

## Faith & Football - Business Enterprise Challenge Winners trip to Goa 2008.

### Steve Rolls - Personal Recollections

It was six weeks or so prior to departure that I was on behalf of Faith & Football invited to attend the above trip to provide support to group leader Paul Hickman.

I immediately knew in my heart that this was something I was keen to undertake and recognised this as a desire planted by The Lord. - I felt very excited at the prospect of returning to India and was confident that God had ordained my place on the team.

#### Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> November

After a long overnight flight we arrived late morning India time in to the Military Airport near Panjim, after a successful reconciliation with our luggage we moved on through the terminal exit - we were met by the searing heat on our faces and a scrum of baggage handlers who groped our case handles in a quest for a few rupees - Rick and Gilly beamed big grins as we were hugged hello. Pedro and Genilda arrived with bright orange and yellow garlands that were draped around our necks as we were ushered to the safety of the waiting coach and the comfort of its air conditioning.

It had been over 4 years since I had last been in this country - it felt a lot less as I readily recognised the beautiful countryside, - a lush green from the recent monsoon season. Although tired - the girls began to absorb the sights from their seat windows. This was it! India grabs all of your senses - cows and dogs at every turn, women in bright coloured saris, swaying palm trees - poor roadside dwellings - constant sound of hooters, pure blue sky. The coach hurtled towards the hotel through a kaleidoscope of daily life and then within an hour we arrived. The Holiday Inn - Mobar Beach is a welcome sight for any jet-lagged traveller.

A welcome committee of beautiful Indian girls draped more garlands over our heads. As we entered the hotel we got our first glimpse of the hotel pool meandering through tropical gardens that sloped away to the hot yellows sands of the private beach and the warm waters of the Arabian Sea. The girls sipped their welcome cocktail and knew this was it, their prize - the industry and commitment of the business challenge was paying its biggest dividend.

The last time I was in India the accommodation was much more humble - I knew some of the toil of the tour itinerary and was pleased with this wonderful place of refreshing.

The afternoon was an opportunity to relax after the 10 hour flight from the UK - everyone chilled by the pool - we met in the lobby prior to dinner that evening, a small fleet of local taxis took us a mile or so into touristy development of shops and restaurants - Mick's place seemed an appropriate enough venue for our first meal together. Drinks were ordered while all the girls engaged in the fumigation of arms and legs as a choking cloud of deet deterred any possibility of a mosquito attack. It was a warm sultry evening - the food was excellent and the conversation animated.

Bonding was beginning; even at this early stage I could sense great unity among the girls and the Lords peace upon us all. Mandy could not contain her surprise or delight in how calm she felt - "this is not like me, I am usually quite stressed" she exclaimed. Well not this week - day one was drawing to a close and a sense of expectancy rose in each of us.

## Sunday 9th November

The day began with our first Prayer meeting - it had been made clear that this was a Faith & Football tour and although not compulsory I encouraged everyone to try and make as many gatherings as possible. That first morning 5 of the girls joined Toni, Debs, Mandy Sarah, Rick Gilly and myself, we looked at scripture where God encouraged us to consider the poor. We were able to pray for the week ahead and to ask God to give us a glimpse of his heart for the poor and destitute. Paul did not make the meeting - a text from my wife wondering if I was safe woke him in the early hours and he could not get back to sleep, I always switch my phone off during the night so I do not get disturbed. This was to be the first of a few sleepless nights for Paul in the week ahead.

This was a full day for R&R - though it did not take long for a few of us to start a water polo match in the hotel swimming pool - we soon attracted some of the locals and a competitive match ensued that left those relaxing around the edge under no doubt that we had arrived!

Faith & Football has a mission to reach Pompey people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ - so it should not have been a surprise to learn there was a family from Milton staying at the hotel - they were very interested to learn why and how the girls were in town.

I found the day very enjoyable - with a comfortable pool side sun lounger, there was ample opportunity to fellowship with Paul, Rick and Gilly sharing in our faith, building each other up and sensing the real peace and presence of the Lord. In the afternoon some of us strolled down to the beach - we hopped across the burning sand to the sea shore and the crashing waves of the Arabian sea, the water is as hot as a bath and the girls screamed with excitement as we bobbed over the huge beach breakers. Deborah was completely submerged, as she was nearly taken out by what seemed to be a mini tsunami. Billie watched from the beach, isolated by her fear of the sea and its fishy population - it was great to see her encouraged by Paul step through this apprehension and join us in the surf.

