

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Peace Corps/Foreign Missions Project

India Crusade

O. H. 649

ROBERT STOLL

Interviewed

by

Joseph Rochette

on

November 28, 1984

ROBERT FRANKLIN STOLL

Robert Franklin Stoll was born on August 12, 1925 in Niles, Ohio, the son of Orrie and Lucille Stoll. Being brought up in Niles, he graduated from Niles McKinley High School. Pastor Stoll served in the U. S. Navy during World War II (1943-1946) and the Korean War (1951-1953). He earned a B. S. in civil engineering from Swathmore College in June 1946. He was employed by Republic Steel from 1946 to 1975 and presently works for Richwood Industries (since June 1983).

During the 1970's Mr. Stoll served as an associate lay pastor and eventually felt inspired to start the Lord's Chapel in Niles, where he has been pastor since 1975. In the late 1970's Pastor Stoll became interested in the fight against hunger and poverty, especially in Brazil and India. After the death of his first wife, he went to India at the request of an Indian pastor who was in need of help. There he saw the desperate situation of India's children. Since that time he has been involved in establishing rescue houses responsible for taking care of many abandoned, orphaned children.

Pastor Stoll presently lives in Liberty Township with his wife Siromani whom he met and married while in India. They have three children at home: Syam, Chitti, and Jyothi. Pastor Stoll has three children from his previous marriage: Karen, Kathi, and Beverly. He is a member of the Youngstown Chapter of the Myasthenia Gravis Foundation and is the head of To Every Creature, Inc., Missioners' Society. His hobbies include travel and nature.

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INTERVIEWEE: ROBERT STOLL

INTERVIEWER: Joseph Rochette

SUBJECT: India, culture, geography, religion,
religious aid projects

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R: This is an interview with Robert Stoll for the Youngstown University Peace Corps/ Foreign Missions Project, by Joe Rochette at 1849 Tibbets-Wick Road on November 28, 1984 at 10:05 a.m.

Give me a little background about yourself, where you were born, where you were from.

S: I'm Pastor Robert Stoll. I'm presently the pastor of the Lord's Chapel in Niles, Ohio. I was born and raised in Niles. I'm fifty-nine years old. I was in the service during World War II and also the Korean War. I am a registered professional structural engineer and in the military I was a member of the Navy Civil Engineer Corps. My civilian career was primarily as an engineer in Republic Steel Corporation's Manufacturing Division and also with other companies in construction.

In the 1960's I became a lay pastor in a church. Then in the mid 1970's I became a pastor full-time in the Lord's Chapel. I just decided to change my career and become a pastor. I had no formal training as a pastor; my training was strictly in engineering. I felt led to do this so we established the Lord's Chapel in Niles, Ohio.

In 1975 I became the president of a small missionary organization named To Every Creature, Inc. that had three families of missionaries in South America, Brazil. I was the administrator here in the States. For those two years I administered that work. In 1977 my wife passed away; my family, three daughters, were grown and married and it left me free to do anything I wanted to do. Early

in 1978 I went to India because I had been corresponding with an Indian pastor there who had twelve orphan children in his home and his home had burned down. He had requested some financial help to rebuild an orphanage. I raised some funds and felt that as an engineer with construction experience I could go over with the funds and build a decent children's home. In January of 1978 I went to India with funds to build my first children's home. When I got there in January I watched them start from scratch to make this home out of mud that they had taken from the canals to make the brick one by one, burn the brick, and erect the home. I was there for three months. We built a very lovely, solid brick building and immediately filled it up with fifty children who were destitute in one way or another, either orphaned or with poverty in the family. While I was there I saw a great need and I decided that I should put more time and attention to that work. I had a vision of doing the same thing the following year. I came back to the States with my impressions and I went across the United States and showed slides of my experiences in that three months to other people and raised funds that year for going back the following year. We did that and in January of 1979 I went back and started our second home. We also started and built a school.

