

This morning, we spent about two hours in a tiny village school outside of Mataduri, whose students' ages ranged from 3 to 10 years. They are the fortunate ones who are able to go to school, and the school was a church-based school. It was started by an Indian Christian pastor, who was there. (Christian pastors and politicians wear white tunics and longer white skirts, called a 'pyjama' or 'kurta'. I'm not sure which. In the villages, instead of 'pyjamas', men wear 'lungis'. The 'lungi' is a rectangle cloth, usually made of cotton, draped around the waist and pleated in the front at the groin. )

The children were waiting for us, sitting cross-legged, and when we walked in, more than two hundred pairs of huge black eyes looked at us, expectantly. Honestly, I have to say I have never seen more beautiful children in a single room in my life, with their gleaming and very white smiles and sweet natures. (Indians have the most beautiful white teeth -- they don't consume sugar like we do.)

I talked to them for a few minutes about myself and where I worked, and that I was fortunate to work with students the same age as they. I spoke through an interpreter, so I had to speak deliberately and slowly. It was a great experience for me. Every word had to count. Since many of them are Hindus, we focused on the message that there is one God who loves them very much and He made each one of them very special. I took a quick survey of the students, asking how many of them liked mathematics, how many liked science, how many liked sports, writing, art, and so on...and I told them that their abilities and talents were special to them and that those were God-given talents, and to believe in themselves and to have faith in God. A very simple message, but I believe they understood.

Then Elizabeth Anne and I had some fun with them, teaching them some of the basics we teach in Jr. Cotillion, such as sitting properly in a chair, and introductions. These children were so incredibly priceless, coming up to us, introducing themselves the way we taught them, shaking hands and making eye contact. It was hard for me to refrain from just hugging every single one of them. The children wear a simple school uniform, and many of them were barefooted. Many of the girls from the Hindu families sported a single dot between their brows, some of them with tiny jewels in them. Many of the girls sported jasmine wreaths in their hair.

I told them that one of the songs of our faith that the children learn at a very early age is the precious song "Jesus Loves Me" which they learned very quickly. It was such a moving experience singing with them.

There was one tiny three-year-old little girl who caught my eye, whom I later found out had lost her mother six months ago. I wanted to bring her back to the United States with me, but learned she and her sister were well cared for by her grandparents. I have a photograph of her, which I will treasure. I'm sure I will encounter other children just like her and I will feel the same way about them.

This afternoon, Elizabeth Anne and I were treated like rock stars at a government school on the property of a sugar cane plant. When we walked into the presentation room, the students clapped and cheered for us. It was humbling.

The employees are fortunate to be able to work at the plant and to send their children to the school located on the property. There are more than 1,500 students total who attend, grades 1-12. Because they could not fit more than 500 children in this small room, (all I could think of "What would our Fire Marshall say? Claudia (our business manager at school) has to see this!") we spoke, fittingly so, to 6th, 7th, and 8th graders. This time, we only had about an hour to talk, so we kept it simple, telling them about where we were from, I spoke about St. Anne's, we taught a few basics from Jr. Cotillion, and then I ended with my "God made you special" talk. After our program was over, the young ladies came up to us in droves, kissing their fingertips and pinching our cheeks, and telling us we were beautiful. I was touched and humbled by the out pouring of their affection and gratitude that we cared enough to come to their village to see them.

Tonight, we returned to the village we were in earlier, and gave a rousing program about Noah's Ark to about 100 children, where I told the story about Noah being obedient to God and building the ark, the great flood, and the rainbow. We then taught them the song "Rise and Shine, Give God Your Glory, Glory" and colored rainbows on paper that they could take with them.

At this point, I'm really drained from the day, and I'm a little emotionally and spiritually conflicted about all I experienced, but I am so happy that I came over. It has been an amazing and joyful experience so far.

Lisa