and then I took another one with most of them smiling! I delighted in the ride and truly enjoyed the sights and sounds and the ready smiles of the people. I had the

rickshaw driver drop me off quite a distance from 'home' so that I could walk along the main road to window shop the street stalls.

As I strolled along the main road, I engaged in conversation with two young men playing chess underneath the bedspreeds and cushion covers they were selling. When I asked who was winning, they quickly asked whether I knew how to play and then invited me to play against the one who was winning. I bantered with vendors who were about to go into their sales pitch by saying "I know that you will give me the best price because I am the first customer of the day" which quickly disarmed them and elicited warm smiles. At a statue and jewelry store the proprietor offered me a cup of herbal honey and cinnamon tea as I perused his wares. He left me to look through bins of jewelry as he performed his Muslim ritual right behind the counter. When I left the shop, it was dark. I side stepped three cows that were foraging in the street for food! Dawoodi, my sister in law's father, had warned me about walking about at night, so I scurried back as quickly as I could.

On Sunday, December 7, Rashida and I picked up her friend, Kulsum, to drive to Matheran, a 'hill-station' which is a town with a railway station situated on top of a hill, four hours from Pune. Kulsum owned the bungalow that we were going to stay in. It took us quite some time to get out of Pune as there was a marathon taking place that day for 'world peace.' We entered onto a bridge where traffic was at a complete standstill due to the marathon - cars were turning around going the wrong way against traffic to take the low road, after a time we did too! Then we got caught in the traffic jam on the street below and saw the bridge traffic was moving along. I was glad Rashida made this maneuver as I incredulously saw a camel being led down the sidewalk on a leash! We went on the expressway which made the journey quicker - only 2.5 hours. We made a pit-stop at a highway eatery/gas station where I used my first in ground toilet on this trip to India. As we ate our lunch we watched as men entered a single batting cage to have a swing with a cricket bat presumably while the women took care of the kids or did some food shopping.

The oddest thing was exiting the expressway; before coming to the toll booth we went to a coned off median area that looked as though you could do a U turn. A guard was stationed there. Rashida showed him the ticket that indicated we were exiting there. He removed the cones; we crossed 5 lanes of traffic and then turned to face the oncoming cars on the furthest lane from our pit-stop to exit the expressway. Wow!

On the side roads we came across stall after stall of women mainly, selling fruit. It is fascinating to hear the potential buyer ask the price; hear the answer, and then the bickering starts. The buyer pretends not to be interested as they are taking out their money - of course, the quality of the fruit is extolled and the price eventually comes down. Everyone walks away thinking they got the best deal. Rashida told me: If the protesting and bargaining did not occur, both would be disappointed with the sale. She punctuated her statement with, "That's the way it is."

Winding our way up the hillside to Matheran we had to drive in first gear. The lane was not quite large enough for two cars to pass and the edge dropped off perilously. The roads were rutted in places from the monsoons. There is a toy train (a real train that carries people but it's smaller in comparison to the other trains that run in India) that traverses the road as both train track and road switchback to go up hill. Cars can only go a specified distance and must park in a jungle-like 'lot' where you pay when you leave. Payment is made on the honor system as no ticket is given when you enter the lot, so you tell the ticket taker when you arrived so he can compute the rate. Men and women wait to help you carry your luggage, sacks, personal belongings, etc. They wrap their scarves in a circle on their head and place the flattest bag and all others on top of it, tying them together with dusty twine. We took off walking along the train tracks twenty

minutes uphill to the bungalow. The dirt was red and dusty and in no time at all, so were my sandals, my feet and the bottom of my jeans.

Kulsum's husband had purchased the bungalow from an elderly woman nearly 30 years ago. It had 5 bedrooms, each with a separate bathroom just slightly better than an outhouse. She had a servant family that lived adjacent to the house that cooks and cleans and undoubtedly makes use of the house when it is empty. After we settled in, we took a walk through the jungle, and accidentally wound up going through the dump where monkey's scavenged through plastic bags of garbage, on our way to the 'sunset point'. The place was jammed with locals and visitors alike as it was a Muslim holiday, Eid, and a Sunday. After sunset we walked on different trails through the woods to the town. It was hopping! We didn't stay long, deciding to return in the morning when we would be able to see and do more.