The hotel was located on a peninsular and in the evening we eat at a restaurant across the road from the Holiday Inn, which sat along side the inland waters of the lagoon. There was a small wooden pier that linked the restaurant to deeper water - there was a wonderful point in the evening when Rick and I made our way to the end of the jetty - looking back we could see the coloured lights of the patio and the girls shaking their stuff on the restaurant dance floor. The moon was bright - as the waters lapped around the supports below us. Rick and I shared our hopes for the trip, the warm evening breeze seemed to blow with The Holy Spirit, Rick and I prayed - the chicken tikka meal was great but the Lord tasted good this evening.

Over a glass of Australian red I was able to share some testimony with Toni about the Faith & Football Friday night league and the transformation God was brining about in Landport and Buckland.

## Monday 10th November

The Chicken tikka bubbled away in the early hours of the morning prompting me to visit my bathroom - I got back into bed feeling wide-awake, again I felt the Lords presence and prayed in the spirit for miracles.

This was our first day at the coalface so to speak - we had an early breakfast and met in the hotel lobby for 6.20am. Prior to leaving we had a group huddle and Paul lifted the day to God in prayer.

Three people carriers lined up outside - I jumped into car number 2 along with Debs, Mandy, Anita, Sammy and Leah - we introduced ourselves to our driver, a smart handsome young man in a white suit, his quiet demeanour and boyish grin disguised the spirit of Sterling Moss within, little did we know at this point of the adventures that lay ahead for car number 2.

Our first destination was Sanjay Special School - we left early in order to be able to meet the schoolchildren as they arrived back from half term. Many were physically handicapped and it was very emotional to see them make their way into the school. Everyone was then assembled in the School courtyard where the School Principal addressed them - her name was Vega, a tall elegant, inspirational lady with a commanding presence.

The morning sun grew hotter as the assembly got under way with the school band playing the Indian national anthem - the initial blast on the trumpet was enough for me to cry my first tears. There was something about my old school days as the kids in their bright uniforms moved on to P.T - star jumping, toe touching and jogging on the spot.

After eating our hotel packed breakfasts - a strangle collection of lettuce sandwiches and cakes, we were shown around the school, visiting various classrooms. We saw deaf children with big ear phones being taught to read, young mentally ill kids were in another classroom - all of them pleased to see us and happy to hold and hug. Music attracted our attention to some children who were having dancing lessons in the corridor - everywhere we went we were greeted with big smiles and curious eyes.

We finally left the school - from the darkness of the windows lots of little anonymous hands waved us goodbye. Our group filed across the road and past a burning rubbish tip on the corner to a derelict looking building that was Salmans School - I noticed smart young girls and boys with crisp clean white shirts and blouses and smiles to match - a shining contrast to the bleak dark and empty classrooms all accessed from one black tunnel of a corridor. The only furniture was a couple of rickety old desks with matching bench, not a book or pen in sight. This school was for the poorest of the poor and its teachers, each one a hero were the lowest of the paid.

More tears were triggered by a meeting with the Headmaster in his office. Along with Debs and Mandy from Warbligton and Toni and Sarah from Wildern, we asked the school head what was his vision for the school. In some ways I think the poverty and hopelessness of his situation limited his ability to think big. We asked him about specific needs and he said a water filter system that produced drinking water for the children would be a help. The staff from our schools were visibly moved by the visit and shocked by the complete lack of any facilities that our school kids take for granted. They left with a hearts desire to do something that would benefit the school.

We departed the school and headed for the centre of Panjim for lunch - amid the narrow lanes of the City we found our restaurant in an upper room, we filed in and sat along a narrow table, it was a cool retreat from the heat outside. This is the place where the girls were able to graffiti their messages on the wall.

We were joined for lunch with Pedro & Genilda - afterwards I was separated from car number 2 and whisked off by Pedro in the Mustard Seed jeep, him and Genilda took me to the city centre offices of The Brazilian Football Academy. This is a newly formed charity with Pedro acting as one of the trustees. It is the vehicle for two Brazilian born again Christian Football players who play professionally in the Indian League. They each have a very similar vision to that of Faith & Football - that is to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ through the medium of the beautiful game.

