

Feb 4-5 New Zealand to Jowai via Sydney, Bangkok, Delhi, Guwahati, Laban. Jowai, Padu. Many conveyances, from 777-300 airplanes seating 800, to 'cars' (taxis with a set route) seating 6 in space for four. We slept on the planes, in a Bangkok airport lobby, in Laban (suburb of Shillong, you can find on a map) in a B&B, and in Jowai at the Unitarian Union of North East India VIP guestroom.

*Bhutan from the air,  
Delhi to Guwahati.*



*Gail liked the colors in the streets, here in Laban, part of Shillong.*



In Jowai, helping us get our phone to work, Rev. Helpme Morhman brought us to these two young men. Later we shared in a family birthday celebration with him at a nearby restaurant, culminating with a bit of earthquake and a walk home in a blackout to hear the choir rehearse in the dark.

The 600 member Unitarian Church in Jowai, next door to The UUNEI headquarters. One plaque reads “Love is the Gospel of this church, the quest for truth its sacrament, and service is it's prayer....”



The Padu church, near the border with Bangladesh, celebrating 100 years with this new building and hosting the UUNEI annual conference – I'm sitting here now during plenary, conducted in

Kyndrian, the Vox Romana of the Kashi Hills (related to a tribal language in Cambodia).

Gail brings greetings from the Nashville church, fulfilling a 25 year dream to visit the Kashi Hills Unitarians. Her brief message was ably rendered in Kyndrian by UUNEI Director, H. Helpme Mohrmen. 'To Nangroi' means 'forever progress', and is the motto of Hajam Kissor Singh, founder of Unitarianism in NE India, 1887, and the association of churches that grew from his efforts.



Sunday Jan 6 was a big day in Padu, Meghalaya, India : the culmination of the Unitarian Union of North East India annual conference and the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Padu Unitarian Church. There were four sequential church services, all with separate hymns, sermons and prayers with breaks in between for camaraderie and food. The Jowai Choir, whom we heard rehearsing by



candlelight during the blackout after the earthquake. Can you tell Gail told a rip-roaring tale for her sermon? Helpme lived up to his name with enthusiasm. She preached one of two at the second service. Our new friend Rev. Eva Cameron from Cedar Falls IA had been in Khasi Hills for six months ten years before, and gave a sermon full of knowledge of and love for the gathered churches at the third service. She and Gail will pool their resources to build the relation between UU's and Khasi Hills Unitarians, especially at G.A. this June. We understood hardly a word of Pearl Green Marbaniang's sermon, but we could see that the crowd was with him for every word. Pearl was the main planner of our visit here, for which we are increasingly grateful as we are met everywhere with gracious hospitality.



Cream, Arnold, and Dr. Donkuper , siblings who are shakers and movers in the Unitarian movement.

Cream is and old friend of Gail's mentor Rev. Doris Hunter and the champion of education. Arnold works for the state of Meghalaya managing public health projects, and Dr. Donkuper is a G.P. Physician.



We thought one more service in a language we don't understand would not be unfortunate to miss, so at dusk we strolled to the sacred grove, an area untouched by the traditional religion of the area as sacred to the goddess. The Christians have made incursions, much to the

disgust of the Unitarians. Walking back, a young man asked us if we would like to see Padu from this hill. We walked up stairs to see a beautiful spread of houses below us, all connected by paths and stairs. Too dark for a photo, this one earlier.



We stayed a second night in a guesthouse in Padu village's town, Amlarem, then drove on to Nongtalang overlooking Bangladesh. The blue is not sky, but the valley floor beyond the border river, in morning mist. We settled in with a branch of the Lyngdoh family. Rev. Biron Lyngdoh Talang, who works with the UUNEI setting up micro loan co-ops (SHG's – Self Help Groups), showed us around. Children



gathered by the water treatment plant for photo thrill. Then we toured towns along the Bangladesh border, including Dawki and Sohka.