Late into the evening, the three of us sat in the enclosed outside veranda to talk. They shared stories of their lives as Muslim women. Forgetting where I was from they spoke openly of their opinion of Americans. Their perception was that Americans live in a throw away culture extravagantly buying too much without caring about the accumulation of waste that is created. They caught themselves and stopped midway in the conversation concerned that they may have offended me. Once they learned I shared similar values we continued to discuss universal issues without any cultural or geographic boundaries to separate us.

The next morning I awoke early and went with Rashida to the sunrise point. After a minimal breakfast we returned to the town where I purchased a few local handicrafts and enjoyed a dosa with coconut chutney for a mid-morning snack. Rashida purchased two young coconuts from a street vendor, who used a small machete to hack off the hard outer shell to reveal three segmented gelatinous covered sacs filled with fluid inside. She handed one to each of us. Unfortunately, although it is considered a delicacy, it was not a taste that I cared to repeat, so I politely refused the second piece. That afternoon Kulsum took the train to go visit her brother in Mumbai, leaving Rashida and I to enjoy the peace of this aerie village.

While in town we had purchased a cone of henna so that Rashida could decorate my palms and the top of my fingers. As a teenager she had worked as a henna artist decorating women's hands and feet for special occasions. The caretaker's five year old granddaughter had asked to have her hands done, too. I was amazed at this young girl's ability to sit patiently, watching with rapt attention as flowers and vines were carefully painted on her little hands. When I extolled the girl's patience, I received the reply: it is part of her culture. Rashida then told me how when children are very little their curiosity is put to good use to find things for them to do to help in the kitchen. First they are taught to remove the pebbles from the grains and beans. As they get older they are given other things comparable to their skill level.

The following morning our getaway ended and we returned to the hustle and bustle of Pune. Before we had returned home the tailor had delivered all my finished garments! I tried everything on and began to press the bright red-orange and gold trimmed Shalvar Kameez (pants, top and scarf) I was to wear Wednesday, December 10th for Guruji's religious ceremony (puja) and luncheon at Govind Gardens off of Aundh Road.

I awoke very early as the puja began at 7:30am. I allowed myself 45 minutes to get there, but there was very little traffic, so it only took 25 minutes. The rickshaw ride was quite chilly in the early morning hour, so I wrapped the dupatta (scarf) tightly about me to keep me warm.

Almost immediately I saw Cheryl, the Australian Canadian I had met at the Ayurvedic retreat. We were very happy to have arrived early and had the opportunity to connect as the event drew nearly 1,000 people!

We sat by Jake and Lindsey Clennell, the documentary film makers', camera equipment to 'guard' it while they were walking around filming, which insured we had a good vantage point during the puja. The ceremony lasted nearly four hours. We were served breakfast in shifts during the early part of the ceremony. There were flowers, fruit, and small urns filled with water that occupied a rectangular area in front of the dais where BKS Iyengar, his grand-daughter, sisters, son and daughters sat. He was given garlands, shawls, and a head dress made of pure silver as part of this ceremonious event. His son, Prashant, gave a discourse on the puja. One of the sisters led us in a chant.

There were more than a dozen priests who chanted, flung water, sticks, flowers, into the fire they circled. The flames rose higher and higher and then so did the smoke. His family escorted Guruji to the grassy area to bathe him in the water that was made holy by the ceremony and then came through the crowd to sprinkle holy water on us as well.

After the puja was over we formed an incredibly long line to pay our respects to the master. Geeta was directing traffic and announcing when items that people had lost could be claimed. Lunch was then served in shifts. And what a Prasad (offering) it was! We were first given a banana leaf and a small bottle of water. The gentleman sitting next to me instructed me to pour some water on the banana leaf, clean it and hold and lift the edges of the leaf closest to me to shake the water off the leaf away from me. That would be our plate.

