



Teaching in India: The Volunteer Experience

To the outsider, India is a colourful, chaotic place. But in the Ganesh-adorned homes of those that came to know us, along the streets dotted with grazing buffalo, and on the playground of over a hundred enthusiastic students learning new songs to sing – India means more, and now means so much to me. In July this year, I participated in a three week Teacher Tour in rural Maharashtra through *Tara.Ed*, a not-for-profit organization founded by Macquarie alumni Jennifer Star (nee Purcell) in 2007.

Living in a rural Indian village reminded me of what's important: the people you share the experience with, from the kind man downstairs who delivered our drinking water each time we ran out (his name was Ashok, and he made delicious samosas) to the elderly woman that helped us cross a busy street in a nearby town by guiding us through the traffic. Eating with your hand (no plural intended) became a luxury for the Westerners normally constrained by cutlery, and the "chai ladies" gave new meaning to morning/afternoon tea.

The children we taught were a pleasure, even when we were met with challenges such as language barriers and time constraints in the classroom, but we all tried to pour as much energy into teaching as we could. I can speak for everyone when I say that I wish we could have had an extra week, to do more, to see more, to learn more. After three weeks, we'd already invested so much of ourselves into the school. It was hard saying goodbye. I hope that I was able to show the teachers – and students – a new way of learning within the lessons I prepared, one that gave the learner a voice and put questions above answers.

I know the kids (and the rest of the girls) often saw me as "that Drama teacher who liked to play games" but I think that's one of the best ways to learn, to *play*: to explore, and ex-

periment, and learn by *doing* and not just seeing... because that's what happened when we all ventured out into the village and its surrounds, we didn't just see. We mastered the squat toilet and one-handed chapatti tear (that took some practice)! We walked to school in our sarees and built beautiful friendships along the way. It's been a few days since returning home and I'm

still singing "Oh, India... oh my India, I love you, oh my India."

For more information on future tours, search for "Tara.Ed" on Facebook and receive updates on all events, or visit www.taraed.org.

by Stephanie Merriman



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