Here at Umsyiem (King's bathing place) we got a fantastic view of the Bangladesh cement works that operates only in winter at low water



in an oxbow of the border river. In Sohka, we paid our respects to the family of Pliebok Lyngdoh (uncle of Biron and Enial) the minister and founder of the Sohka Unitarian Church who had died the previous week. Biron takes Gail's picture at the church.



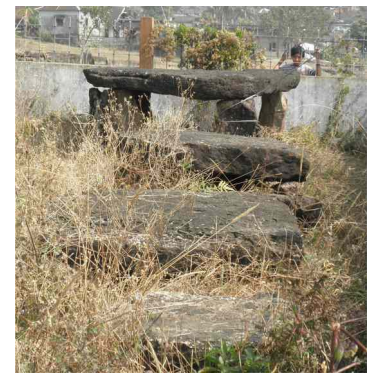
In Dawki, we visited the first Hindu temple in Meghalaya, dating to before the Raj.

Back in Nongtalang, we saw the ancient stone meeting grounds, huge stones set by a single chief. Right next to it is the community college, where Biron had planted thriving aloes when it was a middle school and he a student.



Enial Lyngdoh, minister of the Nongtalang church, has joined us as we return, here showing us his wife's store.

The Nongtalang Unitarian School, K-8. Like a lot of Indian buildings we have seen, it seems to be perpetually under construction.



The church – most have the motto 'Wei Blei', 'One God', as well as the 'To Nongroi' Note the nice little bell tower to the left.

Gail taught an impromptu workshop on leadership development, put



together by Enial as Biron escorted us around the area. It was attended by a substantial part of the congregation, and nearly all of the

youth, who demonstrated a true thirst for leadership training – Gail told Enial, 'this is your gold'. Biron translated for those whose English wasn't as good, and really acted as co-facilitator.

We returned north to Jowai, then on the eighth left with the office manager and hostess of the UUNEI, Leiki Suchiang, to her hometown, Mukhap, to the east near the Assam border. She makes the trip back and forth several times a month and regrets that the road is so curvy. After Snangpung we are off the map, and the views from the road are more frequently beautiful.



We arrive in Mukhap in the evening. The conversation around the kitchen fire after dinner is peppered with cell phone chatter as Leiki and her sisters announce our early arrival. Leiki and her mother cook breakfast as we prepare to visit members of the church in their homes. We hear



more about the SHG movement, subject of a training in Bangalore the previous year for several Khasi Unitarians. Here we purchase a child's sweater set from the church's secretary, treasurer of the first Mukhap Self Help Group, a microloan savings association. Later, as people return early from their work and chores, an impromptu service is held, hearing stories from Gail and our new friend



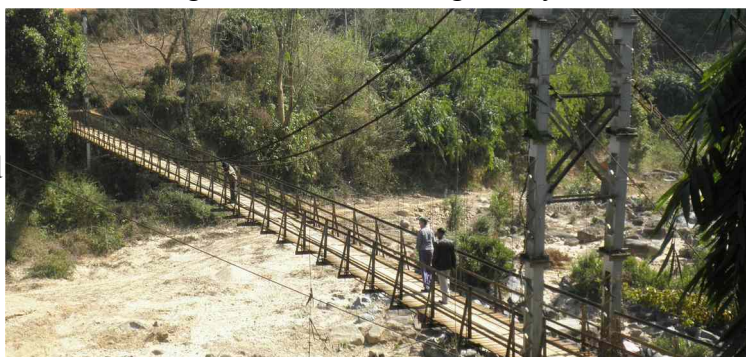
Rev. Lindy from Bristol, England.

Mukhap is one of the bigger towns in the area, and the Unitarian movement is thriving, helped by the Upper Valley UU Church in Norwich VT. The stunning new church, built entirely by volunteer labor, nears completion.



We are grateful guests one more night with the Suchaing family, where Leiki's eighty-two year old grandmother has taken quite a shine to Jim.

On the 11<sup>th</sup>, we head out for Assam on a long dirt road journey, crossing on a foot bridge while the Land Cruiser



fords the river. During rainy season, the trip would be even longer (but on bigger roads) because the river is too high.

