

My first visit to RIMYI came somewhat late - 2 years after passing JI3. We have 4 children - the youngest is now 10 - and finding a way to be away for a month was not easy. I spent many years assuming that I would need to leave them for the month and both emotionally and logistically this did not seem possible. The time came however when I could not wait any longer. A couple of conversations - "just take them with you - we always did" - opened up a new idea and when I mentioned it to my husband Nick he leapt at the prospect of some time in India, even embracing the idea of staying in a busy and polluted city (good food always being an attraction!). We have both travelled extensively in India - this was our 9th visit - and took the children four years ago for a holiday travelling around south India and visiting old friends, so the terrain was more than familiar and we were itching to get back! I may not have felt so confident taking children had India not already felt familiar to me.

Our children all attend a Steiner Waldorf School and when I discovered that there was a fledgling Steiner school in Pune a plan started to fall into place as to how we make it work to take our 14 and 10 year old there for the middle two weeks of my month in Pune. Our oldest is at university and our 17 year old chose to stay at home with my Mum and the dogs - I was grateful to all of them for looking after each other while we were away!

Nick and the girls, Flora and Nancy, arrived on the Saturday - we stayed in an apartment right opposite RIMYI and I had already settled in for 10 days or so. Before they arrived I visited the Swadhaa Waldorf School, a 15 minute Uber drive away in Pashan, was shown around the school and met Vimeeka, the teacher of



Class 4 (Nancy's equivalent class). So on the Monday morning after they arrived, I went off to Prashant's class and Nick and Flora took Nancy off to school. I was amazed at her courage - she was welcomed warmly by the 9 children in the class and by Vimeeka, enjoyed doing fractions with her Indian classmates and sat listening while they had some of their lessons in Hindi (History) and Marathi (Geography). The Hindi teacher took her aside for a couple of minutes to teach her a couple of useful phrases and this inspired her to learn the alphabet and some Hindi in the afternoons back at the apartment. At the end of her 6 days there she gave and received cards to all her classmates and will keep in touch. The school does not yet go beyond the age of 12 so Flora, 14, was very happy to spend the mornings with Nick playing tennis at the Deccan Gymkhana. At 12 we picked up Nancy and went out for lunch and maybe a bit of shopping before returning for a rest and in good time for me to observe



evening classes each day. (Once a week I got up to watch Raya's 5.45am class to return for breakfast with Nick and the girls!) Nick even managed to set up an office in the apartment and work every afternoon for the second week. A couple of times a week we swam at the Marriott and used the spa which was a great novelty for the girls. We enjoyed Laxmi Road (where I realised that I no longer have a teenager's stamina when it comes to shopping!), visited the Aga Khan's palace and some temples. And for the middle weekend of their visit we drove to Matheran, a hill station on the way to Mumbai, where we rode horses and enjoyed staying in a completely car-free environment surrounded by hills, jungle and monkeys. I was ready for a break from the city by this stage so even though I missed class on Saturday I came back very refreshed. Back in Pune my husband couldn't get enough of the dosas and chaat at Vaishali's. Flora loved the food - Nancy struggled a little with spice but found enough things that she could enjoy. In the evenings a local lady, Rucha, brought us dinner in Tiffin carriers. She made the dal very mild so that at the very least Nancy ate a good plate of rice and dal each time - in fact she ate it with great joy and it was good to see her appreciating local cooking.



I have had comments that taking children with you to Pune must mean you cannot be completely focussed on your yoga - that it must be very hard to immerse yourself in your yoga with your family around. All I can say to this is that when Nick and the girls arrived I completely relaxed back into my "normality" and enjoyed the yoga all the more for it. (I also went to sleep much earlier for not having to phone home late in the evenings!) Having a timetable with family time scheduled for a few hours in the afternoon made me make the most of my yoga time. More than that, being in Pune and staying opposite RIMYI made me understand how family and yoga do not have to be two separate things. Looking out of the window after the practice session I saw Guruji's great grandchildren surrounded by their mothers, great aunts, grandmothers and great Uncle Prashant. The little girls' voices often echoed up to us while in class. This family supports its family members in their pursuit of yoga which exists at the core of their family life. I found this both reassuring and inspiring. India is a good reminder that family is everything - children are openly adored, aging parents are cherished and respected and life goes on with this at the centre. I learned many things, not least to relax about how to combine yoga into family life and time. A wise and wonderful Iyengar teacher told me last year to take the family to Pune - to take them on the yoga journey with me so that they realise that yoga is for all of us, not just something Mum does. He couldn't have been more right - we all got to see how yoga is part of the daily and weekly lives of hundreds of people in Pune, old, young, large, small, strong, not so strong, and that it is fine just to go along and do. Since our time there Nick and the two girls have been coming regularly to my classes, not because they know it pleases me (it does!) but because they can feel the benefit of the yoga - and perhaps because they have seen how much part of life it is for those lucky people in Pune who attend as locals. This makes me the happiest of all and long may it continue!