In that second year I proposed marriage to an Indian woman named Siromani Thadi who was widowed about a month after I was. She was very poor and lived in a mud hut in a village called Kaza. I brought her and her three children to the United States where we were married on June 16, 1979. I've adopted the children and they are now at school in Liberty school system. The eldest boy, Syam, is now 16; the younger boy Chitti is 12 and my little girl is 8 years old. Siromani and I are very active in the work in India. We are in the business of telling people in America about the need and are raising funds to establish children's homes and also to establish a Christian outreach there. We support four children's homes that we've established with a total of 200 children in them. We support a school with 100 children in it. We support twenty local Indian pastors and we do other charitable work in leper colonies and poor villages. We're expanding all the time.

In January of 1985 my wife will be going back to India with plans to enlist a manager for our fifth children's home, which we will establish in the slums of Bombay this time. In 1984 by the grace of God and the generous contributions of Americans we have actually begun building or have completed building a total of five churches. In the villages of India the people sit on the ground outdoors for the church services usually because there are no structures. So in the monsoon season they are really handicapped as far as a place to worship, so we are building some solid brick structures for them to worship in. Each church will hold about one hundred people.

Our work really is prospering. We made a lot of progress since 1978 when I first went over and we don't see any end to our efforts. We're just going to continue to do the same thing because the need is there.

I would like to tell you a little more in detail about what went on when I first arrived there and what my impressions were. I went to the state of Andhra Pradesh and in the East Godavari district of the state of Andhra Pradesh, which is along the Indian Ocean at the mouth of the Godavari River about 600 to 650 miles south of Calcutta on the east coast. It is a very beautiful part of India. It is flat, sandy, prosperous rice country. It is all irrigated. The land is owned by rich landowners and it is worked by coolies, who are just the village population of men and women. They work for very low wages in the rice fields and in other crops. In that area they grow sugarcane, cashews, peanuts, coconuts, bananas and cotton. The laborers are the parents and children from the village families. The mother and father both have to work to support a family. They will live in a mud hut with a thatched roof without electricity or any of the modern conveniences. They will work for anywhere from sixty cents to a dollar a day.

The food cost in India relative to American food cost is very high. More than ninety percent of their income goes to buying food. For example, it will cost them as much to buy an egg as it does us here in America. Chicken is high too. Rice is about one-fifth the cost in America, but their wages are far less than one-fifth of our's. Their main diet is rice and they mix it with some curry that they make out of meat or vegetables or fruit.

The villagers are very poor and I noticed that they are also very thin. There are very few fat village people. They are thin and they impress you as being fragile. The fact is that they are fragile in that their lack of sanitary conditions and their lack of decent diet has made them susceptible to all kinds of diseases. The infant mortality rate is very high; I think it is 133 per thousand in the first year compared to around 13 in America. They have a life expectancy less than fifty years whereas in America it is more than seventy. There is a constant struggle for survival in India in the villages especially, and also the slums in the big cities. I guess the thing that really impressed me the most was the great need that they had. These are intelligent, hard-working people, but they are unable to break out of this situation that they are in. They need encouragement and help from the outside. We are in the work of primarily helping the children for this reason. In India if a husband and wife have a number of children and for some reason they are unemployed, either because of sickness or lack of work or whatever, they will take their children out of school and

let their children go out and find some jobs or beg even if it is just for the child to feed himself. You will find that there is a lot of child labor and even though it is illegal the government does not work to suppress it. In my opinion I don't see any evidence at all that they enforce the law. Besides child labor and child begging there is even child slavery in that a man who has gone into great debt will sometimes give his son or his daughter to some rich person to be his servant. What we have done is try to break this cycle of a child having to be employed in order to support himself or even help support his family. We take children from that situation and bring them into our homes where we provide for all of their material needs, food, clothing, shelter, and put them in school where they belong. The fact is that sometimes we have twelve year olds that have never been to first grade, and that is a real struggle for them to start at that age to go to school for the first time.