On the 11<sup>th</sup>, having passed over the Myntang River between Sahnsiang, Meghalaya and Kuriliya, Assam we travel over rough roads to Jirikindeng, a small village with a Catholic church and a hospital, and yes, a Unitarian church. The building is new, dedicated a year ago, and the new dorms (hostel) are nearly complete. Unitarian students from the outlying villages of Rongkimjalin and Umkhirmi will stay there to attend either the Catholic or the state school – a first step to a Unitarian school.



Gail needed to rest and was tended by Glorice Milikpi, daughter of our host for lunch and a generous donor to the church, Mr. Basatimung.

Glorice with her husband, Sakat . Singh.



All of the Khasi people are matrilinear. He is from Meghalaya, where they met in college. We moved on to the Rongkimjalin church – as promised, everyone in the village is Unitarian – I did a little jig! The village was founded in 1979 by the gentleman on the right, from members of the



Umkhirmi Unitarian Church – as the success of the farming increased the population, the village grew, along with the church. This building was in the most need of upgrade and expansion of any we've



seen yet. One of the crops that better roads (!) have made possible, fresh delivery being paramount.

Gail consults with a church leader during an open meeting. Our friend Lyridium Mukhim from Mukhap translates, assisted by a local man (in the cap), as the Assam Khasi are a distinct tribe with a different dialect.



(See what a brave lad Sakat is?)

After dark, we continued to Umkhirmi, where we had dinner (with the best pineapple ever for dessert) and spent the night, hostel style.



After breakfast, which this proud new father helped his wife cook by doing the baby care, we visited the Umkhirmi church, where the village was called to



the meeting by solar powered PA. Gail addresses the meeting, bringing greetings from the U.S. which is as fine a geographical reference as most people comprehend (younger folks sometimes get 'Nashville', but more as a reference on the radio dial than a place). The congregants assemble outside as we make our way to the school.



Umkhirmi has the first Unitarian fish farm we've seen. The pond is made by damming a small stream, seeding with fingerlings from a hatchery, then draining the pond the next year to harvest the fish. 60 % of the fish are used by the villages, and 40% go to market.



We then head back to Jowai, taking a shortcut that brought us this sticky spot in the road. We all piled out and gathered sticks, the driver jacked up the back, and we shoved them under the wheel.

Sunday, Feb 13, Gail prepares to visit the Sunday School in the morning, and preach at the afternoon service. We have breakfast with the Unitarian School caretaker, Leiki's 'second mother'. She's here with two of her 'nieces'. The younger was learning a new hymn in Khasi. As we listened, the tune seemed vaguely familiar, and we realized it was Peter Mayer's "Blue Boat Home". The girl ran in, and got the English and Khasi text, and soon we were all singing together. We are truly well cared for by everyone we meet.



Sunday 13, am, Gail visits church school in Jowai. Helpme moderates a more than animated discussion about where to go and logistics for a field high-school level trip: they will visit the living bridge, a long hike to a gorge crossed by trained tree roots, very ancient. Rev Laloo, 3<sup>rd</sup> right and Rev. Gail, 2<sup>nd</sup> left, carefully dressed by Leiki in a sari (and sweater), meet before the service



with some church leaders.

Once again, Rev. Helpme Morhmen translates.



The Jowai church is the 'Mother Church' of NEI Unitarianism, founded in 1887 by H.K.Singh.



Dinner Sunday night with Homeland Lamar and his family. Rev. Lindy Latham (left), who had preached that day in Padu, was with us, and has become a good friend. Marshall Lamar, 1<sup>st</sup> on the left above, Homeland's brother, would have joined us but was called to the deathbed of a close friend. Homeland is a civil engineer and designed his elegant home, and the impressive church in Muchap.