Men wearing fabric wrapped around their lower torso served us from huge vessels - a finely chopped salad, a sweet coconut carrot salad, rice, papadum, sambar and more. The food just kept coming. It was delicious! We ate using our fingers and thumb of the right hand as no utensils were provided. Luckily I had a lot of practice staying with my sister-in-law's parents. However I did break down and use a spoon, especially when the last tasty morsels were too difficult for my not so nimble fingers to pick up.

Cheryl and I made our way out of the hall about 3pm. A local woman who is a yoga physio-therapist offered us to share her personal rickshaw with her two granddaughters who were visiting from Oman. The five of us wedged ourselves into the back of the rickshaw and off we went. We all engaged in a lively conversation. They dropped me off first on the road near RIMYI to catch another rickshaw as that was where we diverged in different directions. When I thanked her for the ride, she replied graciously, "We are all one family."

In the evening Rashida and I were invited to visit Kulsum at her house nearby. She had also invited two other women friends from their group to meet me, but only one could join us, a yoga student of one of the yoga teachers who was honored by Geeta for having lost her grandson in the terrorist attacks. We had a lovely evening, sipping coconut water, eating chocolates and sharing universal women's talk.

Thursday, December 11 there was a recitation from the Bhagavad Gita given by Geeta at the Institute from 10 am to noon. It was my first time up in the yoga hall as the previous time I was there a class was in session so I did not venture up. My Australian friend, Cheryl, had saved me a place near the elevated stage where Geeta sat. The hall was full. The room was atwitter with various languages being spoken as students and teachers from all over the globe interacted with one another like a wonderful family reunion.

Geeta lectured on the 4th chapter of the Gita, but made reference to the 5th and 2nd chapters frequently. She said the 27th and 28th slokas were very important. She spent a lot of time discussing Arjuna's dilemma...and related it to ourselves in the world today. Her basic message was to dedicate all of your actions to God and let go of the result.

I noticed that more senior US teachers had arrived. I asked John Schumacher who had just flown in that morning for a recommendation on a restaurant for lunch and then asked him to join Cheryl and I. Cheryl was astounded that I asked him and was tickled when he said yes! I pointed out who was who since she had never studied with any of the US teachers.

On the way out of the Institute, BKS Iyengar was sitting outside of his house, which is directly behind the Institute, talking with people as they passed by. There was a throng of people milling about looking at the wares several vendors had set up between the two structures with various handicrafts.

After lunch, I went down to the library to meet Rajvi Mehta for the first time and then proceeded back upstairs to sit at a table to dispense tickets to the US attendees who came to retrieve them. It was nice to put faces to names of people that have been emailing me about this event for the few months prior to the celebrations. Not quite half the US tickets were handed out. I nearly fell off my chair when BKS Iyengar walked into the room to head down to the library where he spends most afternoons. He replied "Namaskar" when I put my hands together in namaste' to greet him even though I wasn't quick enough to stand up when he had entered the room. After my shift was over, I headed down to the library to return the remaining tickets to Rajvi where I got to greet him yet again. He looks at everyone that passes by his desk which is adjacent to the bottom of the stairs.

I took Cheryl to Pune Central, the large department store I had visited earlier upon my first visit to RIMYI. She was so enthusiastic! We had a very non-Indian dessert...gelato! I did some more shopping since the last time I was there I did not have enough time to look leisurely. It took twice as long in the rickshaw to get back 'home'...traffic was the worst I have seen to date. One lane had 5 motorcycles abreast of one another!

In the evening on Friday, December 12th a flute recital by Pt Hari Prasad Chaurasia and the premiere of the documentary film on Guruji, Leap of Faith, took place at a small auditorium on the outskirts of Pune. Depending on traffic it could take up to an hour to get there from where I stayed in Koreagaon Park. Rashida drove to the auditorium, but she wasn't familiar with the location so we stopped to ask several people along the way as we neared the area. The directions were always, go straight at such-and-such statue, then turn right at such-and-such statue. You can't be sure whether someone is telling you the truth because people want to be helpful go even if they don't know where it is! So polling a few people instead of relying on the first answer appeared to be the norm.

