

December 9, 2014

This is Erin Dunn of the Fortuna Chamber of Commerce with a Community Comment.

I just returned from two weeks in India last week and I was reminded once again of how lucky we are to live in the United States and more specifically the North Coast of California.

I was in India as part of a volunteer group of doctors, nurses and non-medical staff who were there to help repair cleft lips and palates on behalf of the non-profit Rotaplast organization.

There are the obvious things to appreciate here—mostly our clean air. Stepping out of the car Monday morning in Fortuna, I was so grateful for our heavenly smelling air. That morning there was just a hint of wood burning in a neighboring stove and that just added to my smile.

In India, there is lots of garbage, lots of clogged traffic and people burning cow dung for heat on the side of the roads. This acrid trifecta creates a visible soup in the air that not only smells bad but is horribly unhealthy. I struggled with my asthma and came back with something that reminds me of a smoker's cough—a cough not caused by a cold, but by gunk I inhaled.

Do you know how great our roads are? Especially our highway between Garberville and Fortuna. How lucky are we? Roads in India are not only poor in infrastructure, they are clogged and noisy. Lots of honking going on and near-miss collisions that seemed to happen every few feet. The honking isn't a symbol of hostility like it is in the US, it's more like a conversation and helps the dance of traffic move forward.

Garbage on the side of road in India is a constant—it seems to just be part of the landscape. People on the trip who had been to the same location last year though, commented that the garbage situation had

improved – due to the efforts of the current Prime Minister Modi who has a “Clean India” campaign in the works. There were no cans on sidewalks for incidental garbage and there appeared to be no second thoughts about tossing wrappers, cigarettes, or whatever you might have, on the street. I smiled when I saw the many “\$1000 fine for littering” signs on the road to Ft. Bragg Sunday.

I was surprised by the number of stray dogs that live there. The dogs are not aggressive and don’t insist on food from passersby, they are docile and curl up wherever they can find a good spot. People walking on the sidewalks simply sidestep them.

Some things, though, were much the same as home. The hospital where I was volunteering had the same dedicated health care workers as we have. In spite of all the differences between how our two countries run hospitals – we certainly have many more regulations and better equipment – the doctors, nurses and staff provided top notch care and service.

I want to take this moment and thank all of you who have devoted your lives to the care of others. You face long hours, sometimes tough conditions and you don’t stop. Thank you so much.

This has been Erin Dunn with a Community Comment.