Monday was exceptionally busy with a morning visit to the oldest Hindu temple in Meghalaya which still boasts the stone from which human heads dropped, the site of even more ancient monoliths, and a school opening in a village with only one, very influential, Unitarian family. Durga temple – I did not take photos from inside as prayer was in session – the sacrifice stone, now used for



goats, is to the right of the man in white. The Nartaing Monoliths, 5,000 years old, kept my finger clicking for 53 times. The Ksehrychang school, set on a knoll below the village, had the most stunning location. The work progressed on the building even as children lined up



for their first day after winter break. Back to Jowai by something like 1:30, we joined the funeral for a Unitarian member who had



been failing for a year. We were honored to sit with the family - the husband and three children, ages 7-18. The 18 year old boy was to sit for a state I.T. exam the next day. Gail had visited the day before, and he had been deep in grief. Today, he cuddled his young nephew and cracked a couple of jokes in excellent English. Revs. Laloo and H.H. Mohrmen spoke as well as several relatives. We have been to so many



services that we can sing along with the hymns pretty good (Khasi is phonetically recorded, the script having been lost to all but a few scholars) The entire gathering, with Unitarians from as far as Guwahati, walked down hill with the pall bearers to the



Unitarian cemetery. The brief graveside ceremony brought home to us how well this community of Unitarians support one another.



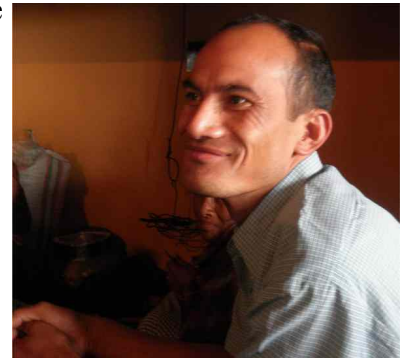
Tuesday am (15<sup>th</sup>) Gail visited Jowai Unitarian schools, then we left for the village of Kut. There we saw the church, the school, potato patches and the ruggedest landscape we've yet seen. The school's greatest current need was fencing to prevent vandalism – small size limits enrollment so not all the children are able to attend. The



Indian constitution mandates education for all, but there is a terrible lag.

Schools like this are started by the church and staffing needs are partially met by the state. We then traveled part way back to Puriang, where we met Ditol Mylliem, had dinner and a

worship service at his house where we stayed overnight, and a good thing as the service ran till after eleven. It was very intimate with many people (children in the adjoining room), and the women took a strong



roll in the Q and A, engaging in a lively

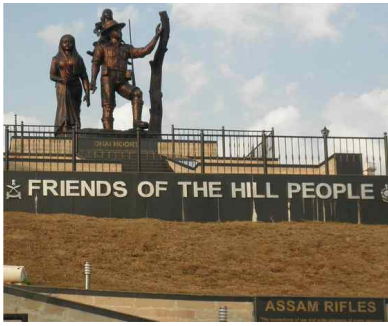
conversation about church life. We increased our appreciation for Ditol and Helpme, their minister (and predecessor and mentor to Ditol at the school), as we realized this group of women were feeling empowered. Ditol, principal of the school and several of

his teachers must have been a bit drowsy the next day, but we didn't notice when we visited. The discipline of learning starts with lining up by class, and singing a morning prayer.



The tenth form (grade) meets in the computer room, which serves the district, the school having won the right to house it by being the highest scoring in the state tests.





We arrived in Nongkrem after schools had closed (17th), so we made (we think) an impromptu visit to the nearby army base, home of the Assam Rifles. The Hill People are the Khasi, the fear is Bangladesh. The troops are mostly Hindi from 'mainland' India, so I think this serves as a reminder to all that the mission is peace. Many civilians are employed on base, and much construction has been underway for a decade, and the economic boost shows in Nongkrem.

Gail and Lindy address the regular Wednesday night service briefly – Arnold Nongbrie does the translation honors in his home church.

We stay across the street in Riana Nongbrie's house. Her grandfather founded the church. Some of the Nongbrie siblings



reunite: Cream (looking uncharacteristically stern); Riana; Lindy's host (not a sib); Arnold, and Dr. Donkuper, town physician from Smit.