Pedro had been greatly impacted by the Faith & Football mission to India in 2004 - He had seen at first hand Linvoy and Darren Moore share their faith and hope in Jesus. It was a privilege to be able to pray with Pedro for this new ministry and to enquire of God as to any possible future connection with Faith & Football.

I was re-united with the rest of our party at a trendy café that specialised in every kind of Milk Shake and offered a huge choice of cream cakes and buns. The air conditioning and familiar faces made for a great welcome, though I was less than chuffed to learn they had been off visiting a local Hindu Temple during my absence.

Shallom House an orphanage on Choroa Island was our next destination - we travelled alongside the wide river that flowed through the city to the car ferry departure point. The ferry a floating pontoon with room for 6 or 7 cars and packed with scooters and pedestrians chugged slowly towards the island across alligator infested waters.

It had been some 4 and half years since I was last at Shallom House - it was good to see the roof extension had been completed. There was a noisy and joyous welcome for us - we were led into a main room where the children of the orphanage were seated on the floor. The principle of the School welcomed us and in her speech gave heartfelt thanks to Ricky & Gill for their love and commitment to the work of the House, I tried desperately hard not to cry again. The Children sang for us - " Give Thanks to the Holy One" - as on my previous visit here I felt the tangible presence of God. The visit was quite brief but everyone was encouraged to learn we would return again at the end of the week for a longer visit.

We travelled back to the mainland across a different more remote route - it was by now late afternoon and as some of us began to scratch our arms and legs it triggered another chocking cloud of deet, much to the amusement of the locals.

We headed for the Muslim village where Salman lived - we had been invited to his home to meet his family. It was a bit surreal with twilight approaching as three people carriers of white westerners embarked on a procession through the narrow shack lined alley of the village. The inhabitants lined up outside their small huts and corrugated dwellings while hundreds of scruffy little faces skipped around our legs. Old men sat with arms folded and stared - there was a sense of intrusion and I didn't feel altogether comfortable. However we were well received by Salman and his family and we took it in turns of two and three to examine the small yet spotlessly clean home. The trip back down the track became much more excited as we handed out sweets to everyone and cameras clicked to capture priceless moments.

Salman insisted we see the local village football pitch and he sat in our car to show the way, we drove on to a mud clearing with a bent iron goal at each end - some of the girls were in disbelief at the facility and it triggered further crying and hugging among them. It was a good backdrop for me and Pedro to again talk about Faith & Football - Pedro was impatient with some quarters of the Church, his strategy to communicate the Gospel was in his own words to make friends with people. I thought how incredible on the back of that a whole party of white foreign strangers and been able to invade this Muslim community.

It was night time as we headed back to the hotel - about an hour and half's drive, definite opportunity for some noddy head time. We freshened up for our evening meal at a restaurant just outside the gates of the hotel. There was great atmosphere, team spirit and unity developed further over the eating and the drinking and the reflecting.

### **Tuesday the 11th November**

Psalm 121 provided the food for thought at the early morning prayer meeting. After breakfast I was back in car number 2 for our journey to the Spice Plantation.

We were beginning to understand that there were some rules and etiquette for road drivers and that amidst the chaos there was some vague order, although our driver seemed to specialise in overtaking on blind bends, we gradually appreciated that there was a kind of unmarked central lane for hooter tooting overtakes. Although it often looked like a giant game of 'chicken' our driver didn't actually hit any people - sadly cows and dogs were less fortunate.

We were greeted at the plantation with a shower of fresh flower petals and dancing girls in colourful national dress, after a welcome herbal drink we were shown around the estate and the incredible variety of plants and shoots used for medicinal purposes.

Lunch was a very tasty curry and papadoms with ice cream and chilled coke.

The excitement of the early afternoon was all about the elephant ride - three girls at a time sat on the back of a huge elephant and waved at the cameras as the giant beast lolled up and down the dusty track.

The afternoon offered a choice of returning to the hotel to relax by the pool or to journey on to a remote part of the coast for a glimpse of an unspoilt piece of planet earth. One carrier returned to base with Paul while I accompanied Rick Gilly and the rest of the girls to the beach.

