

February 2016



Sunrise from Coaker's Walk

Class of '66

50th Anniversary in Kodai

By Charlie Franklin



Kris, Lyn, Teri, Joe, Maureen, Bibbi, Jennifer, Lynette, Charlie, Anne

By ones or twos we launched our long-awaited voyage, drawn by the power of our experiences together at Kodai School, to reach the magical place that had sent us out 50 years ago. Those with more time made their way at a leisurely pace, and those still tied to jobs and schedules, more expeditiously. As paths converged, we joined up with each other to complete the journey in groups and clumps.

Some of us had not been to Kodai in 50 years. Terri Oliver-Crabbe and Anne Ferguson Mowell met at JFK and continued on together. Charlie Franklin and Bob Coleman met at the airport in Chennai, where they paused to decompress for a day before meeting Terri and Anne at Egmore Station for the evocative train



Jennifer, Joe, Maureen, Charlie, Bob, Teri

ride to Madurai. Jennifer Grant Busam and friend Jay took the western route through Asia. Lynette Shaw and Malcolm came south from Agra and Delhi. Kris and Wendy Riber came east from Harare where they had been visiting kids and grandkids. Maureen Aung Thwin took advantage of a business trip to Myanmar, and flew into Madurai. Joe and Marty Rittmann seem to pop up anywhere they want. Lyn and Naomi Krause landed in Bangalore after their route through Asia. Roger Thompson and Carole arrived a few days after the rest of us from the Maldives.

We were not ready for the chaos that India has become. Chennai traffic had never been orderly, with bullock carts, bicycles and rickshaws competing for the left shoulder of the road. But motor traffic back then was nowhere near as heavy as it is now. Bullock carts, bicycles and bicycle rickshaws are mostly gone, but replaced by motor rickshaws, scooters, motor cycles and millions of cars competing fiercely for every inch of roadway.

Some things were close to the same: standing in the doorway of the Vaigai Express as it hurtled through paddy fields and villages; veg meals at train stations; masala dosai; stopping before climbing the ghat to consume green coconuts at a roadside stall; honking at every curve of the ghat; ladies in saris with water jugs on their heads; views of Rat Tail Falls.



As we neared Kodai though, and got close up to some of our dearest landmarks, time and change has asserted themselves. Silver Cascade is littered with trash and surrounded by garish souvenir and refreshment stalls. Tour buses and taxis compete for parking everywhere. Ditto for Pillar Rocks and Dolphin's Nose. Brick and concrete buildings festoon the hillsides where once there were only green sholas. There is trash everywhere we look.

Hidden among the litter, though, we found remnants of the Kodai we knew. Villa Retreat at the beginning of Coaker's Walk, and Prospect House at the end of it are examples. Kodai School remains shielded and constant behind its walls, though there have been updates and improvements. The Kodai Club, formerly the English Club, and the dining room at the Carlton remain unchanged. The lake is now fenced off with wrought iron, but still looks the same. The walk around it in the early morning is still a treat. A few of us were grateful to Bruce Peck who guided us down to the top of Pambar (Snake) Falls, to experience Kodai the way we once did. There are more hidden treasures for us to find on our next trip.



Villa Retreat



Joe and Saleem

The logistics of our reunion tour were intricate and complicated, and were all arranged and orchestrated by Joe and Mr. Saleem at Tips and Trips, Kodaikanal. We spent five days and nights in Kodai. Joe kept us moving constantly to be able to take in all the experiences we hungered for. Even so, members of our group were able to find enough free time to go shopping, take hikes, walk around the lake, and more. Unfortunately, Perumal was closed due to "animal activity" and we were not able to climb it.



Our first event was dinner at the Golf Course, generously hosted by Lyn and Naomi. We started with a walk up to Suicide Point (now a tourist attraction called Green View Point), and discovered that wherever tourists flock, so do troops of monkeys. The walk was followed by lavish libations and a dinner of Biryani and other Indian dishes.