Next morning, Gail and Lindy visit schools and I climb the hill behind the church. The rocks and the view are spectacular and remind me of home (Cape Ann).



The arrow points to the church.

I must have overdone it, because my turn for an afternoon in bed came, after we drove on (in a cab) to nearby Smit. As I rested, I was lured out to take a picture of Raymond Khrian and Rev. Franklin as they discussed Self Help Groups with Lindy and Gail.



We stayed here with Raymond's mother, Drimai, and had a rousing discussion with her daughter Barisuk, a lawyer and political activist.





Then we all went to the Smit church, where Gail and Lindy once again brought greetings from England and America – any finer geographic location is lost on most children and many adults. Smit is a smallish church, closely associated with Nongkrem, but has the distinction of having 100% female leadership – yes that's Barisuk as moderator in front.



We met her sister Rev. Darihun only briefly at the family home because she is off duty for maternity leave.

We stop at the Kharang church this Friday 18<sup>th</sup>, where Gail will preach Sunday. We visit the school, meet women of the church and, at tea, our hosts through the weekend, Rev. Nangroi, and Thwissila Khasbithae, a young mother who is the administrator of the Annie Margaret (Barr) Children's Village, our home for the next three days (blessed with a western style toilet).



Two of the church women leaders take us to yet another new school being built in an insanely beautiful spot, near the local health center, where on the walk people pass some undocumented (or at least unmarked) ancient monoliths.

At AMCV, Rilum and Thwissila welcome us in the kitchen. I waste no time in running an extension cord for Thwissila's computer, recently moved from her home: they'd been waiting two weeks for an electrician to hard wire it – just like the states! (Except that the wires are 220 volt – Yikes!)



Friday night movies – an old horror movie in Hindi, which very few in Khasi Hills speak, and an Arnold Schwarzenegger thriller.

Lunch on Feb. 19 with Rev. Darihun and Khlan who is our guide today, husband of Thwissila. Rev. Darihun is the minister of eight churches, but lives in Dienglieng to care for her grandmother. Her maternity leave does not stop her from walking down the street with us to the church for a short service and Q&A with Lindy and Gail. On the way this church member shows us the Self Help Group chicken coops – this lovely bamboo structure is in



progress. I suddenly realized as Rev. Darihun is translating for Gail that she is a powerful and dynamic speaker. I'm sure that juggling the needs and strengths of eight churches means she's a good administrator as well.



We move on to Pingwait where we meet with two self help groups who start the meeting by arranging the benches in a circle – how UU is that! One group is working on several commercial ventures (soap, chickens), and the other is a work co-op whose



ultimate goal is to build a much needed store in the village. As we discuss the various goals and frustrations, the depth of our relationship increases – one of the members invite us to their home for tea. As is usual, we are sitting alone with Khlan and our host when I remarked that I hoped the next time we met we would be close enough that we would not be offered tea. Gradually the room filled with every member of the household and other church members, and we knew a barrier of formality had fallen. The young men, one in

pink and the other in the plaid wrap, had been making the case for an electric piano to enrich the music during services. The generation gap rose up, which gave us another deeper way to explore our mutual church experiences. We learned that Shillong, the capitol of Meghalaya and nearest city, is known as 'Music City'.



Sunday 20 was easygoing. Gail preached at Kharang about 2 miles from where we were staying at the AMCV in Korbar. Church is in the afternoon, so our big event for the morning was sending Lindy off in the big yellow taxi to Mawlat to preach there – about a two hour toot of 20 miles. Gail and I were quite pleased to witness a child dedication for two families conducted by the very fine Rev. Nangroi, who had spent some time at the UUA in Boston. Gail noticed 7 restless boys in a pew in the middle,



with a tale about a boy named William who was told he was naughty. Khlan translated with charm. She had the kids hooked, and the rest also: Rev. Darihun (suppressing her maternity leave again, there for the closing prayer) said Gail was 'brilliant'. We spent the afternoon and evening meal with Darihun, Nangroi, and



one of the families of the newly dedicated children.

