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The X-rated Newsletter or Donkeys Don't Smile: Sex and Love in India

By Richard D. Connerney

MARCH 2006

On a recent car trip through the Punjab with an Indian woman, I was startled to find our path blocked by two copulating donkeys. The rutting beasts were snorting and braying with wild abandon in the middle of a narrow village road, such that our car could not go around them, and we had to wait patiently for their encounter to end. After a few minutes, the male donkey dismounted, stuck his snout toward the car window, hee-hawed, and then bared his teeth in what looked to me like a smile of victory.

I laughed. I couldn't help myself. I had never witnessed donkey sex before and found it difficult to keep a straight face. My friend found nothing funny about the situation, however. She told me to stop laughing. "Just ignore these things," she said. "There is nothing funny about it."

"But, did you see the male donkey?" I asked. "He was *smiling*, he really was."

She looked at me with an angry expression. "Donkey's don't smile," she said gravely and turned towards the window.

If donkeys caught in *flagrante delicto* elicit this type of reaction from a single Indian woman, I wondered what type of reaction mating humans would have. To find out, I bought a copy of the September 26th edition of the *India Today*, which had conducted an India-wide survey of women's sexual habits and attitudes. The enthusiastic editor the magazine hailed the results of this poll of unmarried, urban Indian women aged 18-30 as an indication that "young urban singletons are shaking off years of conservatism and asserting their sexuality."¹ Some of the statistics reported in the survey backed up his claim. Over 60 percent of Indian women said that sex was either "important" or "very important," 33 percent had read erotic literature. Sixty-three percent believed in equal pleasure for men and women.

Other statistics, however, indicated that, even among the young of urban India, conservative attitudes toward sex were still widespread. Seventy-six percent of 18- to 30-year-olds had never had a sexual relationship, 46 percent had never had a boyfriend, 71 percent refused to marry a man if he was not a virgin, 32 percent said that oral sex was "okay" and 55 percent did not know what an orgasm was. Several aspects of the survey's findings made me wonder whether the women surveyed were wholly honest with the interviewer. For example, I had a difficult time believing that Indian women's "hottest fantasy" is "man in water with you." Either there is something I am missing about the municipal swimming pool or these women have simply chosen the most innocuous and innocent-sounding answer out of a list of possible answers. Also, the claim that 82 percent of the survey's participants had never masturbated also flew in the face of Kinsey and everything I understood about human sexuality.²

Admittedly, my views on sex are typical of a 30-something from New York

¹ The sample is further qualified as "urban" and "from higher income brackets."

² *India Today* 9/26/05 pgs. 31-61.

City. Excepting bestiality, non-consensual sex and statutory rape, there are not many sexual practices I consider categorically unethical. But even taking my “live and let live” bias into account, it never fails to amaze me that India, the home of the *Kama Sutra*, is seemingly so prudish. Soon after the survey was published, Kushboo, an Indian film star, commented on the survey, remarking that pre-marital sex was “correct.” Right-wing political groups used her remarks to underscore the decaying values of Indian womanhood, and a faction of lawyers in South India demanded Kushboo be prosecuted for committing a crime.³ During a recent conversation in Delhi with a European-educated Indian man in his late 30s, the same conservatism was apparent. When I mentioned that I was writing something on sex in India, my friend responded “This type of thing—where women are doing everything before marriage—only happens in the cities. In the country there is no such thing.”



Kushboo, an Indian film actress, was the target of right-wing anger over her positive take on pre-marital sex. Even western style magazines like Maxim ridiculed her.

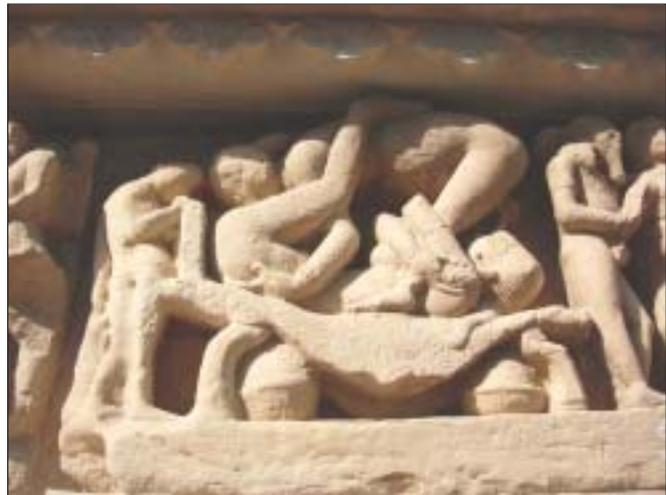
Will You Be My Valentine?