The music recital was performed by a world renowned flautist with three other musicians was amazing. The flute player and the drummer were dueling - the flautist would play a riff and the drummer would copy. It became more intricate and faster. They had a wonderful banter back and forth.

On the morning of Saturday, December 13 - my rickshaw driver took me on a back road through a slum like neighborhood. He stopped at a shop to get tobacco. Subsequently as we drove along orange spittle spewed forth onto the pavement at each stop. Then he pulled into a gas station! Just like the roads, the rickshaws were side by side getting their tanks filled and then the gas station attendants push you off to the side, sans driver as he left the transport to pay inside! Evidently most rickshaws run on a natural gas so there are no emissions, unless it has not been converted yet. Only the cars, buses, and trucks run on petrol here.

Finally I arrived to meet Cheryl for the informative lecture and demonstration of classical Indian dance followed by three performances by Mandakini Trivedi, the dance teacher and her star

pupil. It was deemed yoga dance - the purity of the movement comes only if you are focused and strong from yoga practice and then it is offered as a dedication to the Divine.

In the evening we returned to the venue to see *The Prophet*, a 4 person play. A young boy, a young man, a woman and a famous Indian actor, Naseerudin Shah, who played the Prophet had 99% of the lines. Rashida was enthralled to be in the 5th row in a small theater watching him perform. Evidently for locals to attend this performance with this particular actor the tickets to the event would have been exorbitantly priced and would not be affordable for them. The price for us to attend all the events was nominal. I was grateful indeed that such wonderful cultural events had been planned for us.

A yoga demonstration by a large group of varied aged children followed. The crowd went wild to see these youngsters doing poses that some may fondly remember doing or perhaps only dreamed of being able to do! Some of the children spoke at the end while others would do poses based on the recitation.

On Sunday, December 14th Cheryl and I met at the Osho Ashram for a 9:15 tour of the facility. I had checked their website before I came to India. Although the place looked truly spectacular online, the mini tour was no big deal. A large outdoor courtyard with huge murals created intermittent privacy walls. We could see people engaged in various activities in the courtyard. A solitary woman was ecstatically whirling and dancing to her own inner song. I thought I had landed back in the '70's.

Afterwards we walked a few blocks to the German Bakery and enjoyed eggs, toast and chai! We walked along the main road to look at the wares the street vendors displayed and to check out some of the stores that were along the road where we both purchased several things. At about 1pm we headed to Rashida and Dawoodi's house for lunch. Rashida had prepared a sumptuous meal - my brother was right when he said it was the best restaurant in Pune! It was Cheryl's first experience in an Indian home, although Rashida told her it is not a typical Indian house since they are well travelled and had lived in Dubai for many years before settling here.

After lunch we three women sat and talked as we hennaed our ankles. Then it was time for me to be swathed in the sari. Wow! What an ordeal. The blouse is extremely tight and should fit like a bra. I had borrowed the blouse as well from Rashida. The first time I had tried it on; it did not hook closed as my rib cage is wider than Rashida's. Interestingly, there were several parallel seams inside so as the Indian woman gains weight, she can just let out a seam or two or three! I ripped out one seam and laughed after I tried it on. The blouse fit like the cone shaped bra Madonna wore back in the day! I was admonished that it should be tight but you still must be able to breathe. A half slip ties tightly and is strategically placed just below the navel. The sari is then draped around once and then tucked under the top of the half slip, folded, draped and then pinned to keep it all together. Dawoodi took our photo in front of this beautiful Asian screen in their living room.

Off we went for the final 90th birthday celebration and dinner which was held in the same venue where the first event, the puja, was held. BKS Iyengar celebrated the completion of 90 years...meaning he turned 91, on December 14th. This time seats were set up in the garden divided by a red carpet which faced the stage with a large banner overhead. We arrived early and secured seats in the second row, immediately behind the family.

The program started with several women dressed in regional sari's. They each took turns holding a platter of lit candles which were waved circularly in front of Guruji to give him blessings.

