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*XXII*

# CHAPTER 1

## *Photography — My Avenue to Love*

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**O**NE OF MY ASSIGNMENTS was to produce a video feature for Cable News Network on Indian spirituality. CNN had previously aired several news stories that I had written based on my experience with Catholic missionaries, who worked with the indigenous people in the Brazilian Amazon.

After working with people and organizations of different faiths, and after covering situations where people had been divided by their religious beliefs, I had come to terms that there are many paths to God, and there is no one right way.

By now, I felt prepared to finally meet the person whom I considered the greatest missionary of them all, Mother Teresa. I considered her to be free of religious prejudice, and for that reason she was a magnet for people of all faiths. As author Navin Chawla wrote in a biography of Mother Teresa: “We cannot view her through Catholic eyes, or Hindu eyes, but only through human eyes, for she does not discriminate. She respects all religions and all people . . . . By not making her religion exclusive, Mother Teresa’s compassion encompassed persuasions and the irreligious and disbelievers as well.”

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I got my first break when Jay Suber, Vice President at CNN who was in charge of feature shows, gave me an assignment to cover five stories in India

including a possible feature on Mother Teresa’s work. I was grateful at the prospect of making some money on this trip, but I considered my trip to Calcutta as a pilgrimage more than as an opportunity to cover a story. Very often as a photographer, I had been assigned to photograph in soup kitchens or in shelters crowded with the homeless on the coldest nights. Perhaps this was in prepa-

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**I**n India, the streets alongside the temples are constantly bustling with activity. A small sign hanging on the wall of Kalighat — the home for the dying — indicates Mother Teresa’s presence at one of India’s busiest temples. A mother hugs her small boy outside the entrance of the home, while merchants work near the main door, and a beggar squats on the steps.



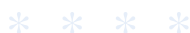
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**M**other Teresa in pew next to Sister Nirmala Joshi (who succeeded her as the new superior general of the Missionaries of Charity). When Mother Teresa visited Atlanta and spoke at Sacred Heart Church, she refused a seat near the altar, but elected to sit with her Sisters.

## CHAPTER

# 2

### *Divine Coincidence — Mother Teresa's Atlanta Trip*



**I**N THE EARLY SUMMER OF 1995 I began to plan my fourth trip to India. And then, out of the blue, I received a phone call from Gretchen Keiser, editor of *The Georgia Bulletin*, the Archdiocese's newspaper for greater Atlanta. She said Mother Teresa was coming to Georgia in a matter of days and asked if I could photograph the event. I just about fell on the floor; I was so excited. I had worked for Gretchen over the past ten years as a photographer, and she knew how much I wanted to one day photograph Mother Teresa.

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The night before her arrival in Atlanta I couldn't sleep. By 5:00 A.M. I was on my way to Hartsfield International Airport. At the last minute I had been given permission by her Order to photograph Mother Teresa at the airport. When the tiny corporate jet finally came into Atlanta's airspace, I ran out on the tarmac. The door opened, and there she was — dressed in the distinctive blue and white sari and wearing her frayed blue woolen sweater.

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As a photographer, I'm accustomed to not drawing attention to myself as I work, so I was shocked when I saw Mother Teresa approaching me after shaking hands with Archbishop Donoghue and a number of priests. She held my hands with surprising strength. What I saw was the face of the *mother* and a look of unconditional love.

We drove in a police procession through the people-lined streets of Atlanta to her AIDS home in Virginia Highlands. Dozens of volunteers were already waiting for her; she greeted each one in the garden behind the home.

Later, during a Mass at Sacred Heart Church in downtown Atlanta, I sat by her feet with my cameras piled around my neck while she spoke from a podium in the sanctuary. I hardly heard what she said. I was too mesmerized by her presence. I gazed at her face, at her feet, and at her hands. She was real, she was here, and I was going to see her again in Calcutta.

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**A** typical street scene in Calcutta, The city wakes to the sounds, smells, and color of a new day.