One hour and one cow later we arrived at the beach - it was incredibly beautiful and still largely deserted, although there was a small hostel that offered tiny bamboo beach huts for a few pounds per night. Toni allowed herself to imagine a few weeks de stressing on this paradise beach. The warm sea was an irresistible welcome for weary travellers and everyone jumped in apart from myself - I had forgotten my swimming shorts and although Paul had lent me a pair of his Speedo's I resisted the temptation and paddled instead.

We departed the beach and drove around the headland to another beautiful bay - it was in fact the beach where the bounty advert had been filmed and was indeed a taste of paradise. However unlike the previous beach this one was very busy with tourists and cows alike - a road that ran adjacent to the sea was lined with small shops selling all sorts of local crafts and gifts. Rick and I sat on the beach and left the girls to their first shopping fix - an hour or so later we were all re-united and together saw the bright orange sun sink slowly behind the trees on Monkey Island

We headed back to the hotel in the dark - looking forward to seeing Paul and the others for dinner.

### **Wednesday 12th November**

It was again a prayer meeting by the side of the pool that kicked off the day - Rick asked the girls present what they thought about these early morning spiritual gatherings - I was thrilled when Billie said she had found the meetings "intriguing" her and Sam had attended every morning and I could see that the Holy Spirit was speaking to them, there others too who I knew were being gently challenged by the Lord.

Breakfast was good I had by now got my routine well sorted and managed to assemble a good shout for a full English.

Car 2 was becoming a bit tribal - Mandy brought along her own R&B CD, which met with approval from our driver who was happy to keep on pumping up the volume. We departed the hotel for Mapusa Market - our driver was supposed to follow the car in front, but it was a pace just too slow for him and so at a roundabout he took a different fork and sped off, it meant we arrived at the market 20 minutes or so ahead of the other two vehicles.

We finally all met up and after our driver had been properly chastised we were joined by Pedro and Genilda - Rick briefed us on the importance of staying together, stressing how easy it would be to get lost in the hectic hustle and bustle of the market.

The heat was scorching as we entered through the fish market - all the traders seemed to be women, lines of them sat in front of boxes of all types of sea creatures flicking away the flies. The first thing that hit me was the fishy stench that filled my nostrils to the back of my throat - Shelbie gagged and put her hand over her mouth, she turned around and quickly left, Pedro followed her and led her through another route that bypassed the fish shed.

We emerged from the relative darkness of the Fish market to the burning heat of the day and row upon row of traders selling everything imaginable. There were spices, fruit, plants, vegetables and stalls of raw meat swarming with flies - a cacophony of colours and smells, A throng of people - the women dressed in bright coloured saris made for a busy noisy atmosphere as they haggled and gestured for a deal.

We were here to strike our own bargains, we needed to purchase men's shirts and ladies nighties for the old folks we were going to later visit and sacks of rice for our visit to the poor Lamani Village.

The girls soon got to work and demonstrated some of the negotiation skills that had contributed to them winning this trip of a lifetime. They haggled for the best price, motivated by the knowledge that the old people would be the beneficiaries. The heat levels rose with the sun, the noise increased with the frantic bartering - all too much for Emma who promptly fainted, Paul and Sarah helped her back to the safety of an air-conditioned car.

We left the market for the short drive to the Old peoples home at Mapusa Asylum - this was a very emotional visit for everyone. We were led into a large room that was sparsely furnished with 10 or so small metal beds. Upon each mattress there was a small old frail lady. Some were curled up and seemed oblivious to us, others gave us big toothy grins and sad sunken eyes seemed to glint. Each old lady was given a nightie and though obviously pleased I thought they were happier holding hands with the girls who perched themselves on the edge of each bed.

We met the men housed in a different room - they seemed even sadder to me and although everyone was reasonably clean and well fed, it was hard to escape the feeling that people here were simply waiting to die. As we left the Asylum many of the girls were again overcome by what they had seen.

We headed off for Lamani Village, as we approached our vehicles were met by a crowd of smiling, waving children - I was struck by how beautiful the children were and how warm their welcome was. I guess they knew we were loaded with sweets!