There were several speakers called onto the stage: Faeq Biria regaled us with stories of travelling with Guruji in the early years; Padma, an elderly student from South Africa told of Guruji's first visit to her country where they struggled to get 10 people to go to his classes! Manouso Manos spoke as well indicating that thanks to Guruji's dedication to his art, he makes us all look good. Prashant Iyengar gave thanks to the countless volunteers who helped to bring the events to fruition. Geeta Iyengar spoke about four individuals who deserved their gratitude for countless years of service, Mr. Shah (the man who came to teach at KARE, the Ayurvedic retreat), Pandu, the secretary at RIMYI, a local teacher and another person who is now deceased. Lastly, Lee Sverkerson was called forward to bestow a garland upon Guruji! Then it was Guruji's turn to speak...Abi, ever at her grandfather's side, held the microphone. His face was filled with emotion as he began "My children..." and encouraged us all to continue to practice to reach the heights of Yoga.

It was pandemonium when they invited us to eat as everyone got up at once to head to the tables. The food was set up in stations: plates and utensils in the center, with cafeteria style lines on each wall. I lost my two companions and found myself chatting in line with Patricia Walden and Manouso Manos. The best part of the meal was a digestive treat called paan. Upon opening the foil wrapping was a green leaf with an explosion of flavor inside. I have never had anything like it in an Indian restaurant anywhere ever. It reminded me of my favorite Thai appetizer, Miang Kum.

When the meal was over it was nearly 9pm. I asked Manouso to take a picture of me with my two companions before we left to go home. It was a delightful end to the Pune celebrations.

On Monday, December 15th, I met Cheryl at a local large bookstore called Crosswords. We then went shopping on Mahatma Gandhi Road in search of a suitcase for Cheryl as she had purchased some larger items. We had a wonderful lunch at Ram Krishna restaurant at the start of MG Road. Her journey to India was over. We parted; she to her hotel to get ready to spend the night at a Mumbai airport hotel and return to Australia and me to pack all of my treasures and prepare for my South India tour.

Rashida told me only my suitcases should leave for Bangalore and I should stay. That was very sweet...She and her husband have been delightful hosts and I shall be forever grateful to have had the opportunity to stay with them. I guess I should thank my sister-in-law for wandering into the wrong temple and finding my brother, and my brother for realizing she was too good to let get away...

On Tuesday, December 16th I departed Pune for Bangalore. I was 30 minutes early at the airport and went through the security checkpoint with my luggage only to be told after I went through that I had to wait because the flight was not ready for check-in. After waiting 30 minutes, I had to go through security again even though I was on the other side of the checkpoint!

It took 2.5 hours for the tour bus to get to the E-inn hotel we were staying at in Electronic City, on the outskirts of Bangalore. I swear it was in the middle of nowhere. It felt quite different in Bangalore than in Pune with less traffic congestion, less rickshaws, more pastoral scenery and therefore, less pollution.

On Wednesday, December 17th we awoke at 6am. I awoke earlier to the Muslim call for prayer that was a constant background sound at certain times of the day. It always served to remind me to dedicate whatever I was doing at the time to God.

The hotel provided breakfast and then we boarded the buses. There were 9 tour buses filled to capacity to hold the entire group. This day Manouso and Rita Manos, Gloria Goldberg and her

entourage, Patricia Walden, John Schumacher, James Murphy, Marla Apt and Paul Cabanis were on my bus. There was constant ribbing, joking and laughter. I sat next to John and as always enjoyed his company immensely.

We arrived at the Bellur school/dormitory/hospital complex and had time to wander around to investigate everything. As I passed the steps leading up to the school I could see the uniformed schoolchildren singing the national anthem to Guruji on top of an adjacent building. Soon the bell to start school was rung and all the uniformed girls and boys scurried to their classes. They were really excited to see us and greeted us in 'namaste', handshakes and ready smiles, eagerly posing for photographs.

We had breakfast there and then boarded the bus to go to the Patanjali temple a very short distance away. The road was lined in the center with a carpet strewn with marigolds: red and gold. The villagers were standing outside their homes watching us as we paraded by. At the temple a band played; there were sadhu's, priests, children, foreigners and locals all intermingled under a canopy of brightly colored cloth to shield us from the approaching mid-day heat.