# CHAPTER 3

## *Arrival in India*

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**W**ORDS OF MOTHER TERESA rang in my head as I prepared to fly to India. She had said that Western societies had the spiritually poorest of the poor. While they might not have the most physically poor, rich nations produced spiritually poor people. It was also her position that while one might offer food and shelter to the truly poor, it was a difficult task to take away the anger, bitterness, and loneliness those people feel.

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On August 22, 1995, I was on a Lufthansa plane bound for India. Before I left Atlanta, the Sisters from the AIDS home gave me gifts to deliver to Mother Teresa. One of the gifts was a box of Godiva chocolates — one of her few indulgences.

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During my ten-hour layover in the Frankfurt airport, I had a couple of petty arguments with women who worked in the terminal. The first was with a sales clerk who impatiently cleared the counter of face creams because I didn't make my selection quick enough. Another argument was with a Lufthansa employee who wouldn't let me sit in an area that was cordoned off, even though at the time there were no other seats available in the terminal. I reacted with hostility to these women when I perceived their individual aggressive behaviors.

When I boarded the plane for Bombay, within minutes of our departure, an Indian man dressed in blue jeans and a blazer left his seat and sat next to me. He looked at me and greeted me with a familiar look. Without hesitation he remarked, "You had a very bad week. It was very hot where you were." He was right. I had been trying to move and pack in temperatures that were over 100 degrees Fahrenheit in Georgia.

Never taking a pause he continued, "Your prayers saved your father. It could have been yes, or it could have been *no*." I was caught completely off guard and



# CHAPTER

# 4

## *Shishu Bhawan*

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**E**ARLY THE NEXT MORNING I hailed a rickshaw and was taken to the Motherhouse. I asked the man pulling the rickshaw to stop first at a coffee-house along the way. I hadn't slept most of the night and knew that I would have to find a new hotel for the next night.

I was surprised to find that the streets were already alive and bustling with traffic. The cracked sidewalks were crowded with people bathing themselves around fire hydrants that had been opened for that purpose. This was also my first experience on a rickshaw, and I felt sad that this poor, bare-footed man, acting as a human horse, was pulling me through the streets of Calcutta.

After two cups of coffee we made our way onto Lower Circular Road and I was left at the main entrance of the Motherhouse. The morning began with 5:30 a.m. Mass followed by breakfast for the volunteers before they fanned out to the various facilities run by the Mission.

It was at breakfast over tea that I would meet my first fellow volunteers. I spoke with Kari Amber McAdam, a young student from Dartmouth College in New Hampshire who had received a fellowship to work with Mother Teresa. She was volunteering at Shishu Bhawan and offered to accompany me there after breakfast.

We walked the short distance to the orphanage and at that moment I felt frightened at the prospect of being around babies. I had never once changed a

diaper. Kari on the other hand seemed like an old pro as I watched her handle a baby. The other volunteers also seemed very comfortable with the operation and their roles.

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**S**everal of Mother Teresa's orphans gather for a group photograph at Shishu Bhavan. One girl clutches a Western doll whose forehead has been painted with Hindu markings.

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**M**other Teresa in deep contemplation moments before the Mass during which the noviciates would take their final vows and become Sisters.

# CHAPTER 5

## *Missionaries of Charity*

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**T**HE LONGER I STAYED WITH MOTHER TERESA, the more I wanted to learn about her organization, how it was founded, and Mother Teresa the woman. It is well known that Mother Teresa doesn't like to talk about herself, but I found a beautiful authorized biography about her, written by an Indian Hindu, Navin Chawla, who received permission to write a book about her life and work. He gives an in-depth insight into Mother Teresa's boundless determination to help those most in need and how she went about organizing a multitude of centers in Calcutta and around the world.

They include homes for abandoned children; homes for the dying and destitute; medical dispensaries for lepers and tuberculosis patients; a colony for lepers run by Brothers of the Missionaries of Charity; and a prison for female inmates (which Mother Teresa was able to convince the Communist government of Calcutta to turn over to her control).

When the Missionaries of Charity's Constitution was approved by the Sacred Congregation in Rome, it included a fourth vow — wholehearted and free service to the poor. Mother Teresa's order began on October 7, 1950. Over the decades, close to 500 centers were established in more than 100 countries.

