

Lucky encounter

Doctor is among last to visit with Mother Teresa in India

By Anne Sullivan
Staff Writer

ALLEN PARK — Sometimes luck is on your side and an opportunity of a lifetime comes along.

For Dr. Raj Gupta and his wife Lata, it was a mixture of luck, patience, good timing and who they knew that opened a window of opportunity for them that probably will never be equaled.

On a recent trip to India, the couple were able to meet with Mother Teresa at her Calcutta mission four days before the Nobel Peace Prize-winning Roman Catholic nun died.

Gupta, a plastic surgeon, has practiced at Henry Ford Wyandotte Hospital and has had an office on Southfield Road in Allen Park for 23 years.

A NATURALIZED citizen, Gupta has been in this country for 30 years. He was born in India and

periodically returns to his native land.

If he ever made it to Calcutta, Gupta had said he wanted to visit the nun who founded the Missionaries of Charity.

As luck would have it, on his last visit to India, Gupta and his wife arranged for a trip to Calcutta. It was not a short journey. The Guptas usually visit Nahan, a town 200 miles from New Delhi and about 1,000 miles from Calcutta.

On Sept. 1, their last day in Calcutta, the Guptas were sitting in the mission wondering if they would be able to see Mother Teresa.

"I AM NOT a Christian," Gupta said. "I am Hindu. But this lady, she passed through any religious barriers. She doesn't look at us as Hindu or Christian. She takes care of everyone. She was loved by

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Granting a rare visit, Mother Teresa met with Dr. Raj Gupta (left) of Allen Park. The doctor was visiting Calcutta, India, Sept. 1 and had always wanted to meet the Roman Catholic nun who founded the Missionaries of Charity. Mother Teresa died four days after the visit.



Mother Teresa gives a religious medal and prayer card to Dr. Raj Gupta (right). The Allen Park plastic surgeon visited her mission in Calcutta, India, Sept. 1. The doctor, his wife, Lata, and some relatives visited the mission and only hours before they were leaving the city met the world-renowned Roman Catholic nun.

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everyone. She did a lot for the poor."

The Guptas had an inside track to visit with Mother Teresa since a distant relative had done fund-raising work for the mission and was trying to make the arrangements.

It was hours before their flight back to New Delhi and still no word.

Mother Teresa had been in poor health and usually didn't greet visitors, he said. But she would come to the window from 9:30 to 10 a.m. every day and wave to and bless the people who had gathered.

THEY SAT on a bench in a barren hall in the mission beside a chalk board that posted a special Mass for Princess Diana, who had died the day before, and asked for prayers for her family.

"Her mission was spic and span, absolutely clean," Gupta said. "Everyone was working. It was amazing to see such dedication. It's a very modest type of setting, but clean. That's what impressed me. No frills."

Around 11 a.m., word came that Mother Teresa would see them.

"We were waiting, and the next thing she was there," he said. "I just couldn't say anything."

POOR HEALTH had forced the 87-year-old nun to use a wheelchair. There was no entourage. She was wheeled in by another nun, and when he was face to face with her, Gupta said he was in awe.

"I was totally overwhelmed," he said.

She broke the ice. And they spoke with her for 10 minutes.

"I said to her, 'You do great work; please keep it up. We need you,'" Gupta said.

Though he had thought about how it would be meeting Mother Teresa, Gupta said it was like nothing he had imagined.

He said she was humble and had her mission in her heart.

AFTER GREETING her guests, Mother Teresa asked them if they had any items they could donate to the mission.

"She asked for shoes, clothes, anything we cannot use," he said. "She said, 'Anything you cannot use, our people can use it. I'm a first-class beggar.'"

Mother Teresa gave Gupta and his wife a medal of the Virgin Mary and a prayer card. He asked for and received medals to give to the employees in his office.

Before leaving, he made a donation to the mission.

When he heard that Mother Teresa had died four days after he saw her, he was stunned.

The physician said he realizes how fortunate he was to have met with her.

The Guptas are returning to India in December for a family wedding, and he said if they had waited until then, it would have been too late.

ALTHOUGH THEY only spent 10 minutes with Mother Teresa in the

Calcutta mission, he and his wife have memories to last a lifetime.

Mother Teresa signed an autograph book and wrote a blessing for them.

She also made another exception for the Guptas, allowing photographs to be taken. She didn't normally do that because she didn't want to commercialize the mission, Gupta said.

He said he knew he had a special opportunity when he met with her, but he didn't realize how special until her death.

"She was looked at as a holy person rather than a nun," Gupta said. "To be in that presence is something remarkable. It takes a while to get over it. I am fortunate. It was a chance in a lifetime."