We also find that in the big cities for example, the city of Vijayawada, there is a lot of child neglect. Vijayawada is a large city and it has a lot of passenger rail traffic through that city, so there are hundreds of thousands of people pouring through that huge station all the time, and vagabond children will go there to beg and steal and actually live. Some of them are orphans; some of them are runaways; some of them are lost. Anyway, you see the evidence of these children all the time. They are dirty and ragged boys and girls and they live together in little colonies. They will cluster together in some secluded spot in this huge railway complex. That will be their home. I've seen them walking the tracks along the railway station platforms picking up garbage that has been thrown onto the tracks by the passengers. But in the same area that they are picking up the garbage the rats will be competing with them for it. I've seen them in the railway station restaurant digging through the garbage bins where they find scraps of food. They are really in a situation that we Americans would call unacceptable and deplorable. When I saw their condition we decided to try to rescue some of them, so we rented a home right there within walking distance of the railway station. We hired a manager to run the home, and we told them to go out and rescue as many of those children as they could. We now have rescued in that one railway station thirty children that are now going to school and getting everything provided for them. We have operated in that place for five years now.

In particular, one little boy whose name was Raju, was among the first group that we rescued. He is now a nine year old young boy, just a beautiful child. We have another boy named Jivan Jyothi that we found crying there one day in the station. He had just recently lost his parents and his uncle had pushed him out of his own house, so we rescued him

six years ago and he is still in one of our children's homes.

I think that when we Americans go to India and see child neglect we don't see the necessity for that kind of neglect or the hopelessness of the situation as the Indians do who are are willing to accept it as just the way things are and go on about their business. I think we have the thought in mind that something should be done, and that is really the basis of our ministry; we go out and tell Americans about the need and they respond. Yet it is only a drop in the bucket to the need. There are a lot of American missions working in India. I think that India has come to the forefront in the last ten years considerably as far as the need for some help at least as far as the children's problem is concerned. You hear of people like Mark Buntain who is a missionary in India, making great progress, and Mother Theresa of course working among the poorest of the poor. Americans are rallying behind people like that, American churches and American Christians, and also non-Christians.

In India the population is over 700 million as compared to a little over 200 million in the United States. They have one-third the land area as the United States so there is a high population density. The 700 million people in India are comprised religiously this way: eighty-five percent are Hindu, eleven percent are Muslim, and two and a half percent or three percent are Christian. The rest of the religious groups are divided between the Buddhists, Sikhs, Jains, Parsees, et cetera. The Sikh cast people have come into prominence in the news recently because of the storming of their golden temple at Amritsar by the Indian army where hundreds of the Sikh cast people were slaughtered. They had used the golden temple as a refuge and they had been harassing the Indian countryside in order to promote their independent spirit. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi sent in her army and squelched the rebels. A few months later they assassinated her and boasted of that too. The Sikh cast people really are a mixture of Hindu and Muslim. They have, in a sense, taken the best of both religions. They believe only in one God. They have pretty well gotten away from idol worship. They have a religion that they are very proud of. The Hindu religion is a very complex religion. For an American going over there what you probably see most is the evidence of their idols. Every village will have an idol of some kind or multiple temples, but the temple might not be a place that you walk into. I don't know what you call these little structures, but the structures would be in some prominent place in the village, at the crossroads, and it would be just a stone or brick shelter. Inside behind some bars and lighted up at night would be an idol, a man with a monkey face or an elephant face, or maybe there would be a cow statue in there. That sort of thing we don't see in America. It probably strikes us as being strange,

but whereas we have Christian churches on every street corner downtown they have a multitude of Hindu temples with their idol god exposed.

The people of India have a varied style of dress. Most of the women wear saris. In Northern India the women wear thin baggy pants with a long blouse. The men's costumes vary also. Some wear shotis, which are a cloth they wrap around their waist. A lot of the men just wear ordinary European dress. They do not dress as casually as Americans.

The monsoons come to India yearly. They can be a blessing or a problem. In the villages the huts have mud walls and the monsoons will actually melt those walls right down and the houses will collapse. The people have to rebuild their huts frequently. The huts are made by sticking some sticks in the ground and then plastering mud on each side. The walls are ten to twelve inches thick or more. Then they put some palm leaves on top for a roof.

