

“No, no, no—you have to create the shape of a flute,” reprimands Meena, my Bengali friend, as I try to configure my fingers in ways they just won’t go. She speaks in simple phrases, pausing at the end of each sentence to make sure that I, with my kindergarten-level Bangla, can catch what she means.

# ...with bells on

By JOY WALTER



I want to be someone in whom people can see the light of God, someone with whom people can feel comfortable, no matter who they are or where they’re from.

Meena walks over to the corner and presses pause on the rusted old tape player, and the pulsing rhythm of the Indian drums stops. I stoop down and adjust the belled anklets tied tightly around my ankles that make loud jingling sounds with even the smallest motion.

As I continue to fiddle with my fingers, trying to figure out how to make them appear as a flute, Meena sits down on the small thatch stool in the corner. Seeing that I’m quite ready for a break from the twisted fingers and throbbing ankles from doing aerobic steps on the cement floor, she asks if I’d like some hot *cha*, sweet milk tea. Relieved, I answer yes.

She runs to the kitchen, then returns—jingling the whole time—with two steaming cups of my favorite drink. As we sip our *cha*, the two of us discuss things like Bollywood [an India-based film industry] movies, ways to design our next henna tattoos and how last week’s choir practice went. After her umpteenth request, I tell her the children’s story I memorized in Mandarin class at school, and she laughs.

Soon, Meena’s up on her feet once more, demonstrating again how incredibly far I have to go to get this traditional dance right, and this is only one song. Nevertheless, I stand up and say in my broken Bangla, “So, which way do we blow into the flute again?” At this, a smile breaks across Meena’s face, and together we start to dance.

### Always Something New

That afternoon is just one example of the many opportunities I’ve had in my short life to interact with friends, classmates and even total strangers from different cultures. Living 9 of my almost 16 years overseas, I’ve made homes in Bangladesh and Malaysia and visited several other places: Thailand, Singapore and India.

Although I have relatives and loved ones all over America, I truly feel more at home in Asia. The busy streets; extreme tropical weather; intense surroundings; spicy—and sometimes strange—food; colorful, unique clothing and overall zest for life that is Asia fill me up every time I look around me. In Asia things are always new, always fresh, and people are always ready to open welcoming arms to anyone who may come their way. And that’s where the fun truly starts.

You may travel to other parts of the world for business or pleasure—to sign a contract or see the Taj Mahal—but whatever you’re doing, you can’t accomplish it and *not* be with people. There are people everywhere in Asia. From the poorest slum in downtown Dhaka, Bangladesh, to the tallest high-rise apartment in Singapore, people are making their homes and living their lives. Some will completely ignore you, just brush you off as another “dumb white tourist,” but others will open their homes and hearts, grab you by the arm and take you into their lives. All people have a place for new people to enter their lives; we just need to learn how to find it.

### Love Connections

As an MK (missionary kid), I’ve learned to be easily amused, especially by myself. This comes in handy during long hours of waiting for delayed flights, days when all the other MKs are on furlough and times when I feel like no one can take the time to be with me. But I can amuse myself for only so long. And that’s where the ability to get along with people of other cultures is needed.

You don’t need to be a great linguist or even a skilled communicator to relate through body language. Whether it be dancing, drawing pictures in the sand with dried twigs, sharing toys or even throwing mud clods at each other—all of which I have enjoyed—you can make connections with people.

When I was a young MK in Bangladesh, I used to enjoy learning games from the Bengali kids, inviting them to play in our sandbox and even amusing them by showing them their pictures on a digital camera. I learned, often through trial and error, what these kids enjoyed, how they liked to have fun and, most importantly, how to show them God’s love.

As my family would go through the villages in Bangladesh visiting ▶

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people, small children would often swarm us, poking and prodding us to see if we were actually white-skinned or just painted that pale color. It could become extremely annoying, but I learned that snapping at the kids with insults or harsh words would only hurt them, not make them stop. Sure, they were different from me and were dirty and grubby, rude and aggravating, but they were also God's children. They needed to know that they could be loved and cared for by a Heavenly Father. And it was up to me to show them that.

### **Always Watching**

Even now as I attend an international school in Penang, Malaysia, I use some of the same skills I learned as a child. As I place my empty cafeteria tray onto the stack of dirty dishes, I make sure to give a nod and a shout of thanks to the national staff who work to prepare lunch for us every day. When I'm out eating or shopping at the mall, I make sure to behave and act politely, no matter how hard it is to explain to the waiter that vanilla and banana aren't the same thing.

I do these things because no matter how aggravating it may seem at times, I know that people of other cultures are watching me not only for entertainment, but also because they look for something different. They want to see whether there really is something greater out there, whether they might be missing out on a life that could be theirs.

God tells us that it is up to us to show the world His light, to shine for Him in our daily lives, to be Jesus to the people of the world. I want to be someone in whom people can see the light of God, someone with whom people can feel comfortable, no matter who they are or where they're from. I know that God will help me with the rest, but I have to take that first jingling step. @



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