

## Diary of a Medical Journey

By: Patricia Hansen and Judith Williams Source: AARP Bulletin Today Date Posted:

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Patricia Hansen, 59, of Soldotna, Alaska, traveled to New Delhi, India in July for hip surgery. She brought along good friend and travel companion Judith Williams. The following is a daily journal of their medical journey.

### Judith Williams

Our Med Journey adventure started in Seattle **July 3, 2007**, when Patricia flew from Anchorage Seattle and I flew from Spokane to Seattle. From that point on, we have been pampered and treated like visiting royalty, which is a treatment we've taken to completely and easily.

We flew from Seattle to Newark, New Jersey, and were gratefully met by a flight attendant with wheelchair for Patricia. He saw to getting us situated for our next flight, our last leg of our journey to New Delhi. We appreciated the fact that our flights were well arranged in that we had minimal layovers. Our flight to New Delhi was about 14 hours long but we slept most of the time. The food served gave us an introduction as to what we would experience in India if we chose to eat the Indian cuisine and was very good.

We landed around 10:30 p.m., **Wednesday, July 4**, and were again met with a wheelchair and taken to the front of the customs and immigration line at the airport. We exchanged our American currency for some rupees in the airport and then met Prabha Chawla, who then took over and assumed our care for our next 24 days in India. Prabha is a jewel of India in that our needs aren't too small or too great for her to attend to. Whatever our needs or concerns, we can ask for and receive her support. She met us at the airport with beautiful marigold leis, bottles of ice-cold water and moist towels for us to refresh ourselves from our long journey.

As we traveled a short distance by car through the busy streets of New Delhi to the Max Specialty Hospital, I was grateful for our Indian driver, who safely dodged other traffic, pedestrians, and Brahman cows so that we arrived safely at the hospital. We quickly went to our room, had a delicious late dinner of Indian cuisine and retired for the night exhausted but excited to be in New Delhi, and for Patricia to be receiving a hip resurfacing.

Thursday morning around 5:30, we awakened ready to assess our new surroundings and to start the pre-op investigations or, as we say in America, the pre-op tests. At 8 a.m. we ate a mid-morning bowl of soup, lunch a little after noon, another bowl of soup at 5:30-ish, and at 8:30 p.m. we were served an Indian dinner. Patricia passed all her investigations with flying colors and met with Dr. Marya, who gave her encouragement regarding her surgery scheduled for the following day.

The Max Specialty Hospital is a beautiful, clean building in good repair with beautiful green marble floors. I feel the hospital as a health facility is good and I can't say much beyond that about the hospital structure and equipment. However, I can comment at length about the hospital staff and the personal care rendered by the doctors, nurses and other support staff. The doctors were caring and took time with Patricia to answer her questions and to reassure her.

The nurses almost felt like permanent fixtures in our room in that they were in and out so much tending to Patricia's care. When she had to ring for a nurse, the nurse would come promptly to the room. All the hospital staff spoke English, though some were more easily understood than others. I had spent nine days in a large university hospital in the state of Washington in April with my son, who had pancreas and kidney transplants, and a week with my mother in a hospital in Arizona, just prior to coming to Max Specialty with Patricia. It has been interesting to see the differences and similarities in the three hospitals. While Patricia is the patient who receives the surgery and the hospital care, I wouldn't hesitate to have surgery here.

It's **Friday, July 6**, and Patricia is in surgery while I await a visit from Dr. Marya, who will tell me how the surgery went. Our hospital room has a very large picture window and a balcony, though we can't go out on it. Indian birds come and perch on the railing and look out over the beautiful

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green canopy of trees below. Through breaks in the canopy, I can see some of a game of cricket being played, which appears to be an informal game since no uniforms are worn. Food Service staff came to ask if I enjoyed breakfast and to inquire what I wish to eat for lunch. At 11 a.m., Dr. Marya and his colleagues enter the room to tell me all went well with Patricia's surgery, that she is in the ICU, and that I'll be able to see her for a short, 10-minute visit in about 20 minutes.