A thing that is also lovely about Indian village life is that you are usually walking when you go anywhere, and therefore you know your neighbors very well. The people don't live in their houses in the daytime. Their houses are really a shelter especially at night. In the daytime they are out. The roof overhangs a porch usually and the people are out on their porches. On their porches they carry out their cottage industry. An old mother might be shredding the fibers from the outside of a coconut husk and making rope with it or they may be making lace or baskets. When you walk in the villages of India you are in close proximity to the other people. The tailor would have his treadle type sewing machine right on his front porch. You are really communicating a lot more than in America where we are in our automobiles and we only see our neighbor when he is riding his lawnmower or something like that. In India there is a lot of communication among villagers because they are exposed to each other a lot of the time. It is very lovely for that reason. If an American walked down a village street in India the chances are that by the time he walked the length of the village he would have been invited to a half a dozen porches for a cup of tea or something. It is really a beautiful place. I'm fascinated by the people; they are lovely, beautiful people.

I have compassion for them for the reason I mentioned earlier; they are poor, sickly, and fragile. I feel the little bit that we do is important, but it doesn't solve their problem. I believe that as a world we need to have a new attitude about the whole face of this earth. I think that we need to have a commitment to change this pattern of having people who are hungry and starving and so on. If we have the attitude that it can be done and that it must be done the methods and the hinderances and the negatives that always

seem to interfere with solution will ultimately be dealt with. I think that our problem is really in our mind, that when we consider the millions that are in need in India we say the task is impossible. There is a need to get the cooperation of all the various state governments and the national government of India. The same thing is going on right now in Africa, particularly in Ethiopia, where we are sending one hundred million dollars worth of food over there for the starving people and we are confronted with the problems of a Marxist government and also with the problems of robbers intercepting some of the shipments. All of those negatives seemingly thwart efforts to solve a problem like that. I feel that if we had a more positive attitude we could just overcome the negatives. All the negatives do is discourage people who might otherwise help. If we could just not allow the negatives to be predominant the day will come when local governments can also be led to believe in themselves and their capacity of changing the situation. Sending one hundred million dollars from America, that is not going to solve their long-range problems, but right now in short range we do have to make some sacrifices in America for those Third World countries where they have poverty and high infant mortality rate. It is our moral responsibility. Even more than that we need to begin to believe that not only is this unacceptable, but that something can be done to conquer the problem. I think that we have just come to the conclusion that it is there and we have to live with it. The Indians look at the children begging in the railway station and they walk away from that, but an American goes over there and says--this does not have to be, so a home is established where the kids can be rescued. For every kid we take out of the railway station another one comes in and the vacuum is filled, but that doesn't detract from the fact that we have saved a child from the kind of a life that would just literally spoil him.

The social problems are not solved in India like they are in America. In America we try to have programs set up for the poor, the blind, the handicapped, and other needy people. We don't make anybody rich in America with our programs but they do offer some relief. However in India they have such a small humanitarian effort that most of the people who cannot work have to beg, including three million lepers and millions of blind, cripple, and handicapped people. One thing you still see in India is young people with polio. The distribution of polio vaccine and getting it to the children at an early age is a problem. The evidence is that there are still many village kids with polio. They also have outbreaks of hepatitis. We lost one of our children in our children's home and two of our pastors this last year to hepatitis. The sanitary conditions are very bad. The drinking water is contaminated and the sewage systems are nonexistent. There are all kinds of problems that need addressing, but the only way to address them is to

have a conviction that they don't have to be that way. The world has to have this conviction, not just Americans and not just a few people.

In the meantime, it is to the benefit of the people who are fat and healthy and able to work to make some sacrifice for the rest of the people of the world. As a Christian I would say that I find this truth to be a motivating factor. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." There is a reward for being merciful, and the reward is that you will also receive mercy. If we are looking at it from the standpoint of what do we get we don't necessarily get anything except that it is recognized by God as the right thing to do. If we withhold our charity or if we refuse to make sacrifices on the basis of "Why should I put money down the drain," or "It is not going to solve the overall problem or the big picture," that is wrong. At the same time if we only give for the short term and don't give our minds to the long term problem, that is wrong too. We really need to give our minds to the long term problem. I think living for awhile in India and any other Third World country gives you the awareness that the problem is great, but there is something that should be done. Whatever I as an individual or you as an individual can do is a step in the right direction. In other words, we who are part of the solution rather than a part of the problem have a moral obligation to do something.