In a culture where most marriages are arranged, dating is still something that usually happens clandestinely among the urban rich of India. Venues for dating as we know it in the West, such as nightclubs with a co-ed clientele, are still rare in all except the largest cities. When I

checked out *Tantra*, Culcutta’s hippest nightclub, most of the women in attendance were foreign tourists. At *Pegs and Pints* in New Delhi it was much the same, except on gay night, when locals came in droves. Young Indian women rarely venture out to bars or nightclubs even in these large metropolitan areas. No respectable woman would be caught in Lucknow’s bars which, attract an almost exclusively male patrons.

Participating in Valentine’s Day is also a daring act for women of Uttar Pradesh. In past years, right-wing Hindu political parties (e.g. the Vishva Hindu Prasad, World Hindu Congress, or VHP) have encouraged violent agitation on February 14th, seeing Valentines Day as a corrupting foreign influence. The VHP arrived at a unique strategy this year, threatening to unify any unmarried couple found displaying affection in public on February 14th in involuntary matrimony.⁴ Meanwhile Shiv Sena (Army of Shiva) leader Bal Thackeray quipped, “Anyway, you youngsters do this thing throughout the year...You don’t need a special day for it.” He also suggested that Valentine’s Day be given an Indian name.⁵ On February 13th, state police cracked down on couples in public parks, “intercepting” over two dozen couples in a February 13th, pre-emptive Valentines Day raid.⁶ No involuntary weddings were reported.

To find out what all the hullabaloo was about, my wife Deborah and I spent Valentine’s Day at the Kukulal Crocodile Reserve, a popular lover’s lane in Lucknow that had been targeted in the February 13th raid. I was hoping to meet and talk to some Lucknowi love-birds and get their take on the Valentine’s Day controversy. On the way, our driver, Durilaal, wanted to share his own amorous news and



The temples of Khajuraho depict a wide range of sexual activity, including bestiality.

³ *Dainik Jaagaran* 10/7/05 “Badhtii jaa Rahee hain Kushboo kii Mushkilen” pg. 18.

⁴ *The Pioneer* 2/8/06 “Culture Police’s Latest: Tie Love Birds in Knots on Valentines Day” pg. 5.

⁵ *The Pioneer* 2/14/06 “Bal Thackeray suggests Indian option to V-Day” pg. 2 His suggestion of renaming Valentines Day Laila Majnu Day (after the poem *Laila and Majnun* by Nizami) is an odd choice. Nizami (d. 1209) was not an Indian at all, but an Azerbaijani.

⁶ *The Pioneer* 2/14/06 “No Love Lost!: Police Crack Down on Love Birds” pg. 1.

informed us that he was engaged to be married.

“Congratulation!” I said. “What is the girl’s name?”

“I am not knowing her name yet,” he answered. “I have not met her.”

“What village is she from?” I asked.

“This also, I am not knowing.”

“Well, how old is she?” Deborah wanted to know.

“This I am not sure,” Durilaal admitted sheepishly. Then he added, by way of explanation, “But I am sure that my father has chosen a good girl.”

Unfortunately, the raids and the VHP’s threat of involuntary matrimony seemed to have worked; the crocodile reserve was almost empty. A group of boys played cricket while another group of men in button-down shirts stood watching us. Could they be undercover police, we wondered? Sitting on a park bench, I reached out and took Debby’s hand in mine. The men did not react. I put my arm around her shoulder. Still nothing. I kissed her. The boys stopped their cricket match for a few moments and stared. Then they returned to their game. It occurred to me that, for the average Indian eleven-year-old, cricket is probably much more interesting.

That evening we dined at Lucknow’s Taj Hotel, one of Lucknow’s finest restaurants. It was half-empty and the only couple in attendance was Deborah and I. Valentine’s Day was a total bust. This year, the invasion of Western cupids had been soundly routed by the protectors of traditional culture and Lucknowi society remained sexless, at least in public. As Deborah and I shared a bottle of wine, it occurred to me that the only person I had met all day who had good news about love was Durilaal, our driver. He had a fiancé, and, if it went badly, it was all somebody else’s fault. Given the difficulty of romance in Lucknow, letting your father pick a bride was not such a bad idea.

In Search of Umrao Jaan

Yet, despite the lack of romance on Valentines Day, I knew that somewhere there was a sensuous India that had inspired the erotic temple statues of Khajuraho and the *Kama Sutra*. Even Lucknow has a tradition of romance. In the 19th century, Lucknow was the home of the *tawaif*, a group of professional, geisha-like courtesans. Men of repute in Lucknowi society would gather for special parties (*mehfil*) during which these highly trained women would sing, recite poetry, dance and play musical instruments. *Tawaif* were not simple street walkers; they were talented and beautiful women who clients would court

for months with expensive gifts before they gained access to their physical intimacies. In the 1980s, a popular movie entitled *Umrao Jaan*, based on a novel about a famous Lucknowi *tawaif*, perpetuated the myth of Lucknow as a place of courtly illicit love, clandestine meetings and Urdu love poetry whispered *in sotto voce*.