...I just returned from that visit. Patricia looks and sounds good and is relieved the resurfacing surgery went well. I've spent the rest of the day catching up on my reading and visiting with hospital staff. I enjoyed a visit with Prabha, who dropped in to check on Patricia's surgery and to, of course, ask as she always does, "Do you need anything?"

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**Saturday, July 7** I've been reading books about India that Prabha brought me, taking naps and visiting with hospital staff. It's impossible to feel lonely here because it seems I'm never alone. Late in the afternoon, Patricia was brought back to the room from the ICU. She looks very good and is happy.

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**Sunday, July 8**, has been a lazy day as we eat, nap and visit all day. We called home and spoke with our families. Prabha called to check on us and to ask, "Do you need anything?" I can see improvement in Patricia as each day passes.

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**Monday, July 9** we called home to family and friends, visited with staff, read and mostly napped. Patricia is looking and feeling better and better.

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**Tuesday, July 10** Patricia is experiencing some intestinal discomfort. Right away the doctors are taking care to make sure she is OK. The doctors check on her later in the day and tell her she will be discharged from the hospital and will go to the guest house Wednesday afternoon.

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**Wednesday, July 11** Patricia is still experiencing some intestinal discomfort and is worried she won't be discharged today, as the doctors told her yesterday. After examining her, Dr. Marya discharged her and we were able to come to the guest house with our fearless and tireless leader, Prabha. We have met members of the Bhutani family, who have helped us get settled into our very comfortable room, where we will reside until the end of our India adventure. I'm beginning to wonder if all the people in India are so hospitable and gracious as the hospital staff, Prabha, and now the Bhutani family. The move from the hospital to the guest house was tiring for Patricia, so we were served a delicious three-course dinner in our room at the guest house. We will welcome a good night's sleep.

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**Thursday, July 12** We've had breakfast in the main house and Pat has received her physical therapy from the therapist, who came to the guest house and will come daily for a week or more, depending on Patricia's needs. We enjoyed eating lunch and visiting with another American, Derrick, who has come through Med Journeys for a knee problem. It's nice to be here in this quiet and peaceful setting at the guest house after the hustle and bustle of the hospital.

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**Friday, July 13** Today we stayed in the room most of the day except for going to meals and Pat walking outside for exercise. We're enjoying getting to know the Bhutani family, who are very kind and caring people. We pelt them with questions about India's government, the people, agriculture and places to visit. It's such a nice convenience for Pat to have her physical therapy here at the guest house for an hour every day. Having to go to the hospital would have been very tiring and time-consuming for her.

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**Saturday, July 14** Pat is feeling a little funny today and is resting more. I'm trying to get caught up on my journal and e-mailing. Many of Pat's and my friends and family members in the States have been supportive of our trip to India for Pat's surgery, which has made this whole experience much easier.

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**Sunday, July 15** Today we attended church for an hour. From the time we left the house until we returned, we were gone for 2 hours. Pat felt good the entire time and was able to maneuver around in her walker just fine.

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**Monday, July 16** We are living proof of the old adage, "Good things come to those who wait,"

because today Pat felt stronger and more energized, so that we were able to go on a city tour of Old and New Delhi. Our driver took us to the beautiful and impressive Red Fort Palace of the Mughal Empire. Its enormity astounds me. We also saw the India Gate, which was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens. It's a memorial to the 90,000 Indian soldiers who died in World War I. We went by the attractive Parliament and other government buildings. At the Qutb Minar, Pat felt like getting out and walking, so we were able to get close to the tower and took some great pictures. A nice park bench was available in the shade for Pat to rest a while. We were both impressed with the age and beauty of the tower and wondered how many people had been involved in its lengthy construction.