I'm really blessed because I've been through India and it has enriched my life tremendously. Not only has it enriched my life by being able to go over there and fall in love with those people and their life style, but I have also been privileged to establish a new Indian family in America. They are a great blessing to me.

Naturally our work in India is Christian work, but the solution I don't think is in the Christian church as far as the Third World countries are concerned. I think that the Christian church needs to change its attitude about its ability to cooperate with non-Christians. I also think that the American democratic-republic spirit has to change its attitude about being able to cooperate with non-democratic-republican countries. We have to be able to cooperate with a communist because some of these people who are starving are under communist domination, but they couldn't care less who is running the government. The fact is their bellies are empty. I think that Ethiopia is going to give some lessons to the world. I'm happy to see what is happening. For example, in Africa the problem is that they have spoiled their ability to grow crops by wasting their land by cutting down the vegetation and really not knowing how to grow decent crops. There are people who are right now being trained to go in there and show them how to irrigate and how to grow

crops and how to preserve their land. They are going to go in there and do a job that could help them. This has been done in India already. The Indians themselves will say that--Britain has given us our government, but America has given us our food. Not that we have shipped food to them, but America is really responsible for introducing better strains of grain, corn, wheat, and rice into India. The Indians have been able to improve their food production to the point where this year India is exporting a million tons of wheat to Russia. Last year India had to import some grain. This year they are exporting. Someone might say--Why would you export grain when the poor people of India need it? Well, it is all wrapped up in the economic complexities of a nation. They have to have some exports in order to keep from going bankrupt as a nation. In a sense, their ability to export grain does in some way filter down to those people as well. Hopefully their attitude about the poor people will change some day to where they don't think the situation is both tolerable and hopeless but that we can do something about it.

R: When you first went to India, because you were an outsider into that culture, do you think people reacted to you differently or in what ways did you notice that you had difficulties?

S: I don't really feel that I had any difficulties. As a matter of fact, I thought I had preferences. In other words, they really treated me better than they might have treated an Indian Christian pastor who had come into their community. I think they were immediately aware of the fact that economically I was a benefit to them. For example, I had seven thousand dollars with me to construct a children's home. That seven thousand dollars not only produced a home, but while it was being built it put food on the table of many of those villagers. They dug the mud from the canal and were paid wages to do this and to make one brick at a time in a little mold, and then to burn that brick and to carry that brick to the job site. By the way, women were the laboring force. It was the women who carried the brick from the brick kiln to the job site one hundred yards away. They mixed the mud for the mortar and helped the bricklayers. That community was economically prosperous while I was there. So I really was given preferences.

One of the things that you see right off the bat is that they have their eyes on you all the time. For example, if I was for one minute just standing watching them, suddenly someone would appear with a chair for me to sit on. If I had walked out into the cocount trees with my Bible and sat on the ground and began to read my Bible, pretty soon someone would come along with a mat for me to sit on. I really had no problem at all. Actually, I felt I was given too much attention.

This last February when I was in India I ran up against

our first hinderance as far as being Christian missionaries is concerned. It wasn't really a great thing, but we were in a Hindu festival area, which is a large complex with temples along the Bay of Bengal where once a year they have a one-week-long festival. A half a million Indians come there to worship their god. A group of Christians, and I among them, did what we had done in previous years; we went into that area and we began to walk along among the Hindus singing some Christians songs. They stopped us. That is the first time that they did that, and the fact is I don't blame them. I'm saying this to show you how tolerant they have been of our work.