Naturally, I was curious to find out whether the type of world depicted in *Umrao Jaan* still existed in Lucknow. Some people told me that, although the *tawaif* had survived the Mutiny of 1857 and Independence, they did not survive the austerity of the Nehru era and were now extinct. Others passed on rumors that the *tawaif* still survived in Lucknow, and could be found at private, secret clubs on the outskirts of the city. These places did not advertise, however, and, if they did exist, they were only for those in the know.



A scene from *Umrao Jaan*, starring Rekha, a popular film about courtesans (*tawaif*), set in 19th century Lucknow.⁷

To help me in my quest, I contacted an NGO that worked with female sex workers, People’s Action for National Integration (PANI). I met the staff of PANI at their offices in the neighborhood of Jankipuram. They were an earnest group of young people, most in their 20s, who insisted on identifying themselves by a single name. They explained that surnames often indicate a person’s caste or religion and they did not want to alienate anybody by using them. Their optimism and unflagging cheerfulness were somewhat fatiguing, but I endured it long enough to secure an invitation to accompany one of their outreach workers, Zahid.

Zahid agreed to take me along with him when he went into “the field.” I had visions of swaying *tawaifs* singing Urdu love songs to me as I reclined on a couch and smoked a hookah. I soon discovered, however, that “the field” meant the Charbagh Railway station where Zahid introduced me to a group of rough-looking prostitutes working the corner near the public restrooms. There I met Kiran Sukla, a heavy-set woman who claimed to be 30 years old. Kiran told me that she made about 200 Rupees a day and had a child that she supported with the money she made.

“Do you have a family?” I asked.

“My family is dead, I do not speak of them.” She answered curtly.

As we chatted, a second woman, Ranu approached us.

⁷ Image taken from <http://img.photobucket.com>. A remake of *Umrao Jaan*, starring former Miss World Aishwariya Rai, is currently being filmed in Lucknow.



Prostitutes sit on a wall at the Charbagh Railway Station.

She seemed upset. Zahid explained that she had just been attacked by one of her clients, who tried to get a discount by bringing a friend along with him. A fight ensued in which Ranu and her customers exchanged blows. After hearing Ranu's story, the other ladies sat heavily on a stone wall and maintained a prolonged and unbroken silence.

"Anyone know any songs?" I asked.

My Neighbor's Wife

Although the world of the *Tawaif* was gone (or dug in so far underground that I had no hope of finding it), Lucknow still had its movies. Although mainstream Bombay films are strictly G-rated, newspapers in Lucknow contained many suggestive advertisements for films rated A (Adult). With names like *Jungul ki Nagini* (Snake-Woman of the Jungle), *Bhog ki Ras* (Juice of Pleasure) *Paap ki Kamaii* (The Wages of Sin), and *Ek Hasina ke kaii Deevaane* (The Craziiness of One Girl), these films played five times a day at theaters like The Red Light and the Swaroop.

To learn more about them, I went to the Swaroop in the Aminabad Bazaar. A dilapidated building, the Swaroop was showing *Meri Padosii ki Patni* (My Neighbor's Wife). Not wanting to ruin my reputation in Lucknow, I had tried to pick a theater in a run-down part of town, on a side street where few would see me enter. This hope was quickly dashed. As soon as I stepped down from the rickshaw, I was surrounded by curious young men, who wanted to know if this type of movies existed in America.

"Well," I said, "I am not sure...I've never seen a movie like this."

They all smiled and laughed.

"No really," I protested, "I'm a writer, I am writing something on sex in India."

This simply caused more laughter. I was not going

to convince them. In the end this was okay. I had expected that the Swaroop would be like similar theaters in America, where lonely men ducked into a dark theater with their collars turned up to hide their identity. The Swaroop was not like this at all. Young men entered quite openly, often in groups, laughing and pushing each other. For such a puritanical society, these Indian men took their pornographic movies with a remarkable degree of shamelessness.