Shishu Bhawan is the name for the many children's homes throughout India. The Mission works closely with adoption agencies overseas and even handicapped children are usually placed. In the early days Mother Teresa herself would accompany the children overseas to meet their new families. Very often babies are brought to the Sisters on the verge of death, which brings the following quote from Mother Teresa to mind: "For me even if a child dies within minutes, that child must not be allowed to die alone."

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## CHAPTER

# 6

### *Train Ride to Titagarh — Gandhiji Prem Nivas (Leper Colony)*

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**N**AVIN CHAWLA QUOTED MOTHER TERESA when she said, “Leprosy is not a punishment. It can be a very beautiful gift of God if we make good use of it.”

Thursdays are the one official day of rest for the Missionaries of Charity and for the volunteers. It is also the day when many volunteers take the hour-long train ride to Titagarh to visit one of Mother Teresa’s leper colonies, Gandhiji Prem Nivas (Abode of Love).

During my stay in Calcutta, I visited the colony twice and had the opportunity to photograph and videotape interviews with patients, Brothers of the Missionaries of Charity, and numerous volunteers. It was a powerful journey for all of us who made it because we could truly see the extent of Mother Teresa’s commitment to helping those most in need.

When she turned her attention to the plight of lepers in India, she was able to reverse an extremely sad predicament for some of the country’s most neglected people into a positive and thriving enterprise. There are about 12,000,000 leprosy cases worldwide, most of them in Asia, with some 4,000,000 in India.

Mother Teresa set up her first mobile leprosy clinic in 1957, followed by the construction of facilities that would provide medical care, dormitories, schools for the children of lepers, and the resources that would make the lepers self-sufficient. Today there is a Missionaries of Charity leprosy station in most Third World countries.

**T**he British built an enormous railroad network throughout India that still serves as the main form of long distance travel. It is also a magnet that attracts, among others, lepers who are often found by volunteers or the Brothers of the Missionaries of Charity, who either treat them medically or bring them to one of the leper villages.

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**L**ined up along Sudder Street — home to most of the volunteers — rickshaws wait for business. The world's oldest form of wheeled transportation, the Indian rickshaw remains the primary method of moving people from one place to another.



# CHAPTER 7

## *Sudder Street*

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**A** FEW DAYS AFTER MY FIRST VISIT to Mother Teresa's leper colony, I began to visit some of the hotels and dormitories where many of the volunteers stay while in Calcutta. Sudder Street is the main tourist artery of Calcutta, particularly for young people traveling around India. There are what appear to be an endless number of cheap hotels and inexpensive restaurants that serve Western food. Sudder Street was my home for a few weeks while I stayed at the Fairlawn Hotel.

Directly across the street from my pleasant accommodations was the Salvation Army hostel, home for many young men who were working as long-term volunteers. One evening shortly after my first encounter with George, I visited him in his dormitory for the purpose of videotaping an in-depth interview with him. When I stepped through the front door, I immediately smelled the stale air and noted that the dusty walls were badly in need of painting. A guard pointed me in the direction of George's room that was on the ground floor facing noisy Sudder Street. George was lying on a narrow cot talking with several Frenchmen who also worked as volunteers with Mother Teresa.

Lines of rope hung from the walls, clothes piled over them, some drying, but most of the blue jeans had no other place to be stored except in suitcases that were under the beds or next to the cots. An old fluorescent light dimly lit the room, and a few tables were littered with plastic water bottles, shaving supplies, and bottles of shampoo.

The men seemed perfectly content in their surroundings as they lounged on their beds sharing their experiences as volunteers among themselves and then with me. I sat at the end of George's bed, flipped on my video camera, and let the men talk for the next hour. Their testimonies were profound and filled with their burning desire to find greater meaning in their lives.