Other places and individuals in India are not as tolerant, but in the villages we have not run into any opposition. They say that twenty years ago it was worse. They say the Christian pastors, the national Indians who had been converted to Christianity, sometimes were stoned and there was a lot more opposition than there is now. I do know there are pockets of opposition. As a Christian pastor I have not run into any problem. As a white American going over there I have only been treated with respect and generosity. They have made many sacrifices for me. For example the easiest meal the poor villagers can give me that they feel would honor me would be to kill their chicken. I have had more chicken dinners in India than enough. Yet chickens are not cheap in India either. There is nothing cheap in India really. Food costs are relatively high for those people. I'm a really blessed man to have gone to a country where I've been so well-received.

There is a lot of danger traveling in India. Here in the States we have our muggers and so on that might attack, most of them probably to be able to feed a drug habit. In India there are desperate people who have come to a life style of robbery and attacks with murder in order just to keep themselves alive. So there is some danger in traveling in India because there are people who will take your life without even a second thought in order to get what they think you might have on you. But that is true in America too. It may not be any more dangerous there than here. I've never felt threatened or afraid in India. Until I married Saromani I used to travel alone at night in India, but she stopped me. She says that I am a target because I am a white man and traveling alone. She won't let me do that anymore.

R: When you were there working what was a typical day like? What would you do beginning in the morning?

S: I went over there thinking that as an engineer, having had building and house construction experiences, I was going to help them build a children's home. When I got there I found out that whatever labor I put forth would only take away the job of some poor laborer and be taking food from someone else's

mouth, and that they were perfectly capable of constructing that children's home without me. As a matter of fact, the type of construction was such that I really wasn't even much help mentally to them. I might have helped them physically by carrying some mud or something, but I could see immediately that they were not interested in having my physical help and they didn't need my help as an engineer or builder as the type of construction is so much different. What did I do? Well, the times that I spent in India were primarily in ministering to the people. That is what they wanted most from me. If I would go for a walk, for example, someone would come down off of their porch and ask me to come up. They would want me to pray with them. Even Hindus wanted me to sit down with them and talk to them about America or whatever. A lot of the people that I would be communicating with didn't understand English and I didn't understand, at that time, much of their language. You really felt that they wanted to have you as a friend. Most of the time that I was there I would either be playing for them or just being with them as a friend, and that is all. They were happy to have me sitting on their porch. They were happy to have me minister to them as a Christian pastor. A number of the people who were non-Christians were also interested in the Christian message.

At night time we would have meetings where we would go to a certain village wherever we had been invited, and there would be a number of people gathered together sitting on the ground. They would predominantly be Christians, but in the circumference of the assembly there would be Hindus mostly standing or perhaps just sitting on their veranda listening. The Hindus were showing their lack of fear or being in the presence of a Christian service. We did have a lot of Christian services and were able to enjoy the presence of Hindus at least around the outside. The Hindu is a very tolerant person in their religion. They only have a problem with Christians because Christians believe that the Hindu gods are not gods at all, but the Hindus believe that the Hindu gods are not gods at all, but the Hindus believe that the Christian God is a god, just one more. The Hindus can add whatever number of gods they want to their faith. In a sense they are able to believe that there is some blessing in having the favor of the Christian God as a god, just one more. The Hindus can add whatever number of gods they want to their faith. In a sense they are able to believe that there is some blessing in having the favor of the Christian God on their side too. However in a particular family if there would be one person converted to Christianity that person would have to denounce their idol gods and the Hindu gods. That would bring real problems into a family. It means that they might be ostracized or really punished by other members of the family. There are a lot of secret Christians in India as a result. We do carry on a Christian

ministry and that is a big part of our work there besides just communicating with the people.

When I go to India now I spend a lot of time with the children. In my first year we were just building up the children's homes, but now I have two hundred children and I personally interview each of them, talk to them, and review their family situation and what their background is. I record all this information. I take individual photographs of all the children so that people in America who sponsor them are able to understand what they look like and have a history of that child. A lot of my hours are spent just interviewing children and also ministering to children. I love to be with them and I enjoy them. For example, we had a little athletic contest. I would establish running, jumping, ball throwing and other sorts of contests with them because they just don't do that sort of thing on their own. As a matter of fact, in the villages of India there is very little recreation, the reason being that the people conserve their energy simply because they don't have a lot of it and they need all their energy to walk to their rice fields and to work in the daytime and walk home and take care of their chores around the house. The only recreation that they have, really, is sitting down and communicating, just talking. The children are really not led to recreate much either, so when I go over there we take badminton sets and jump ropes and frisbees. We are involving the children in some athletic activities that they wouldn't ordinarily be involved in. In the cities it is a little bit different. When the people who are in the universities and offices come home, they are likely to go to the YMCA and take a karate class or maybe they will be out in some tennis court. In the villages they just don't do that sort of thing. The cinema is the one major pastime of India.