Next day we took off in the Big Yellow Taxi (SHG owned Land Cruiser) for Wahmawlein, partner church to Wayland MA, where we enjoyed an enthusiastic sung welcome by the children



in the school, a tour guided by young Blesstar Kshias, who came with us from AMCV to his home town, and a local teacher, and spectacular scenery. Blesstar showed me the soccer field funded



by the Wayland church and dug by hand. The steep slopes on either side of this ridge village meant that a flat space was at a premium and heavy



machinery couldn't navigate. We had tea courtesy of the SHG store and met Nangroi's father. We moved on to Mawlat where the slopes were if anything steeper, and a large church nested above the brood of school rooms, two stories in front, 4 in back. The Head Teacher, Recover Sawian, was most gracious, and his staff served a lovely lunch in the adjacent house.





The 60 family church was expanding the school to tenth level with the generous help of their partner church, Mount Vernon (VA, NJ?). We learned that the people of the village climbed down for two hours a day to work the fields around Umngot (Ngot river), and climbed back at the end of the day.



Feb. 22 Morning finds us back at the Bonnie Guest House in the market district of Laban, the southeast village of Shillong. When we first arrived here on Feb 3, we thought it was marginal and peculiar: now it seems luxurious. We are able to go to the internet cafe, shop for Lifebouy soap and dark chocolate.



There are even signs for the roads (which are largely in English). Here note the Hindi comes first on the National Highway 44 sign – also for Tourists, as most NEI Indians speak a Khasi dialect and have only three years of Hindi at grade 6-8, English from Grade 1 on, if they have schooling at all.

Gail visits with Lur Mangkara Bashi Rani, great grandson of H. K. Singh, and a lovely fellow who Jim has decided is very intelligent – he laughs at all Jim's jokes. We are invited to address him as Mang. (All Khasi vowels are short, BTW, and accents on second syllable - wrecks havoc with iambic pentameter).



Lindy and Rev. Derek Pariat at the Nonthymmai church in the 'New Shillong' section on the road toward Jowai. Gail photo: Jim is busy with posting blogs.

Mang and Lindy at the Laban church – Peter Morales will preach here Sunday. The church is settled on a hillside in a residential area and has a school and an older church building which serves as a community hall. Gail visits two other



schools. The Maragaret Barr Memorial School is thriving (shown), and the other is in deep depression, on the edge of failing: There are four groups of teachers with no single leader, each paid by a separate entity. Lindy and Gail will report back to the UUNEI ('The Union') Education Committee, who groan in recognition – the problems show the great weaknesses in the Indian system and the isolation of Meghalaya and the other North

East states: the government paid teachers are federally paid, some under a scheme that pays only if the year end budget allows. Yikes!

The afternoon of the 23<sup>rd</sup> we have time to wander and stumble on the Shillong chapter of the Brahma Samaj, the 19<sup>th</sup> century Hindu movement that brought H. K. Singh into contact with the Unitarians in Boston, and gave us Tagore. We were headed to the Police Bazar, the center of commercial activity in Shillong, and thence to the Don Bosco ethnic Museum. Of Don Bosco we know nothing,



save that the extensive Catholic holdings in Shillong are all named after him. We learned much about Khasi, Jaintia and Karbi cultures (the Unitarian areas). Gail gets a book about Khasi tribal ethics



which makes it very clear why the Khasi took to Unitarianism. Look forward to sermons on how much we can learn from them. Oh, note that the Police Bazar has given Gail a new hat, as she lost her trademark hat of 15 years.



On the 24<sup>th</sup> we head North of Shillong past this vast reservoir, the dammed river Eit (I think). We are 20KM out of Shillong and have another 23 to Kyrdem, where we will stay overnight. We stop at Lum, leave our baggage at Kyrdem, and got to a Dedication Service in Klew. The Lum church is the smallest building we've seen, but the people are glad to

welcome us, tea and all that. We stop by the nearby school, where the head teacher shows us the building and tells of the program. The country here is a vast plain in the mountains, very wet even in the dry season. Later



Derek tells us that it is malaria prone in the heat of summer. Revs. Lincoln, and Allen Mylliempdah who have come with us, begin the service in Klew. The woman in the background experiments with the keyboard, set up by a young man who volunteers his PA system services to Unitarians all around (including, we found, the Padu

conference).