The following day, after breakfast on our own, we visited Kodai School. We were met at the KMU by Yvonne Dovlo, KIS Alumni coordinator, who greeted and welcomed us. Then we bussed over to Ganga Campus to tour the new K thru 8 classrooms and facilities, which capture many of the qualities that made Kodai so special to us, while interweaving International Baccalaureate



The Magnificent Eleven



curriculum. This was followed by a tour of the main campus. In many ways, it is familiar: The Flag Green, the church, Kennedy Hall, the Quad, the gate to Seven Corners, Mrs. Aung Thwin's cottage, the stairs down to Wissy (now a girls dorm), and so on. There have been many improvements and expansions that keep the character of the Kodai we knew.



Lunch with Liliana Gomez

Following the school tour, we were hosted for lunch by the Vice Principal, Liliana Gomez Murillo and her husband, Gustavo Gomez. She seemed delighted to find out that Charlie and Jennifer spoke Spanish, and that Charlie was familiar with her native country of Colombia, and had attended

the same university there that she had. They had a spirited conversation in Spanish for much of the meal. Following that, she graciously thanked the Class of '66 for its contributions to the solar power project at Poondi, and for donating accessories for band instruments that had been needed.

Just these events would have made our trip a success, but over the next 4 days, many more awaited us:

- Dinner at Bruce and Ann Peck's house at Prospect with a bonfire overlooking the plains.
- Lunch at Villa Retreat hosted by Maureen.
- Dinner at Bob Granner's home in Palangi, with a tour of the ceramics shop, and a bonfire with Dr. Kolhatker's 60s sing-along.
- A demonstration of the new church organ for the class by Bob Granner.
- Shopping in the budge during market day.
- Lunch at the Kodai Club sponsored by Maureen and Charlie.
- High tea at Clarence and Shashi Maloney's home on Bear Shola Road with the Kodai alumni chapter, that included an extended tour of a rainwater reclamation system.
- An excursion to Berijam Lake with a school-packed biriyani lunch, and a drive by Pillar Rocks.
- Dinner at George Penner and Vera de Jong's off Upper Lake Road, including a tour of George's bakery and Vera's studio.



Greetings from Palangi



Lynette, Teri, Shashi

This was the end of our Kodai sojourn. Principal Corey Stixrud wished us well after his return from a trip to the Mumbai alumni chapter. Maureen headed off to Yangon. Roger and friend left us to go to Coimbatore and on to Rajasthan.

The rest of us headed down the ghat to Dindigul, the start of our "culinary tour" (meaning an excuse to eat as much Indian food as possible) where we had biriyani lunch at the original Thalakkapatti Restaurant. We continued on to Karaikudi that afternoon to the posh Bangala Hotel, where we toured Chettinad homes and antiques, and sampled a 5 course Chettinad meal. The next day we drove to Madurai, where we toured the Meenakshi Temple and had dinner at the rooftop restaurant of the Supreme Hotel. Bruce and Ann drove down from Kodai with Basil Manns Class of 63 and joined us. Kris, Wendy, Lyn, Naomi, Terri, Lynette and Malcom, left us the following day, leaving some to extend the road trip through the Cauvery Delta and up the Coromandel Coast.



Ready for a Road Trip!

Joe, Marty, Bob, Charlie, Ann, Jennifer and Jay continued on to the Tanjore Chola Dynasty Big Temple, Pondicherry, and Mamalapuram with the Shore Temple, Arjun's Penance friezes, and the Crocodile Farm and snake serum cottage industry. We stayed at the Ideal Beach Resort before ending our trip at the Chennai airport.

Our appetites sated, our memories filed, our hearts filled, we rejoin the lives we interrupted to make this pilgrimage. We have affirmed the bonds that we have to Kodai and to each other. The Kodai of today is different, but the Kodai that matters, the Kodai in our souls, lives on.



Thank you, Joe!!!