When we go to India we usually attend a series of gospel conventions. This last February we financed two conventions and attended two others. It requires about \$1,500 to finance a convention. The conventions are publicized; we put out flyers announcing the date, time, and place. Then they build what they call a pendal which is some bamboo poles and bamboo laticework with some leaves on top to sort of act as a shelter from the elements. It does keep the place cozier at night even though there are no walls in it. They put some straw or leaves on the ground and the people sit down and gather in multitudes to hear the gospel. For example, we would start a convention on a certain morning and it would go morning, afternoon, and evening. Then the people would just go to sleep right there on the ground, on the straw, at night. Some of them do this; others are within walking distance of home and would go home. We would feed those people. We finance the food and the building of the structure. There were two three-day conventions we financed in February,

and two conventions that we attended where we spoke. When we are there for a matter of six weeks or more naturally not all of our time is spent in conventions. We are also involved in a work among the lepers. I have lived among the lepers. I stayed one whole week in a leper colony one year. I also communicated with them, made friends, encouraged them, took their pictures.

One of the things that we were able to accomplish that I think is really great is that three years ago a friend of mine, Jim Talman, who is the owner of Troutman Drugstore in Niles and also a Rotarian, was in charge of the local Rotary district 665's world relief project. He knew of my work in India. He decided that maybe the Rotarians who are hospital administrators, doctors, dentists, and businessmen might be able to put together some excess items to send to India. He made arrangements for me to speak at Rotary meetings. We spoke to all the Rotary clubs in Eastern Ohio, Canton, North Canton, East Liverpool, Girard, Niles, Liberty, Hubbard, Cortland, and so on. We presented to them the need and asked them if they had any medical items or hospital items that we could accumulate and send to India. We did that over a period of a year and we accumulated two forty foot long semi-truck trailers full. These were shipping containers that would just go right on the ship. It cost the Rotary \$12,000 just for the shipping cost. The shipment was valued at around three-quarters of a million dollars. It went to India and is being distributed among people who can't afford medical help. Some of it is going into hospitals. There were hospital beds, medicines, X-ray equipment and a lot of things. It was a struggle to get it to India because of the Indian customs officials. We were probably a year getting the red tape cut to get the stuff in there. It was finally accomplished and it is a remarkable venture.

R: What is the relationship between your ministry and a lot of the old traditional beliefs and local beliefs?

S: In India among the Christian community there are all the denominations. There is Catholic, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptists, Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostal and so on. My work is really an independent work. We have had some communication with denominations and cooperate with them but we really don't have a lot of interaction. In the Christian community I'm really working more as an independent. In India the denominations do cooperate a little bit more than in America. For example, one of the people that I am very much associated with is an Australian Catholic monk who is the doctor in a leper colony. We believe in what he is doing and we send him money regularly to help him. It is he who was in the leper colony that I stayed in for a week. I have had him here in America. I try not to let denominational differences

interfere with what we are doing over there. Some of the people who are in our organization in India and some of the pastors we support have their background in the Lutheran church or the Baptist church or a Pentecostal church; it doesn't matter to me. I'm just interested in people who are ministering the Word. Whoever the Lord puts in my path, those are the people that I minister to and try to help. That is one of the things you have to deal with when you are doing a charitable work. You look around in India and see how much need there is and you have to draw the line based on a reasonable amount of faith and how much money you are going to be able to raise. I just can't go in there and promise everyone that I can help them. As a matter of fact, the pressure is constantly on me from their side to expand the work, but the funds aren't available. I wish I could expand the work more than I am.