Ceremonies took place to bathe the idols in various liquids as we all parked ourselves wherever we were to either listen to the chanting or observe if we were close enough. It was quite the festival! Guruji spoke at the end of the lengthy ceremony. Then we headed back to the complex for lunch and a program by the children followed by felicitations of the esteemed guests who were there to honor BKS Iyengar. It was a long day that would be repeated throughout the tour!

Someone came on the bus asking whether anyone could drive a bus....evidently one bus had lost its driver! This was right after Manouso had just said that at one time he had driven a tour bus. His wife, Rita, was horrified at the prospect of her husband driving in utter darkness in this crazy traffic. Luckily his services were not needed! We boarded the bus after dinner and headed back to the hotel for a 2 hour drive. I joked that I would see everyone in a few hours after we ate.

On Thursday, December 18th, I awoke at 6am at the E-inn to fit in a quick yoga practice and head down for breakfast. I missed eating fruit! I had fruit daily since I arrived in India, but not on the South India tour. The smorgasbord did not include fruit, so I inquired whether I could order some. After the waiter brought me a bowl of fruit, other people who sat down near me also wound up ordering fruit!

We were reassigned new buses to coordinate with the hotels we were booked into in Mysore that night. We were supposed to board our buses at 7:30...which wound up being 8:45! Then we were told it would be a 6 hour bus ride to Hoysala Village Resort, our luncheon destination. We made one pit stop. I avoided drinking water so my bladder wouldn't need relieving every few hours. I sat next to David from San Francisco --and talked deeply about life. After arriving at the luncheon destination we were informed that we had to leave in 15 minutes! It was a beautiful outdoor setting. After a hurried meal, we drove another 2 hours to the temples we were scheduled to visit that day... Channakeshava Temple, capital of the Hoysala Empire in Bellur; Hoysaleshwara and Shanthaleshwar Temples in Halebidu... only to spend about 30 minutes at each!

Just after leaving the final temple, thank goodness David said something to our tour bus director as the bus turned around and headed back towards the last temple so we could have a toilet break before the 3 hour ride to Pai Vista hotel in Mysore. We were greeted by a band of drummers that reminded me of Hawaiian hula with a very similar tribal beat. Some people danced, others walked between the drummers to go into the hotel ballroom where we were to

observe a folk dance. It took quite some time for all the buses to arrive. It was 10:45pm once everyone was assembled. Two men balanced these large square frames covered in fabric and streamers on top of their heads, twirling and dancing around to the drum beat, lowering themselves to the floor while balancing the frames on their heads, foreheads or between their teeth! We were served dinner at 11:30pm! We boarded the bus yet again to go to our respective hotels. It was quite the day. We were told that we would have a late wake up the next morning 7am instead of 6am!

On Friday, December 19th Guruji deemed that we would begin our journey at 9am instead of 7am. Thank goodness! We still had a 7am wake up call for breakfast at 8, but I was able to get in a good yoga practice to help relieve my sore tailbone from all the sitting the day before. I finally got my wish; that morning I enjoyed sliced papaya for breakfast!

After Guruji finished his breakfast off we headed to see more temples. The Chamundeshwari Temple was in honor of the Great Mother. It was positively fascinating. There were aspiring Indian priests that were on a pilgrimage to many temples who eagerly waited in the long lines with us to enter. I witnessed their fervent worship of the Divine.

Next was Mysore Palace - what a wondrous place. Indoor photography was not allowed so I purchased post cards that still did not show the true beauty of the palace. When it was built, the Rajah brought the best of everything from all over the world: glass lamps from Czechoslovakia and Italy, tiles from Portugal; all simply beautiful. There was a curse placed on the royal family so the couple would always be barren. Therefore the royal family's chosen heir to the throne was an adopted niece or nephew. I learned that one of the Rajah's financed Guruji's 1938 silent film two years before he died!