This community although so very poor seemed quite vibrant - the young mums were well dressed, a real contrast to their homes with mud floors and no running water. Each lady seemed to have a young child swinging from her hip and lots of young ones swirled around their legs.

We handed out the rice the girls had haggled for earlier, in Faith & Football carrier bags. The gift of this basic food was gratefully received and then the children formed two long orderly queues as word on the sweets spread. The girls were brilliant with these kids and led them in some singing and dancing - heads shoulders knees and toes was a favourite along with the Hokey Cokey. This was a real up beat visit and everyone in the small village loved it - when we departed there was a real sense of appreciation and I felt the girls who had given so much love and energy were also the recipients of something greater, it is written somewhere that it is better to give than to receive and I felt I saw that truth today.

We headed for the coast and Anjuna Market - a huge sprawl of bamboo canopy's sheltering a multitude of traders and their eastern wares - it covered a massive area. The girls were gagging for some shopping and keen to practice their bartering gifts.

Paul and I retreated to a beachside bar for a coke and chips as the girls rummaged for gifts and souvenirs. This was a bit of east meets west as locals mingled with foreigners and Indians from other states in a swarm of commerce. Here the rupee was king and it seemed everyone had a strategy to part cash from tourists - I had only just left the safety of our vehicle before a native had stuck his pen in my ear and then thrust the end of it in my face to show a curly little maggot squirming around, he indicated he would remove the others for a small price.

The girls returned to the designated meeting place draped with bags of bargains and throughout the journey back there were stories of haggling success. We arrived at the hotel by 8.00pm - just in time for an evening swim in the hotel pool before our evening meal.

### Thursday 13th November

Following three long hectic days on the road I was looking forward to the relaxing day at the Hotel - the prayer meeting was at a civilised time of 8.30am. I prayed in my room and felt God say to lift up the name of Jesus - the poolside meeting provided an opportunity for the Gospel message of grace and was followed by some of the girls questioning Rick about his faith.

A leisurely breakfast outside on the terrace set the pace for the rest of the day.

The girls all headed for the beach as I located my sun lounge for a poolside chill under the hot Indian sun. On their return there was a major water polo match, the hotel manager encouraged us by putting up a bottle of wine for the winning team. Steve the guy from Milton proved a cracking goalkeeper - though no one could steal the show from Shelbie who seemed to score a goal at every attempt. A beaming hotel manager presented her with the winning prize, but she was too young to drink it so Pompey Steve gratefully stepped up.

Leah left her lunch on her sun bed for just a few seconds and in that time a flock of big black ravens devoured the contents - lettuce and tomatoes as well.

Later that afternoon Paul and I walked down to the beach and negotiated with the hotel staff at the seaside restaurant for our last nights dinner. We arranged for the table to be positioned along the middle of the beach, close to the foaming waves of the Indian ocean - I was really excited at the prospect of a moonlight meal on a lantern lit table. Paul struck a good deal with a great menu and welcome drink; we were both thrilled at the prospect of surprising everyone on the final night.

One of the hotel guests had informed us that there was a Karaoke night at a restaurant near the hotel; we decided to eat there that evening. I had a pre-dinner sunset beer with Ricky & Gill by the hotel pool and we reflected on the wonderful few days we had so far spent.

I loved dinner, not just for the great food, cold Fosters and warm barmy evening - but because the girls simply took over the restaurant by way of the karaoke stage. They were fantastic and each song was met with rapturous applause from the packed venue - the local radio station was present and its star DJ sung his pop hit GOA accompanied by the girls who danced and added backing vocals. Ken an old tourist from the north of England boldly took the microphone and did some old Sinatra number, the fact that he was awful did not stop the girls screaming and clapping his performance - Ken loved the adulation and with the exasperation of his wife obvious made a couple of subsequent appearance. However he could not upstage the girls who became stars for the night. As the night grew late I said we needed to leave after the next song and right on queue the girls all jumped up and skipped out of the bar to the song; 'Girls just want to have fun'. Everybody in the restaurant rose to their feet and gave them an ovation; I followed up behind feeling like some sort of minder for a famous pop band.