One day I was over there standing on the roof of a house. It was a two story concrete building. I was up on the roof and I looked around me and I just felt a little bit depressed that I couldn't do more. This is one of those experiences where occasionally in your spirit you feel that you are in communication with God. I felt that the Lord was reminding me that in Ohio every winter I put out seed for the birds. God said, "When you do that, do I send you all the birds in Ohio?" I said, "No, you don't." He said, "Well, the saying is true here in India as well. I want you to take care of the ones I put in your path." That is what I do. The Lord has been faithful to give us that kind of support.

I have to send about \$3,000 a month to India. That is a big chunk of money and a big responsibility. There were many, many months since 1978 when I just came right down to the wire and wondered where it was going to come from. I guess there were about one or two months where I had to defer part of the payment. So it has been a struggle to meet my commitment in India. It is not a case of building up a bank account and just drawing out of it; that doesn't happen. Financially I am always under some pressure, but at the same time I have never had to reduce our work or cut off some of our work. I think that is somewhat of a miracle too, because I have no organization behind me that is ready to come to my aid and rescue me if I get into trouble. It is just individuals of all denominations across the country. I receive help from a Roman Catholic priest, a retired Orthodox Catholic priest, Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Pentecostals, whatever, all the way across the United States. Many churches and individuals have helped me in these last years one time or another and some help me continuously.

R: Are there things that seem to pop up regularly that are particularly discouraging?

S: Yes. It is hard to get things accomplished in India; that is a discouragement. Things move very slowly in India. There are a lot of hinderances. Like I said, we spent a year trying to get our medicines and supplies over there. If I establish a children's home I find that there is a lot of friction likely to happen over there among people who I don't bless. There are people who always feel left out; whenever you bless one person somebody else feels left out.

I also have a struggle with nepotism. If I establish a children's home in India I will likely find that the manager will want to employ his brother, sister, mother, or father and everybody else in his family rather than spread the blessings around. Family loyalties are very great.

Working with the local government in India is a little bit of a difficulty. In the Asian countries there seems to be the necessity of paying bribes in order to get anything done. It was true in Vietnam and it is true in India too. That is upsetting to me to have to pay somebody to do what their job requires them to do. I personally have avoided it. It has probably cost me some time to get things done. The minute you enter the country you are faced with that. When we go over there with bags of clothing and supplies and are standing in line at customs we are faced with a challenge of how to get our stuff into India. I have known of people who will actually put money in their pockets so the customs officials can pull the money out and they get on through without a lot of trouble. I have not done that; I haven't had to do that. I've had our bags completely torn apart and searched thoroughly a couple of times, but then there have been more times than that when we have not had any trouble. I know that those guys who tore everything apart would have stopped if they would have had any indication I was going to give them some money. It is just a philosophy that upsets me.

One thing is that it is hard to communicate ten thousand miles away. The mail takes ten days each way. It is almost impossible to telephone to the villages. You can telephone into the large cities just by dialing; you can get the large cities really easily. When it comes down to the villages it is impossible to call. There have been some times when I really wanted to communicate immediately, and it is hard to do. We have to resort to telegrams, which don't always solve the problem either.

Beyond that, I don't know of any serious complications that we have had. Everything has gone quite smoothly.

When I make a presentation somewhere I never put on any

high pressure. I think that my work is not my work; I think my work is God's work and that as he provides I will expand it. I don't feel any anxiety about it. I guess my only anxiety is that I want to do the very best job I can. If I neglect doing the very best job I can then I think I have reason to be anxious. I try very hard to do what I think is best. I'm willing to make any sacrifice that I can possibly make to promote this work. We do a lot of traveling here in the States to go to places and tell people about our work. We have a good slide presentation, which is very educational and informative. It is not designed as a fund raising thing, but people who are really moved and interested usually do come forward and say, "We would like to help. What can we do?" That is how we keep our work going and expanding.

R: Thanks a lot for sharing your experiences. I think it will be helpful to a lot of people. I think by getting it into the library people who are interested and share some of the same beliefs can see what other people have done and are doing. It is a topic where I think there is so little primary source information.

END OF INTERVIEW