



Death with the flies

Valerie: a smile may seem incongruous set against this text and yet the photo still represents the person she is - a person with a loving and tender heart, who has not remained unchanged by her experience.

Yesterday Ruby and I went for our regular hospital visit. Once again we visited the female ward where women are dying of Aids and TB.

These thin malnourished women basically, without exaggeration, lie on their beds awaiting death. The ward has no character; just bare walls, basic beds and a dirty floor. Several kittens and their mother were playing around under the beds, oblivious to the sufferings around them. Life had just started for these kittens, with a new world to explore. These women, however, are dying in an awful and lonely place.

We continued down the ward, and there was a dead body under a dirty blanket. I thought she was sleeping or resting, but the other patients shouted that she was dead. No one was beside the dead body, no one was crying for her, no one was holding her. She had recently passed away. Ruby reminded me that a lot of these women are abandoned because they are prostitutes.

Two beds down, there is another dying woman, minutes or hours from death. Ruby said she was in a coma and her breathing was very irregular. Once again no one beside her, no one crying for her, no one holding her... only the flies on her face were

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keeping her company. I felt so sad and depressed; I can't express my feelings of despair. I said to Ruby that we needed to pray! I felt this need with urgency and panic. I prayed, but words are limited; it didn't express to God what I really felt. I touched the woman's forehead and she was cold; I wanted to make her feel the warmth of my hand and comfort her. There was a look of hopelessness on her face. I prayed I would see her in

heaven. This is surely the worst type of death to experience, being alone in your last moments on earth. I hope to see her in heaven, without pain and being loved.

Just before leaving the ward, we saw two men with a metal stretcher coming to collect the dead body. The other patients looked on. Were they thinking, 'Am I next?'' What a way to end life.

I will never forget this day. Thank God for everything: for good health, food, clean water, family, friends, shelter, everything. I don't understand suffering; in heaven, I'll ask.

Valerie Dehaene, a nurse, went with Interserve England & Wales to Pune, India, for most of 2004 through Interserve's short-term programme, On Track. Dr Ruby continues to persevere as a volunteer doctor in the red light area in Pune; please pray for her. Valerie is at present studying at All Nations Christian College, England.