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**Tuesday, July 17** Today we tried to go shopping but first had to try to get some money; we weren't able to succeed at that. Then we went to shop at Delhi Haat and the part we needed to shop in was closed. We came back to the guest house and after talking with Rita, who knows all and who told us how to get money and when to go to Delhi Haat, we planned what we'll do tomorrow.

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**Wednesday, July 18** Today we were able to get money, as instructed by Rita. Then we shopped at Delhi Haat until Pat began to feel tired. We were only window-shopping for about an hour but it was good because we saw what was available.

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**Thursday, July 19** Pat had her physical therapy. The doctor said she was progressing nicely with it and told her what she had to look forward to as far as her recuperation. Pat asked him several questions, which he answered. She appreciates how thorough he is with her therapy and in explaining different aspects of it.

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**Friday, July 20** Today, after going to the bank for more money, Pat, Derek and I met Prabha and we all went to lunch at the elegant and majestic Imperial Hotel, where I took picture after picture, trying to capture its grandeur to enjoy again when I get back to Kettle Falls. For some things, I know I'll have to have picture proof when I tell the folks back home about India.

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**Saturday, July 21** When I found out I was coming to India, I decided my 60th birthday gift was going to be an elephant ride. Today, I got my gift. Prabha and I went to Jaipur, Rajasthan. Pat wasn't up to making the trip. Prabha and I left at about 6:30 in the morning. As we drove, I was glad we had our competent driver so I could nap and leave the driving to him. When we reached Jaipur, we went directly to the magnificent Amber Fort Palace with our Indian guide, who was a young girl, very knowledgeable in the history of the area. She took us through Amber Fort, telling us all sorts of interesting facts about the construction of the palace, the maharajahs and their wives. Finding out the interesting measures used to cool the palace in the summer and warm it in the winter were of particular interest to me.

After leaving the palace, we went into the town of Amber for me to ride the elephant. The elephant's trainer had it get down low enough for me to get on with the help of a three-rung steel ladder. Then, with the trainer sitting on the elephant's neck and me sitting on the platform attached to its back, the trainer told the elephant to get up. I hung on, and before I knew it the elephant was standing up and we were on our way through the ancient streets of Amber.

Indian men along the streets were cheering me for riding. After we had gone about three blocks, the trainer turned the elephant around and we headed back to where I had gotten on. I had only wanted a 15-minute ride and for Prabha to take pictures with my camera. We had only just turned around to head back when we met a camel pulling a cart. Suddenly the elephant did a very fast about-face and began running away from the camel. The trainer was shouting at the elephant, trying to get it to stop while I held on for dear life. The elephant suddenly hung a right and went down a different street, still running. I had no idea that ponderous pachyderm could move so quickly.

The trainer was able to get it to stop with his commands and the elephant prod he used, but the end of the prod fell to the street with a clunk next to a man who was standing nearby. I expected the trainer to ask the man to pick up the piece that fell and hand it to him but instead, the trainer commanded the elephant to back up and then to pick up the piece and hand it to him. I was amazed the elephant was able to pick up the piece of metal so easily and then obediently hand it to

the trainer. With the prod all put together once again, we returned to where my elephant ride had begun. Prabha took more pictures while I dismounted. I can't wait to tell my five-year-old grandson, Keaton, about my exciting ride on a runaway elephant. What a thrilling gift for turning 60!

Prabha, our guide and I had a delicious Indian lunch at an elegant restaurant in Amber and then went to the City Palace to see the weapons, art, and fabric museums, which were all interesting and took me further back in time. There is so much beauty and history here. I've enjoyed seeing the camel-drawn carts that are used to carry heavy construction loads of stone, brick and sand. This area is so different from Delhi and gives me a whole different perspective of India, making me wish I could visit all its states. We shopped for souvenirs and I bought an authentically wrapped Rajasthan turban that has been tied in place. I can't wait to take my grandson's picture in it so I can e-mail it to the Bhutani family and Prabha.