My best guess was that *My Neighbor's Wife* is a heavily edited version of a 1970s American soft-core porn flick dubbed in Hindi. The picture quality was terrible; scenes jumped from one to the next with little explanation and the plot seemed utterly incoherent. Roughly, the film followed the frolicking life of a married couple in the American West, their neighbors, assorted guests (including a knockout blonde who claimed to be a wandering psychiatrist) and their efforts to break the seventh and tenth commandments as often as possible. Partial nudity was common, and *My Neighbor's Wife* also included the suggestion (but not the depiction) of intercourse, oral sex and lesbianism. There was no explicit sex in *My Neighbor's Wife*, however, and nothing that would have warranted anything more than an R rating in America.

The Swaroop broke their films (as all theaters in India do) with an intermission. When the Intermission sign flashed on the screen, I thought that I would step outside to get a cup of coffee. The crowd, however, remained immobile, as if they were waiting for something. Suddenly, the Intermission sign switched off, and a jumpy trailer for another 1970s American soft-core porn movie began to run. Spliced into this trailer (which looked like an X-rated *Charlie's Angels*) were several graphic depictions of intercourse. After about three minutes of this hard-core material, the "intermission" ended and the second act of *My Neighbor's Wife* began.

After the film, I stopped by the office of the manager of the Swaroop, Mr. R. S. Mishra. Mr. Mishra told me that he has been working at the Swaroop since 1973. The the-



The Swaroop Theater in Lucknow.

ater had started by showing mainstream Bombay films, but switched to porn when it could no longer make ends meet with standard fare. I asked him how *My Neighbor's Wife*, and the "intermission" material had escaped the censorship board. He explained that one version of the film is butchered by the censorship board. After the edited version has received the necessary certificates, some sex scenes are spliced back into the film, sometimes in order, more often in random sequences. The same is done with the trailer shown at intermission.

This would explain the choppy, non-linear quality to the film. And the "intermission" scenes? "Totally illegal," Mr. Mishra said without hesitation. "We have to be careful." He complained that business was down because of the availability of CDs. The same availability of CDs explained the preponderance of foreign actresses in these films; pornographic films depicting Indian actresses are easily available on CDs in the black market. But blonde women can still pack 'em in, Mr. Mishra explained with an expression of embarrassment on his face.

On my way back to town from the Swaroop, I passed through the main bazaar, Hazratganj, over a kilometer from the theater. As I walked by a smoke shop, a grizzled man emerged grinning from ear to ear. "How was the movie?" he asked.

"Er, what movie?" I answered.

"*My Neighbor's Wife*?" he laughed.

"How do you know?" I asked.

His smile, already wide, became wider. "I know! You like this type of movie, yes?"

"No," I objected, "I'm a writer, I'm writing about..."

The man broke out into a loud belly laugh that bared his prominent, rotting teeth. It was no use. In the end I just smiled back and walked away. A few days later, the newspaper reported that Mr. R.S. Mishra had announced the closing of the Swaroop. Even the titillation of *My Neighbor's Wife* could not stem the tide of declining theater revenues.⁸

The Problems of Love

Adult film theaters may not be making money in India but adult magazines are still in the black. In my attempt to plumb the depths of the Indian Id, I spent time looking at the men's magazines available on almost every street corner in Lucknow. With names like *Saras Katha* and *Prem Samasya* these magazines are part *Playboy* and part *Dear*

Abby. In between stories of adultery and rape, the columnists offer sex advice and even recipes for the increase of sexual stamina. These magazines contain no explicit material and their photos appear to be stolen from Western fashion magazines and *Victoria Secret* catalogues. At times, the articles are very well written. In *Juicy Stories*, for example, I found an informative tract on the history of sacred prostitution in the holy city of Ujjain.⁹

Most of the stories in these magazines are morality tales in which the fallible, carnal nature of woman unleashes destructive sexual forces. In one story, *Pyaar Baantne Waali Aurt* (Women Divided in Love), a young bride named Kaamanii falls for a fast-talking stranger, who convinces her to leave her husband and come with him to Calcutta. Once there, her treacherous lover reveals that he is actually a pornographer who wants her to star in his next "blue film." Stalling for time, Kaamanii asks for ten days to think about his proposal. After agonizing for nine days, she slits her lover's throat, moves back to her village and asks for her husband's forgiveness. Her husband refuses to allow her back in the house, however, and she ends up in the police station confessing her crime.¹⁰

These tales often exhibit a type of understated cruelty. There almost seems to be an enjoyment of the woman's inevitable fall from grace into the clutches of a leering older man. Stories often revolve around family members, and there is much hanky panky between women and their father-in-laws, or young men and their



The cover of the popular Magazine *Saras Katha* (Juicy Stories).

⁸ *The Pioneer*, City Section 2/14/06 "Another Cinema Hall Facing Closure in City" by Man Mohan Rai pg. 1.

