

## Glimpses of God

By Leslee Simmons **IN INDIA**



Leslee Simmons, a multi-cultural major at Eugene Bible College, spent the summer of 2006 with the John Paul family in Coimbatore, India. Leslee is from Urbandale, Iowa.

I had been in Coimbatore, India, for just a few weeks, staying with the John Paul family at the mission. John Paul and Anna, his wife, live in an apartment atop the boys' orphanage, located on the ground level. He is the Open Bible field director and pastors the largest Open Bible church in India, with an attendance of more than 2,000.

Like the biblical Elijah, my room was perched on top of a roof, taking up only a small corner of the compound. Another part of the roof was used to hang clothes to dry. But one half, a long strip of concrete, wasn't used for anything, providing me plenty of room to pace at night. Walking during the day was not an option because the roof overlooked the Open Bible Church and a street with a lot of traffic. Passersby would wonder what that "blond, white girl" was doing up there.



*Leslee taught English to Biju and some of his friends*

Pauls' home with their newborn sons, so I got to know them well.

I loved the babies, the college students at the English church, the family, the precious children in the orphanage – even the spicy food. But I wasn't sleeping well and I couldn't find a place to fit in. I guess I had initially adopted the "American" mindset – the audacious mentality that I could go over to a "developing" nation and fix the country, secure in the knowledge that I was doing a great service to God. It was a terrible shock to find out that Open Bible in

India was doing just fine without me. The best way I could serve India was through financial support and prayer. After that realization my focus shifted. I determined to get to know the people as much as possible, and to learn all I could about the culture related to spiritual warfare.

On the night I gave up hope of personally saving India, I had a lovely walk on the roof. I needed

At first I walked just for the exercise. It was too dangerous to go for a jog. But as the initial excitement from being in a new place wore off, the loneliness I felt demanded time with Jesus. And the more time spent on different territory, the more time I needed to

to learn to savor the place first. As I looked out on the city the wind was blowing dirt onto my sticky arms. I didn't mind because it was the same wind that made the palm trees dance over me. A man was pulling his cart down the street, making a last attempt to sell his



*Blesson, Priyah, and Andrew (left) and Paul, Preethy, and Joshua (right)*

wares. The smell of curry from dinner mingled with the smell of incense from a shop owner chanting blessings over his business. The chants slowly gave way to the cadence of drums as the Hindus celebrated yet another holiday. It was then I realized how blatant the spiritual battle was in that place. The drums and chants were literally inviting demonic forces into the area.

Once I acknowledged that the things I was observing in the physical – the chants and drums – were actually spiritual (Ephesians 6:12), God began teaching me about His authority. I learned I no longer had to wake up afraid in the middle of the night, but that God’s peace was a shield, guarding me. I learned that when I prayed for the country, I could pray specifically. Instead of confusion, I prayed clarity. In place of poverty, I prayed the Indians would recognize their identity and inheritance in Christ.

This allowed me to know God a little better. And the better I got to know the individuals I encountered, the more glimpses of God’s character I saw through them. John Paul lives faithfully, fully aware of his background and the countless times God has been faithful to him. He wakes up early every morning to pray. Anna is a capable counterpart, her love of God’s creation displayed in beautiful gardens and in compassion for the children in their home.

Though Blesson and Priyah’s marriage was arranged traditionally, they are unbelievably compatible. Quiet and calm, Priyah glows with excitement in prayer (and when thinking about chocolate!). Blesson is also quiet and focused, except when teasing someone. Blesson and Priyah’s seven-month-old son, Andrew, is generally happy.

Preethy and Paul are full of passion and zeal. They talk loudly and laugh a lot. Their six-month-old-son, Joshua, has no problem being loud but takes life a little too seriously! Jonathan, the Paul’s youngest child, demonstrates

God’s creativity in wonderful artwork, displayed throughout their home.

Others showed me glimpses of God as well. Biju, a nine-year-old orphan at the Elida Children’s home, was discovered as a baby. He is very intelligent and works at his



*The boys work hard, but cheerfully, at their chores (left). Leslee enjoys spending time with friends from the English church (right).*



studies and chores with a most cheerful attitude. When questioned why he was sitting on the roof one day, he answered, “Oh, I’m just praying.”

The college students at the English church demonstrated characteristics of God every time I saw them, by praying for me, taking me out to see the city, and letting me into their lives. After meeting all of these beautiful people, it was hard to leave.

When I returned to the U.S., I didn’t know how I was ever going to be able to apply all I had learned. We don’t hear chanting and drums at night, or smell the incense, but we need to war nonetheless. We have to be more sensitive because the battles are more subtle, hidden in our loud culture, and we’ve grown accustomed to them.

The people in India are what made the country so wonderful. I miss them a lot. God did a very good job creating them. It felt normal to get to know them, normal to live life with them. They have a different culture – different customs,

foods, and lifestyles – but the people themselves are not really that different. They displayed God’s creativity, mercy, love, passion, and goodness – just like people in America – just like people in Australia, Uganda, Argentina, and Thailand. We have brothers and sisters around the world. We need to stick together.



*Leslee (shown with Joshua) loved her time with the babies.*