Lying on his bed, an arm supporting his head, George began by telling me about an experience he had that morning with a patient at Kalighat. "He [the

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## CHAPTER

# 8

### *Kalighat — Home for the Dying and Destitute*



ONCE MOTHER TERESA GAVE ME PERMISSION to photograph the Mission's facilities, my enthusiasm took over — as it always does when I'm behind a camera. But after a few weeks of working in the context of both a volunteer and a photographer, I found myself exhausted. Coping with Calcutta was tiring in itself. After Mass one morning, Mother Teresa approached me and suggested that instead of taking so many pictures, that I should consider working as a volunteer at Kalighat.

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Except for those very personal moments with Mother Teresa, I found that my experience in Calcutta up until that morning leaned more toward the role of an observer rather than a participant. I was accustomed to being the photographer and focusing on others doing their work. But now Mother Teresa was forcing me to put down the cameras in order to relate to her mission on a deeper level. The process of finding commitment through an open heart that began with my sick husband would be given a new meaning when I had to relate to strangers who were dying.

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I looked at Mother Teresa with mixed emotions. I loved her for caring enough about me to give me this direction, but I also perceived her as a teacher who was challenging her student to go beyond her level of endurance or what she considered her limitations.

← "Heaven is found by serving the lowliest."

— Mother Teresa

**M**other Teresa's original mission, Nirmal Hriday — the place of the pure heart — has treated nearly 100,000 people over the past thirty years.

By this time, I had also changed accommodations and moved to the less expensive Circular Hotel across the street from Motherhouse. It was here that I developed a

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**T**he city of Varanasi on the River Ganges is one of the oldest cities in the world. It is the place where Buddha preached his first sermon and where most of the world's religions are represented. Alongside the famous temples and palaces is a home for the dying operated by the Missionaries of Charity and supposedly once owned by a King of Nepal.

## CHAPTER

# *Varanasi: City of Pilgrims — and Mother Teresa's Home for the Dying*



**I**N PREPARATION FOR MY OVERNIGHT TRAIN RIDE to Varanasi, I bought chains and locks to strap my camera equipment to my bunk. After I had crossed the river on a ferry to the Howrah railroad station and entered the frenetic chaos of one of India's busiest stations, I was suddenly overcome with terror at the prospect of taking this second journey alone.

I managed to locate my train and climbed the dusty, iron stairs of the second class, air-conditioned compartment. I was fortunate to obtain a ticket on short notice due to a tourist quota that restricts the number of seats for foreigners. Reservations must be made well in advance. India's railroad transportation system, developed under the British rule, is still the main form of travel in the country. Although the airline industry has expanded over the last few years, it is still far too expensive for most people.

When I found my bottom bunk, an Indian couple who shared the same cubicle were already preparing their home-cooked food out of metal containers. Later they told me that they were making their yearly pilgrimage to their Guru's ashram in a city a few stops past Varanasi. As I secured my camera bags, it suddenly occurred to me that I had completely forgotten about bringing food and only had a bottle of water to sustain me. After the train left the station a vendor came by with a tray filled with hot, spicy meals in cardboard boxes. I knew better than to put my fragile stomach through that challenge.

I had been told at the tourist office that this was an express train and that we would arrive in Varanasi by the following morning. Instead, I was shocked to discover that it was a mail train and that we would stop at every station along the route. For the next twenty hours I tried to fill my empty stomach with crackers and water which I had brought with me. Fortunately I caught up on much needed sleep and between naps ventured out onto the railroad platforms to videotape some very colorful scenes.

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**F**inal vows handwritten by each of the novices — many stay up all night to prepare them — held tightly in the hand of Mother Teresa.

# CHAPTER 10

## *Final Vows — Special Mass*

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**A** FEW DAYS AFTER RETURNING TO CALCUTTA from Varanasi, Sister Deena who oversaw the volunteers asked me if I would be interested in photographing two very special ceremonies for the Motherhouse at the end of November. One was a Mass during which the novices would be taking their first vows and the other was a Mass for the Sisters taking their final vows as lifelong members of the Missionaries of Charity.

I was stunned by this request since, as a rule, Mother Teresa and her organization rarely requested such services from a photographer. But now I was being given the opportunity to document the most sacred events of the year held by the Missionaries of Charity. I would be working for the woman I most admired in the world! I told Sister Deena that I would be leaving for a brief trip to Bangalore, but would return to Calcutta in time for both masses.