## Friday 14th November

Paul was by now quite unwell - a throat infection conspired with the local mosquitoes to rob him of another night's sleep. We agreed it would be best for him to stay behind at the hotel and rest, he could also ensure the preparations for our evening meal.

As I sat in the front seat of car 2, I heard Debs shout out "Are you Gonna crash?" - I could not believe what I was hearing, our driver did not need much encouragement! Then I realised she was talking to a tired Paul who had come to wave us off.

Our first stop of the day was Candolim home for elderly men - We found them gathered around a television watching the cricket match against England. The gentlemen here were Christians and we were welcomed with prayer. We handed out shirts that had been purchased at the market; the girls were again brilliant in engaging with the old men. I asked one white headed resident if I could sit with him on his bed he nodded, I saw a bible on his locker and with his permission I sat and read chapter eight of the book of Romans to him. There was an old guy who played his guitar and sang for us - although this visit was much more up beat than the previous old people home, there was an incredibly sad moment with an old gentleman dying of throat cancer. He cut a thin lonely figure sat on the edge of his bed in a dingy drab room. He was in obvious distress although he seemed to gain some relief as he gulped down the jellybeans that had been handed out. Deborah evidently moved by the situation put her arm on his shoulder, I just held his hand and not having sufficient words prayed in tongues. One of the nurses's looked on and quietly sobbed.

Our destination today was Shallom House and on route we stopped to visit Baga House, this is where it all started for Ricky & Gill some 5 years or so ago. This modest property on the edge of Baga Beach became under Rick's supervision a school and a safe haven for street kids. We stood underneath the hot sun listening to Rick and Gilly revisiting the early days of their mission to this wonderful part of the world. The two of them united in their love for each other and their compassion and commitment towards the local people are very attractive and a wonderful testimony to the power of God at work.

We were soon chugging across the murky green water that surrounds Choroa Island and quickly on to a place called Calvim where Rick & Gilly had built their home. They were so pleased to provide us with wonderful hospitality and we were all encouraged to have a good nose around the place, something the girls needed little encouragement with. I tried out Rick's Hammock that was swinging on the front terrace of the house, I would have gently rocked away to and fro for a lot longer had it not been for the rip that sent me crashing to the floor. I realised I was somewhat heavier than Rick. Refreshed by cakes and coffee, sweets and juice our convoy made for Little Angels.

Pedro and Genilda greeted us in the courtyard of the Little Angels Orphanage - With literally months of sweat and labour they had transformed this old run down house into a real time vision of hope and safety for local poverty stricken children. We stepped carefully around paint pots and tools as we inspected the progress.

Pedro & Genilda had formed a Trust and legal structure for Little Angels - one of the trustees was Vega the principle from Sanjay special school whom we had met on Monday. Through Mustard Seed, Rick & Gilly had been supporting this vision for Little Angels and through their relationship with Faith & Football, we had committed to providing the annual running costs of the orphanage.

We were show 3 modest size rooms that would each house 3 bunk beds. Each bunk bed would sleep 3 children making for 9 children in a room that was about the size of a main bedroom in a UK semi detached house. They still had to find the finance for the beds and I hoped it was something that Faith & Football could help with. I reasoned no beds equated to no kids.

Rick showed me the Cess Pitt - I was surprised to see it next to the kitchen - but this is India. The back of the house had a terrace space about the size of the house itself, a huge bamboo canopy was being erected to shade this area, although it was strewn with bricks and rubble I could see this would be an important space for eating and recreation.

Pedro and Genilda joined our convoy for the short distance to Shallom House - as we drew up outside, the kids rushed to meet us - there was great excitement as the girls made their way inside surrounded by the little orphans. We were taken to the top floor flat roof of the house where we were welcomed as guests of honour.

I sat with Toni, Mandy, Deborah and Sarah on four chairs situated at the front of the children whom we all sat on the floor - The Principle welcomed us to Shallom House with a prayer, the kids sang and danced. They performed a praise song called 'I want to see Jesus lifted high' with all of the associated actions, then it was our turn to join in with them - here somewhere in India on an orphanage roof top, 10 students and their teachers waving their hands like banners singing "That all men might see and know the truth, He is the Way to Heaven"

We were served a wonderful lunch of chicken curry and rice - ladled from a giant tin pot, I knew this was luxury food for these kids brought about by our visit - they waited patiently for the English VIPs to be served before they got their lip drooling taste. It was all washed down with fizzy pop - another major treat for sure.

