

More about Cate....

There are nine students in my class from different states of India, Tanzania, America, and Sri Lanka. We learn conflict transformation and cultural understanding practices within our selves, within the group of students, and in the community here in Hyderabad. We can take these practices and the empowerment we've gained through study and leadership to our home communities.

Rotary in Hyderabad is very exciting, there are twenty clubs and there is a lot going on. I have been to ten Rotary meetings, a few special events, and I've spoken to a 'Ladies Wing' of Rotary. Going to the meetings is enjoyable because I get to have one-on-one conversations with Rotarians to find out what they do, what service projects they are involved in, and what Rotary means to them. I also have the honor of introducing myself and my objectives as a Rotary scholar.

The special events are never ending. I began my year by attending a joint meeting of all of the Rotary clubs on India's independent day. At that meeting I made my first connections with all of the Rotary club presidents and the district leadership. The next event I attended was a joint Rotary meeting to honor under-privileged and highly intelligent students that were given scholarships by Rotary. I was also able to attend a beautiful wedding of a Rotarian. Two weeks ago, I attended the felicitation of a Rotarian who was given an honorary doctorate and honored for his life of service to the community. At all of these events I took the initiative to help organize or facilitate.

Two weeks ago I gave a speech to the Ladies wing of a Rotary club entitled Female Empowerment in the United States. The funny thing was that the club made up the title of my speech before I knew about it! I've learned that India is all about flexibility. The presentation was very successful. I was able to give a thorough representation of the situation of women in America and have a fruitful discussion with local female and male community leaders in the audience. We came to some powerful conclusions and realized that a few of us shared the same belief that true empowerment comes from within. I wore a tradition outfit called a 'Saree' for the presentation. I have also been involved in organizing and strengthening some of the Rotaract clubs around town. I look forward to giving one more presentation next week and one the week after that.

I have felt so fulfilled ever since I've been here. I feel that I am truly using all of my skills and talents and gaining confidence by confronting challenges without fear. It is amazing that I have not felt homesick. I am a part of a strong and loving community at my study institution and a supportive and hospitable community of Rotarians.

I am also involved in working with projects that help women learn business skills, practical skills, entrepreneurship and income generation. This is fulfilling for me because I have experience creating my own jewelry business three years ago. I am trying to use the fact that I stick out as an American to the benefit of these communities. I have been asked by local newspapers and radio stations to give an interview and give suggestions on their operations. I am finding my place as an outsider who can contribute, learn, communicate well, and have a good time with new friends. I have the opportunity to represent my culture and experiences 24 hours a day. I was elected my class leader and so it is my job to facilitate understanding, co-operation and team-building among my class who I call the "International Peace-Building Team."

I love to be involved in many things and being here in Hyderabad has given me many opportunities. I am getting used to the organized chaos that is India and I love it. Everything is flexible, nothing is taken too seriously, and patience is a virtue. From the internet connection, to the lack of traffic rules, anything goes and it is a refreshing change from America. I enjoy the fact that India is a communal based society. I enjoy the culture of religious practices and festivals that co-exist here. As I wake up in the morning I hear the chanting and prayers of a mosque and a Krishna temple at the same time. I have realized that despite violence and bombing that is done by a few individuals, most community members respect each other and have an inclusive attitude.

As for the bombing, I was in town on that Saturday night and riding a bus home with my friend Suhail. When I got home and we all watched the news I felt a little sick. I went and talked to my friend Joshua about my fear. Many of my friends have been through a lot of trauma compared to my American experience. I believe many Americans are afraid of death and try to avoid the subject. This kind of event has happened here before and people are dying for many other reasons all the time, it is a constant fact of life. Joshua, who is an Indian Christian studying Islam to understand his countrymen more, reminded me that life is a gift and everyday is a reminder that we don't know the plan of God. It wasn't long before we were all having fun and chatting and laughing again while also discussing the news and its implications. I was asked to lead the devotion that we had on Sunday. I read Ecclesiastes chapter 3 and talked about the choice between fear and love, between fear and life. The tragedies remind us to look at life instead of death and feel gratitude. I was happy to be alive on Sunday so that I could hug my friend Rebecca, from Tanzania, and laugh at breakfast as we teased Joshua. Waking up on Sunday, feeling disoriented and unsure I walked into the dining hall to be greeted by a family that I'm creating here, who are getting to know me, share stories with me, laughter, cultural understanding, and underneath it all a sense of spiritual love. Two weeks after the bombing we led a group discussion at one of the community centers allowing young Hindu and Muslim males to speak out their reactions to the bombing. I have gained confidence from this traveling that friends can be made anywhere in the world. "