Two weeks later, I registered for a second time at the Circular Hotel. In preparation for my assignment I had purchased film in Bangalore, but the battery pack for my flash unit was out of power. The recharger had blown up — overheated by the Indian electricity system. As a photographer, I was in a terrible dilemma. I didn't have the technical equipment necessary for my assignment.

As a last resort, I tracked down a camera repair shop in an alley behind a clothing merchandise warehouse. The man who owned the shop couldn't help me but was very considerate, sending one of his employees to accompany me to scout for electrical stores that might carry a compatible unit for my flash. We walked through the maze of streets near Howrah Station and into half a dozen shops without success.

I prayed on a street corner for a few seconds, and then my companion and I crossed the street to the last shop in the area. The tall man behind the counter took one look at my battery and without a word, turned and found a contraption on the shelf. He cut a few wires and plugged it into my unit. I was astonished to see a green light suddenly turn on. It actually worked!

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# CHAPTER

## *Final Blessing*



**A**FTER THE FINAL VOWS CEREMONIES, I flew to a spiritual community in South India to meet my new husband for Christmas. One month later he flew back to Atlanta, and I decided to make a last journey to Calcutta for what would become Mother Teresa's final blessing.

I was very nauseous when I boarded the plane for this third trip to Calcutta. Within a few days I discovered that I was pregnant. When I received the joyous news in a small medical clinic, I knew that God had intervened. "Finally," I thought, "I'm going to have a baby."

I quickly made preparations to return to the United States. The night before my departure, I took my last rickshaw ride to Motherhouse for the Hour of Adoration. I prayed that I would be able to personally say good-bye to Mother Teresa.

She was seated in her usual position on her mat near the door. I looked at her and silently asked her not to disappear after the rosary. However, before the hour was over, Mother Teresa got up and walked out the door. I looked at the statue of the Virgin Mary and thanked her for this memorable time in my life.

When I walked out into the corridor, Mother Teresa was leaning on the verandah wall. I was so relieved to see her and immediately walked up to her. She looked at me with a knowing glance and placed her hand over my head. I felt the radiance of her touch traveling to my womb. I told her that I was going home. "Oh, to New York?" she asked me. "No, to Atlanta," I responded. "Please give my Sisters there my love." Those were her final words to me. She seemed so frail, yet so strong as I gazed one last time into those eyes that reflected wisdom and kindness



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**“** I must not attempt to control God's actions. I must not count the stages in the journey he would have me make. I must not desire a clear perception of my advance along the road. Nor know precisely where I am on the way to holiness. I ask him to make a saint of me, yet I must leave to him the choice of the means which lead to it.”

— Mother Teresa



# CHAPTER 12

## *Woman of the Century*

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**M**OTHER TERESA'S STRONG DESIRE TO BECOME A NUN in the slums of Calcutta was eventually answered. However, there was a long waiting period. She had taken the route required. She joined the Loretto Order and spent her time in Ireland before being sent to India. But there was always an irresistible urge to go outside of the safe walls of the convent and to work directly with the poorest of the poor. These desires drove her, and as a result, she became one of the greatest influences on humanity in our time.

I roamed the streets of Calcutta for months. I walked on the railroad tracks where so many of the poor lived in cardboard boxes. But I could never hope to see these people through Mother Teresa's eyes.

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The British had left Calcutta behind and Mother Teresa rediscovered it. The city was graced by having a living saint in their midst. She went to the people in the slums and gave them her heart. "Come and see," she said. I could only see a glimpse of what she saw through those beautiful eyes, but I feel so fortunate to have been in her presence and to have looked into the soul of compassion.

I first met her two years before she died. It was near the end of the twentieth century. She was a woman who wore a cross near her heart. She never publicized her work, but she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

If there is a prize awarded for the Woman of the Century, I believe it would go to Mother Teresa. She embodied the message that we hope will grow more prevalent in the new century — the message of love.

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