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**Sunday, July 22** Today we went to church and stayed all three hours, since Pat is feeling so strong. We enjoyed all three meetings and said goodbye to the nice folks there, who wished Pat good health in her recovery and for us to have a safe trip home. Tomorrow is Monday and we'll go shopping before Pat sees Dr. Marya. She has some questions to ask him and she is looking forward to getting her stitches out.

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### Patricia Hansen

First, I would really like to thank Judith for the effort she has put into this project in benefit of AARP. If it hadn't been for her, I am afraid you would have received nothing. I hope you will appreciate the benefit and doggedness she has put forth in getting computers to work, bringing over her own computer, which will now probably need complete reconfiguring when she gets back to the States. It looks like India may not be an "Apple-friendly" country.

I will also say that Judith has been the "companion supreme." Of course, we have been friends for a very long time; but her sunny disposition has been keeping me from needing a total attitude adjustment here for a few days, due to this stomach problem I have been having. I think it is almost over but still have no appetite [which is quite OK, actually, for a fat girl like me :) ]. Everyone seems very concerned to make sure that we eat and eat, but since feeling this way, I not only have no appetite but also feel almost nauseated at the smell of the Indian cooking. I never eat potato chips, but they and a dish of ice cream and a hunk of chocolate cake (fabulous!) at dinner last night are the best-looking things I've laid eyes on.

I would fully recommend Judith as a "hired companion" (well paid, of course) to anyone (that she likes, of course) who is planning a medical traveling vacation. I am sure she will delete this part when she sees it.

OK, now to the matters at hand. I have no problems with anything that Judith has written above. She is correct and Med Journeys has been a wonderful facilitating company. Would I do it again? Well, I am just hoping and praying hard that I never have to have surgery again anywhere or anyplace. And no, I probably would not do it again if I could help it, as I will explain next.

I promised I would not "sugar-coat," but I will say that I believe that my main discomforts stem from my own tendency to be so very homebound and I stress over leaving for one week, much less three and a half of them. In fact, I don't believe I have ever been gone that long except while young and attending college, etc.

I do not have the same experience that Judith has had in being in hospitals. My knee surgery was in a day clinic, and the other, years ago, was an overnigher in my own home town of Soldotna. But I have heard horror stories from hospitals all through the United States, not that I believe that is the norm. However, they can and do happen and far more frequently that we would ever wish for. Hospitals in the States, many of them, also have a good number of non-great English speakers, perhaps even very poor English speakers. I mention that because thus far I have not heard an overseas horror story. Everyone I have spoken to regarding it (who has actual experience) has been very positive.

The language situation here has been mostly that the nurses and many staff are actually pretty good at getting across the basics. Seems the higher up the command chain, the better they are. But I would have preferred to have been able to ask more questions and understood things better.

Again, especially living in the "lower 48" (as we say in Alaska), I realize that the incidence of having staff people who can not converse freely is much more common.

I do not in any way mean to sound negative. Travel has never been something I'm inclined towards. Call me a dud. But it is the way I turned out and even though I thought I was changing during the preparatory weeks of getting ready, I can see that I have not changed too much. If I had it to do again I probably would have just forced us (my husband and me) to have paid the higher price in the U.S. But please, in a few days, I may be feeling entirely different, as I should be out of this stomach jag I am in.

The hip feels great. I am in awe of Dr. Marya and his staff. I believe I received a first-rate surgery. And now the physical therapist is also just as good. And the guest house is wonderful for sure. I am not sure I am in love with the six-inch foam mats that make the bed, but it is probably good for me. And Prabha says she can bring me a foam pad, but I am going to see if I can get used to it.

And so, that is it for me at the moment. I will hand this laptop back to Judith and see if she has any additions. We will be talking to you on the phone tonight.

