

Travels with ID Larry and Lion Rachel Johnson

New Delhi, India: First International Board Meeting, September/October, 2007

New Delhi, a beautiful city among the fertile plains of northern India, is believed to be over 4,000 years old. In September and October, 2007, it served as the site of the International Board of Directors meeting, hosted by the Lions of India. ID Larry and Lion Rachel Johnson arrived near midnight on Tuesday, September 25, after a 27-hour trip from Parkersburg. They flew out of Columbus, through Chicago and London, on their way to New Delhi.

Their first day in New Delhi was their day to rest and recover from the trip, find their way around the hotel, and get used to the 9½-hour time difference. The day was capped with an informal dinner with the other Board members and spouses.

Thursday began business in earnest, as President Mahendra Amarasuriya met with the Board Committees. He requested that each prepare a listing of objectives and strategies to be used as a basis for their work this year. "I fully intended to hear President Mahendra Amarasuriya tell us what he wanted us to do," ID Larry remembers. "Instead he told us where he wanted to go, and it was up to us to tell him how to get there. A completely different process than what I expected."

The opening session of the Board meeting was held Thursday afternoon, following Committee meetings. The session was open to spouses and guests. It began with ceremonial dancing by Sri Lankan dancers. IP Amarasuriya and the mayor of New Delhi, along with their spouses, participated in lighting a special ceremonial lamp. President Amarasuriya made his opening speech. He and LCIP Chairman Jimmy Ross presented Progressive Melvin Jones Fellow pins to some of the Board members and other recipients.

Friday and Saturday consisted of committee meetings from 8 to 5 for ID Larry, who was appointed to serve on the Finance and Headquarters Operation Committee, perhaps because of his background in banking. ID Larry's meetings were more round-table discussions than Roberts Rules of Order. For two full days, they considered goals and objectives, reviewed financial reports, crunched numbers, considered new and old alternatives, and used their brains and experience exhaustively. They have to ensure that the financial play would provide for the President's program and the needs of the other committees, but maintain fiscal soundness. One concern of the Committee was delaying any dues increase for as long as possible.

During the two days that ID Larry was in meetings, Lion Rachel's days were also filled. Thursday morning the Spouses of the IDs (there are two male spouses this year) received their orientation for the activities of the week. The International President's spouse, Lion Kushlani Amarasuriya, was a most gracious hostess. The female spouses each selected a salwar kameez, a native costume of India, and received a necklace and earrings as personal gifts. The costumes were to be worn to a special dinner provided by the host committee later in the week.

On Friday, while the Board Committees met for a full day, the spouses traveled to the New Delhi Cottage Emporium, a local handicraft shopping mall. Saturday's tour was to the Akshardham Temple, one of the most recently built temples in Delhi. Constructed by the Bochasavvasi Aksharpurushottam Swarminarayan Sanstha (BAPS), it is situated on the banks of the River Yamuna.

Sunday, the Board of Directors met together to have informal hearings on the preliminary committee reports. Each committee presented its goals and objectives, a report on its work, and resolutions for approval at the final session. The hearings occupied most of the day; once they were completed, the committees convened to make final adjustments to their reports in preparation for the closing Board session.

While the Board met, Lion Rachel visited the Lions Blood Bank and the Gold Sauk Jewellery Hall, a mall for gold jewelry. She loved looking at the unique items, but kept her credit card in her purse.

Sunday evening, the IDs and their spouses were guests of honor at a Hugal evening sponsored by the Lions of India. The ladies wore the native costumes they had selected on Thursday. The men received turbans at the site of the dinner. Dinner and special entertainment were provided by the Lions of India, several of whom were present for the evening's festivities.

At the final business session on Monday, Somnath Chatterjee, the Speaker of the Indian Parliament's House of the People, greeted the Board members. The final reports of the Committees were approved quickly, as they had been well-discussed at the informal hearings. Following the adjournment of the business session, everyone loaded into three buses to travel about 120 miles to see the beautiful Taj Mahal. The trip took 4 hours, due to the typically heavy traffic that existed everywhere in India, but was well worth it.

On Tuesday, October 2, the buses loaded early for the return trip to Delhi. Some Directors began their return home later in the day. Others had accepted invitations from Past International President Ashok Mehta to visit Districts in India.

ID Larry accepted Past Presidents Mehta's invitation and early Wednesday morning, the couple departed to visit District 324-E3 in the state of Kerala, on the southwestern edge of the tip of India. Their hosts were to be MJF Lion Dr. George Mathew, DG, and his spouse, Lion Jessy. Travel involved flying from Delhi to Mumbai, then on to Kochi, where they were picked up and driven two hours by car to Kottayam. ID Larry learned that DG Mathew had ambitious goals, including 8 new clubs, 350 new members, and 75 new Melvin Jones Fellows, in addition to building a 100-bed eye hospital.

Wednesday evening ID Larry met with the PDGs of the District, which has 78 clubs and more than 2,400 members. He and Lion Rachel then attended a cabinet meeting held in honor of the ID's visit. On Thursday, they visited two projects. The first was to Changanacherry Lions Club's Home for the Disabled -- Training and Rehabilitation Centre. The program, housed in a two-story building which also serves as the club's meeting place, gives physically disabled persons jobs making school books, spinning yarn for the Indian Government, and other appropriate activities. The second project, sponsored by the Lions Club of Kottayam, provided treatment for mentally disabled persons, including a special program for autistic students.

On Thursday evening, ID Larry stood before a crowd of 500, and inducted about 175 new Lions, and inaugurated two new Lions Clubs. The induction ceremony featured a candle ceremony. As a special narration was read, ID Larry lit the Region Chairs' candles. They, in turn, lit their Zone Chairs' candles; each Zone Chair then lit the candles of the members of his/her zone. "It was quite an emotional experience!" said Lion Rachel.

On Friday, October 5, the local Lions took ID Larry and Lion Rachel on a boat ride, giving them a few hours to relax before the long trip home. On the return trip, they flew from

Kochi to Mumbai, from Mumbai to Kennedy Airport in New York, then back to Columbus. The Mumbai to New York leg was a single flight of 16 hours. Due to go, they spent about 4 hours in New York. When they arrived home about 5pm, Saturday, they were tired, but impressed and invigorated by what they and their fellow Directors and spouses had accomplished and experienced.