There are 5 children dedicated, the oldest is two today, and the family, whose home is on the hilltop above the church, mount a huge celebration.



The little girls are somewhat in awe of Lindy and Gail, who had addressed the gathered at the service, as we wait our turn for dinner in the VIP room of the house.

We are now in the habit of greeting friends from other churches at these big gatherings, here a woman from Puriang.



As the evening draws near, we reluctantly return to Kyrdem for the night. What we experience there needs a new post.



As our dinner from Klew settles, we have more at Kyrdem. People gather to see us, and we are captivated by the young secretary of the village, Silnangroi. He understands English, but has difficulty



speaking his passion in it, so we watch as he spills forth in Khasi and Biron summarizes. Politics, Economics, Education, and Health are his topics. As the evening advances, people leave and new come in until we are in the middle of an unusual SHG – five men who are passionate about literacy, for themselves and for the village. Self Help Groups under Indian law may apply for funding with 10 members minimum, but Lindy and Biron encourage this group to form anyway with the help of the British Boland trust, for whom Lindy has been researching, to thrive, then apply to the state as an established group, pushing for modifications of the law.



Arki Kshiar, Joyful, Jrin Nongrum (church spokesman), Biron, name unknown, Silnangroi, Lindy and Gail. By this time, the school head teacher has pledged to resume evening classes, and the SHG has pledged to take there learning to the villagers other evenings. We feel we have witnessed the beginning of a quiet revolution.

Next morning we walked back to the main village to have breakfast at a church-member's home. It was early and I took about 60 pictures as the sun rose through the ground fog. Next, the obligatory visit to the school. After the usual ceremony and visit, we sit before the gathered students and ask for questions. After the usual (Where do you come from, how old are you how many children.....), one wag in the back asks 'Will you dance for us?' Gail said, 'If you dance with us.'



A double circle formed, and Gail, Lindy, and I (!), danced and sang (Gail's choice) the 'Hokey Pokey'. Not until we dropped out and David took the lead, did all but the littlest join in. Our moral was 'be careful what you ask for'.





Friday 25, we left Kyrdem around 10 a.m, bouncing for 2 ½ hrs. on this road – we were told the driver would turn back a ½ hr. walk short of Khyndewso, but the intrepid fellow navigated his street cab the last bit, where we were surprised to learned we had cut across to the double back to the big lakes north of Shillong – pavement never looked so good! In Khyndewso, we were given a royal welcome, being presented with

ribboned pins and a gauntlet of applause as we rose the steps. We then sat in state while the children sang a welcome song. I don't think they actually took much pleasure in singing, atypical of most



Khasi we've seen. 50 km from Shillong on mostly paved road, the children had never seen a computer. As in most of the rural areas getting teachers, especially higher levels and particularly science, is difficult. We discussed an idea that another village had suggested, volunteer English speaking teachers from the states and England, but they didn't seem ready for that – just teachers, Khasi speaking. We risked missing our evening date in Shillong by

staying for lunch, 'already done', served after a mere half hour, which we made the best of by talking with teachers, mothers and babies. Gail, Lindy and I found ourselves quite fluent in Khasi baby-talk.



We steamed back to Shillong, got to our new digs, cleaned up, and got to the Special Dinner hosted by Derek Pariat, delivered to it in grand style to the most posh hotel in town by our tour arranger and consummate host and gentleman, Pearl Green Marbaniang.

Here we are, left to right: P.G.

