

# On to Lucknow

The reason I headed north rather than south with the others is complex. I longed to go to Darjeeling to see Mount Everest and the tea plantations. But the more compelling reason was to visit Jim and Charlotte Stringham. God has a marvelous sense of humor. I was in India to immerse myself in Eastern religions, convinced that I would discover the truth through this path. The Stringhams were Christians, and not of the casual variety. Both graduates of Yale, they moved to China in 1933 as Presbyterian missionaries, where they served until 1944. When forced to evacuate China, the Stringhams and their four children returned to Canandaigua, NY, my home town.

Dr. Stringham worked as a psychiatrist at the large VA hospital in town and with his family attended the church where my parents and I worshipped. Later, when Dr. Stringham opened his own practice in town, he was our family physician. Health issues prevented them from returning to the mission field. After their health issues were resolved, in 1961 they were approved to return to mission work, this time to Lucknow in north central India. I would have had contact with them again in 1966 when they were in the US on furlough.



By this time in my travels, I was hungry to see a home town face. I took the overnight train from New Delhi to Lucknow. Almost all the long haul trains in India at that time were still powered by steam engines. I traveled in a III<sup>rd</sup> class reserved sleeper. Reserved meant that only passengers with reservations were permitted in the carriage—theoretically. Wooden boards folded down for sleeping at night—eight per compartment. My air mattress and sleeping bag gave me a fairly comfortable night's sleep. It amuses me that a modern-day description of the rigors of travel on the lowest class of Indian Railway sleeper car (SL) sounds exactly like what I experienced 50 years ago! During waking hours, I enjoyed

conversations with the other occupants of my carriage.

Once my train arrived in Lucknow, I managed to find the Nur Manzil Psychiatric Centre, of which Dr. Stringham was the director. The hospital was founded in 1950 by E. Stanley Jones, an American missionary who gave himself heart and soul to the people of India. He also started a Christian Ashram movement, spiritual retreat centers in which he tried to incorporate as many elements of the rich Indian culture as did not conflict with the Christian faith. I met the Stringhams coming out of chapel, and both were quite surprised to see me. I stayed nearly a week with them, luxuriating in their hospitality. I had a small room with bed and table all to myself (except for a friendly lizard). I toured the clinic, which had a pleasant atmosphere and genial staff.



A few memories come back to me from my time with Jim and Charlotte. They were a deeply devout couple. No matter how early I rose in the mornings, I could hear them praying in their bedroom. I often walked with them through the streets of Lucknow in the morning. They carried a loaf of bread with them on our walks to give to beggars. Apparently, unscrupulous men deliberately maimed children, sent them out to beg and then demanded all that they collected at the end of the day. By giving food, they were able to help without supporting the cruel begging racket.

Jim and Charlotte had an older Muslim man who cooked both Western and Indian dishes. Jim was a marvel of efficiency in the mornings. He had it timed so that toast popped out of the toaster at the moment the egg was ready to place on top. I ate everything set before me. The Stringhams carved out time from their busy schedules to spend with me. We had many helpful discussions about the Christian faith. They loaned me a book to read while on the road—*The God Who is There* by Dr. Francis Schaeffer, an American who founded a Christian community in the Swiss Alps. This book was going to prove pivotal in my life.

I reluctantly left the Stringhams. The Magical Mystery Tour was heading on to Darjeeling in the foothills of the Himalayas.