For many of our girls this visit was one of the major highlights of the trip. Because of time pressures with our planned farewell evening we had, to the dismay of Rick and the orphans cut our visit back by an hour. Nevertheless this disappointment could not spoil the post lunch making of Christmas cards.

The girls and the school staff knelt on the floor with the kids in half a dozen huddles - as they cut and glued, drew and painted hand made Christmas cards. This roof top art and craft enabled a quick and deep bonding to develop between the orphans and their visitors, it was a wonderful time and made departure even more difficult.

I was conscious of the time constraints and the need to be back for our dinner party on the beach - it took a long time to say goodbye and was not made any easier by the principle lady who encouraged us to sign the visitors book. As I wrote an entry on behalf of Faith & Football, she literally broke down with emotion and became inconsolable. This lady operates under extreme pressure and the relentless responsibility to provide for the children takes its toll. As I recall this moment I am again struck by our different lives and the blessings we in the UK so often take for granted.

It was nearly 5pm as our people carriers rolled off the rickety ferry onto the Panjim mainland, I had said to Paul we would be back by 6pm in order the girls would have sufficient time to change into their saris for the farewell dinner. The temptation to wind up Mandy got too strong and against my better judgement I said to our driver (in her ear shot) do you think you could make it back to the hotel within an hour. It was a challenge that our Asian Mad Max could not resist and we ended up back at the hotel a full 25 minutes ahead of the next car. In the end a stray dog was the only casualty, the screams from the back of the vehicle turned to laughter as the driver and me turned our heads to look at each other and shrugged our shoulders in perfect unison.

I found a poorly Paul in the hotel coffee shop - he negotiated final payment with the drivers while I had a last swim in the pool to wash away the dust of the day and to freshen up for the evening celebration.

The location for the evening was still a secret from the girls; Paul had even thrown in red herring about being picked up by a coach to throw anyone off the scent of the beach location.

Paul and I met at reception - after some last minute panic dressing with the saris the girls joined us and we broke the news that dinner would be on the beach. A colourful beauty procession wound its way in the warm barmy evening to the sandy coastline. The only disappointment was that because the wind had picked up the table could not be laid in the middle of the beach; instead we were seated underneath the thatched canopy of the beach side restaurant.

A small elephant souvenir purchased by Paul sat by our place mats, although hoarse with a throat infection Paul stood in turn behind every person sat around the table and with a Holy Spirit anointing spoke positive and powerful words into our lives, no sooner had he begun to do this the table was awash with the tears of everyone - it was a poignant moment and set the tone for a lovely evening. There were other speeches from the girls that added to the emotional atmosphere and sense of conclusion - there was also a feeling that somehow the glue from this trip would stick us together for a continuation of the journey.

The four-course dinner was followed by a spectacular firework display that lit up the night sky. Linking arms and marching across the beach we paddled for the last time in the warm ocean.

The girls and their teachers had presented me with a book in which they had each written some comments about their experience, I opened it for the first time back in my bedroom, I was extremely moved by the generosity and exuberance of their remarks - I thanked God for such a remarkable week and lay down to sleep with a divine contentment.

### **Saturday 15th November**

No group prayer meeting this morning - the hotel opened its dining room early so we could have breakfast. After some last minute delay settling room accounts our coach departed the Holiday Inn at 7.30pm for the hour drive to the Military Airport.

We hugged and kissed goodbye Rick, Gill Pedro and Genilda. Once through the doors there was no going back and we progressed to the checking desk. Paul and I were invited to open our suitcases for a full inspection of its belongings and then we were through to the departure area.

There was some last minute drama as Shelbie fainted on the bus to the aeroplane. I was pleased to see that the Monarch Jet was near empty, which helped to make the flight home easy and comfortable. During the trip back I reflected and reminisced on our week, I found a warm feeling of satisfaction. I felt very privileged to be part of something so significant. Eleven hours later we touched down at London Gatwick.

Wherever I have been around the globe, I always love coming home - this homecoming came with a wonderful extra sense of achievement and I loved it all the more.

**Steve Rolls**

**Nov 2008**