Marbaniang, Derek Pariat, Dea Braden (Hi Jeff and Brenda, and all her other friends in Nashville), Lindy Lathem, Peter Morales, Gail, Cream Nongbrie and her aunt New York Nongbrie. Cream and New York had just come from an intense

meeting with Lindy concerning Education. Peter and Dea had just come from a tour of the areas of most wretched poverty in 'mainland' India for the Holdeen Trust, and their heads were still spinning after witnessing a village in the garbage dumps of Mumbai where 350,000 people live and subsist.



Saturday the 26th, another day of travel to a small church and school day for Gail, blogging for Jim. Gail rode with Biron nearly to Guwahati (the airport, 50 km away) to the tiny village of Kkhatphra, just steps from the expanding Guwahati-Shillong highway. At least 100 steep stair steps, that is, making it one of the most inaccessible places even though only a couple of km from the large city of Byrnihat. The church rivals Lum as smallest building, but the level of isolation and poverty is a notch below. The people speak a rare dialect which Biron and a local man find hard to overcome. Gail learns more about beetle-nut cultivation (an almost universal habit here red mouths, bad teeth and red splotches on the ground

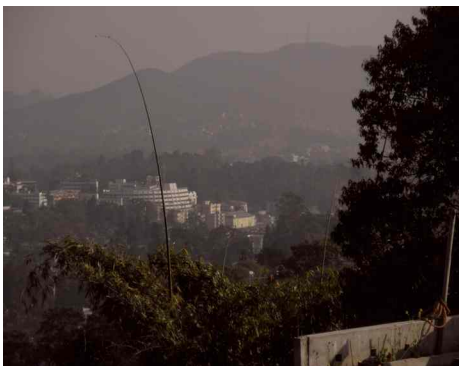


everywhere). The leaves used to wrap the nut with a dash of lime are trained to grow as a vine on the beetle palm trunks. Medical practice does not include educating the patient about the nature of the disease or treatment schedules, so people don't take the medications: polio and diabetes appeared to have been under-treated in one family Gail and Biron visited. Hope lies in this young woman who wanted Gail to hold her baby for the photo – she spoke excellent English.

Back to Shillong, we attended the evening 3<sup>rd</sup> anniversary memorial service for Shri Brington Myllemngap, P. G. 's father. One eulogy from memory lasted 39 minutes (timed by John Dale of the UU Partnership Church Council). At the reception the Laban church basement afterward, much

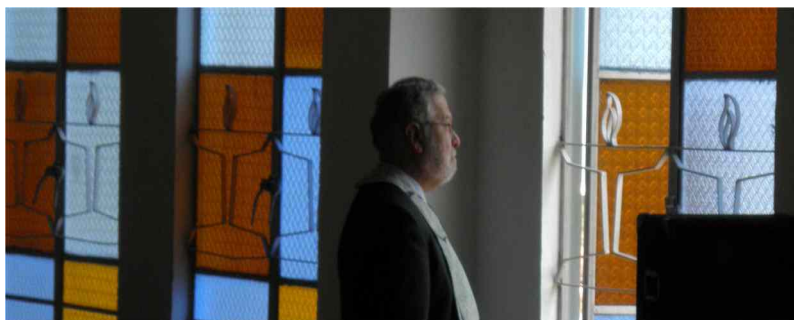


bigger than the service at P.G.'s home, Fair, the long-winded Eulogist and 3 year younger cousin of the deceased, retold the whole story to Gail in perfect English.



Sunday am we awoke at our wonderful Hilltop Chateau Guest House, took in the view and walked to the Laban Church. Just after we made a wrong turn, we were invited to hop into a family motorcar to take the remaining two blocks to the church. There we met many of our new friends, both from the States and Meghalaya.

Here Peter Morales contemplates the view and gathers his spirit before the service, where he delivered a fine sermon on 'Spiritual Passports'.



The UUA formerly presents the 'Carry the Flame' award to the UUNEI (Pearl Green and Derek).

Our visit to NEI was capped by a pastoral visit to the Nazareth Hospital in Shillong to visit Leiki's sister, a Jowai nurse, who was recovering from a severe fever. It was great to see Leiki again: she had been so generous to us both at UUNIE, her home, and on the trail.