We stopped to see the Giant Nandi in Chamundi Hills, the largest bull statue in south India. I had had my fill of sight-seeing so did not venture out of the bus. While waiting I noticed a cow eating a flower garland that was draped across the front hood of an SUV with two monkey's opening bags that had been tied to the top of the roof. They rifled through the bags and ceremoniously threw things to the ground! A man came to chase the monkeys away but by then the cow had finished eating the floral and foil garland!

We had lunch at a park, Karanji kere (lake). It was wonderful. We ate from banana leaves and were served 16 different items. Guruji sat on a bench by the lake as various people approached to speak with him. I ventured into an enclosed bird sanctuary on the grounds. It appeared that this park was intent on educating the public about preserving the earth's ecosystem.

Although on our tour itinerary, we never made it to the Keshava Temple in Somnathpur or to Brindavan Gardens to see the musical fountain show. Instead we stopped to see the first place that Guruji taught and then proceeded to the location of his high school. Unfortunately the gate was locked so we could not venture in. We discovered that the building that stands there now is built upon the site of his old school. We all boarded our respective buses for the four hour drive back to the E-Inn in Electronic City, outside Bangalore.

We arrived at 10pm after a short cut took us on a wild ride through a lunar landscape. I had observed that the car lights were weaving to and fro and asked my seat mate what was going on. He thought that we were at a rest stop and then commented that it looked like a car ballet! The road, if you could call it that, was sandy with huge craters. We soon realized that the cars, trucks and buses were sharing an Indiana Jones adventure ride. We joked and laughed a lot which helped to dispel the fear that some people later admitted having. Once the driver had to back the bus up because the path before us just dropped away! Someone said they didn't

remember this part of the journey on the ride out, another said that we made a wrong turn and had to go back...it took nearly 20 minutes to traverse this eerie landscape in pitch dark. After getting onto the cement road, we gave the driver a huge round of applause. Later we learned that only one other bus took the same route...but that group had gotten out of the bus.

We had an hour before we were scheduled to have our final elegant dinner which was again smorgasbord style with a variety of ethnic vegetarian foods. Many students crowded around the steps to the hotel for the last glimpse as Guruji and his entourage left. Afterwards the devotees milled in the lobby chatting and hugging. It was truly a wondrous experience to be united with people from all over the world through a common bond, to honor our beloved yoga master and relish this extended yoga family.

The rest of my day was leisurely. I decided to stay at the hotel and say good-bye to people as they were leaving on the final sight-seeing adventure of Bangalore with their luggage in tow. No thank you, I had had my fill of bus tour rides. I hung out with David and David from San Francisco for a walk around the hotel area. We accomplished a little last minute shopping and enjoyed the village atmosphere tremendously. I got the impression that the local villagers do not see many foreigners.

Upon returning to the hotel we met up at the pool, which is on the roof of the hotel - to lounge in the sun and take a dip in the cold water. A father and young son from Britain who had been on our tour bus joined us. They shared a song that they had made up of me and Elizabeth, my roommate on the tour, when we dashed off to shop with only 10 minutes to spare on one of our bus stops! It was quite witty and very comical. David and I had a bite to eat before the other David and I left on our taxi ride for the airport. Once there we met up with Ed Marks from San Diego until David's flight departed. Then it was my turn to board for Mumbai and my journey to Chicago and my childhood home.

In the evening of Saturday, December 20th I flew from Bangalore to Mumbai. I spent a short time in the board room in Mumbai before boarding the British Air flight to London in the wee hours of December 21st. Once in London, I went directly to the board room to make a reservation to use the shower facility and a complimentary shoulder massage or facial before departing for Chicago. Upon arriving in Chicago, the temperature was 30 degrees below zero with the wind chill factor! A far cry from the 80 degree temperature in India!

I know a few of you wondered whether I would actually return. I have to admit that I could be very happy in India...

As I complete my final edits to my travelogue, I am filled with gratitude to have had the opportunity to go on this journey, grateful to my family, friends and students who expressed concern for my well-being, especially during the terrorist attacks. I am blessed to have you in my life.

Namaskar!

Carmen