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OK, here I am attempting a little journaling in Judith's laptop. I don't think I can come up with much that Judith hasn't already written about. AND note that I have waited until it is less than a week before we climb back on that big jetliner and zoom back up north and west towards the world from which we came. Did we mention that the plane from Newark flew north, over Iceland? And then east until it pretty much came down straight south into India. Must have needed to miss some dangerous air spaces, even way up there, or else it meant a curvature of the earth and shorter route thing. We don't know.

So, guess I'll just jump around. Otherwise I'll get in over my head and not even come close to finishing. Today is Saturday, the 21st of July, and Madame Elephant Desirer, Judith W. herself, has gone off on a sightseeing car trip with Ms. Prabha Chawla. Right now they are gone for 15 hours and probably will end up more. I stayed home and finished reading a good book named *Tisha*, about a very young woman who goes north to turn-of-the-century Alaska, to teach school in a white settlement, and encounters incredible racial discrimination. Sorry about that. It was pretty awful but is a nice and compelling story.

Well, whatever, I am stalling on this project to be sure. OK, there went Judith Anne on an all-day trip and I, being the wimp patient, stayed here in the room and completed my book. Oh, and saw the physical therapist this morning as well. It has been a nice quiet day albeit a little lonely, all three meals in the guest house ALL BY MYSELF! And yes, I ate a few cookies from the cookie package left here by those people who don't seem to care what they leave laying about. I am looking forward to hearing all the stories, seeing all the pictures, and especially the loot that Judith may have fallen into on her trip. I didn't specifically ask her to, but perhaps she has brought a few scarves (Cashmere) for me too.

Not many e-mails came in for me today, but there are a couple for Judith. OK! Yesterday was Friday and we did go out into the big city and found some places to shop. The first place was on the street and so of course we were subject to the constant pestering of the street people. I am telling you, they do not leave you alone. If you are American they figure you have money and should be buying whatever they have to sell. It just makes me want to run and leave. I did purchase some items though: two large bedspreads, four pillow coverings (none matching, of course), and a cute little glass globe clock that I figured maybe for Miles' birthday coming up next week. What else? OK, then after that we went in the Central Cottage Industries Emporium, which is inside, air-conditioned, very posh, of course not subject to the beggars and pleaders. In fact, they pretty much leave you alone except when you nearly break something. We also purchased some items here. Really nice things, of course, and more expensive, also of course.

On the coming-up Monday (the 23rd), we are going shopping again somewhere, probably the less expensive street-type places, where we'll once more be mobbed by the street vendors. After that we will go to the hospital, where my doctor appointment is at 3:00. I've been calling the thick padding over my hip stitches a "squirrel in my pocket" because that is what it feels and look like, sticking way out there. Then, when it gets hot and sticky and I am getting in and out of cars, it also feels like that squirrel is biting me with its little teeth. That is the bandaging I guess, pulling on my skin and hair.

I have to admit I have seen and had about enough of Delhi City driving. However, it never gets actually boring, just enough of it. So much to look at. So much of it is just as you have seen from *National Geographic* magazine. The terrible poor, the young men pulling tremendous loads on rickety bicycles. You are amazed at the strength AND balance that would be required to keep the thing upright as they are pedaling, sometimes getting off to go up hills. Amazing! Then, you might spot a couple of them, bikes unloaded, resting from their work in a precarious perch UPON their bikes somewhere in the shade while awaiting another load, I would presume. I wonder what they might earn for that work. Sometimes 20-foot-long poles or giant packages of something are tied and balanced on those bikes.

I see businessmen carrying briefcases to and from work on mopeds and motorcycles, obviously the most common and perhaps preferred mode of transportation. Young women, their wives perhaps, sometimes with a small child on the lap, sit side-saddle behind them, an arm casually around their waists and one on the grip behind. Balance seems to be an art form in this country. You see the bikes, the motorbikes, and three-wheel motorized cars, and the nice Toyota cars, all zigging, zagging, darting and filling any space that opens up at any time. That more road accidents and that pure road rage do not seem to happen regularly is a pure miracle!

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