⁹ *Saras Katha* (Sweta Publications, New Delhi, 2006) "Har Jagah Sajatii hain Deha kii Dukaan." Pg. 4. Anonymous.

¹⁰ *Prem Samasya* (Sweta Publications, New Delhi, 2006) "Pyaar Baantne Waali Aurt" Anonymous. pg. 34.

aunts. Most disturbing are the stories that include rape. They often follow a true-life account of the crime but present the story in a style that is deliberately titillating. In one story *Betii ne Kiyaa Premi se Pyaar, Pitaa ne kiyaa Balaatkaar* (The Daughter Loved Her Lover, Her Father Raped Her), a young woman's momentary indiscretion with a boyfriend leads to days of retaliatory sexual abuse by her mother and father.¹¹

Despite disturbing and recurring stories of rape and incest, or perhaps because of them, magazines like *Juicy Stories* sell in large numbers. This potentially massive market for "lad lit" in India has attracted the British publication *Maxim*, which recently released an Indian version of their magazine. As with their Western versions, the Indian *Maxim* promises "Girls, Gizmos, Fashion," but the content and photos are edited for Indian sensibilities.

"February's cover girl is Bollywood actress Kareena Kapoor and the strapline promises 'Eye-frying pics: More Kareena - Less Clothes'. On the cover Kapoor displays maybe an inch of midriff, but otherwise looks as if she could be on the way to meet her grandmother. Inside, pictures show her draped across a sofa, wearing a sensible T-shirt and a skirt which is only a tiny bit short. Readers' eyes will remain unfried."¹²

This bashfulness in their photo selection does not mean, however, that *Maxim* is standing tall for public



The Indian version of Maxim, a magazine that promises "girls, gizmos and fashion." It also includes some humorless woman-bashing. (photo D.Simon)



A page from the February 2006 edition of Maxim. Entitled "Shag Type: Because women are easier to understand if you stereotype them" this layout lists the pros and cons of dating a "TV Journo" (journalist). Pros: "Looks really hot when she dolls up for interviews." Cons: "Has slept with everyone in her office cos it's acceptable in media."

morality or championing the empowerment of women. At its best, a magazine like *Maxim* admittedly presents women as sexual objects, but as objects that should be respected for—if nothing else—their undeniable allure and men's inability to attain their favors easily. The Indian *Maxim*, however, has combined healthy ogling with some unfortunate nastiness. Actress Kushboo, who had gone on record for the right to pre-marital sex (see above), ended up as the butt of some cruel and humorless ribbing. One edition of *Maxim* included a photograph of Khushboo beneath a slogan declaring: 'Of course, I am a virgin if you don't count from the [sic] behind.'¹³

This mean-spiritedness I found in *Maxim* and *Juicy Stories* perplexed me. Most Indians are not cruel people. They do not, in everyday life, lionize rape, sexual violence or slander. My guess is that thinly veiled misogyny in certain Indian magazines was the result of changes in the fabric of Indian society and shifts in the nature of gender relations. In the past, a woman's favors were granted by societal consent, following the marriage ceremony, to an exclusive male for the remainder of her life. In modern, Western-style, romantic love, however, women have a wider range of options. They may grant their physical

¹¹ *Saras Katha* (Sweta Publications, New Delhi, 2006) "Betii ne Kiyaa Premi se Pyaar, Pitaa ne kiyaa Balaatkaar." By S. Sagar. Pg. 10.

¹² The Observer <http://observer.guardian.co.uk/world/story/0,,1697316,00.html> "The Actress, the Virgins and the Lad's Mag in India" by Amelia Gentleman.

¹³ Ibid.

intimacy to one or many, often or rarely, according to their whim. To men raised in the traditional patriarchal Indian society, the embryonic Indian sexual revolution can seem like a threat to their social status.

Men thus both desire and fear the Western conception of romance. Young urban Indians want to enjoy the same freedom to love and make love as their peers in New York or Paris. The change, however, requires men to understand and control their own sexuality in a way that was never necessary in the past. After all, male sexual desire can be a humiliating experience. In the pursuit of womanly intimacy, failure is more common than success and men must often submit to the most excruciatingly illogical emotional and sexual calculi of the fickle gender. Our tendency to make fools of ourselves in the presence of those we find attractive, our helplessness in the face of unrequited or unconsummated love and woman's seemingly limitless ability to outwait us, out-manuever us and outclass us, make us all wish that there was someone to blame for our troubles other than ourselves.

This frustration, in the hands of religious fanatics and puerile editors sometimes degenerates into Puritanism and violent sexual fantasies. This is the inspiration for magazines like *Juicy Stories*, films like *My Neighbor's Wife* and pointless conflicts like the annual hurly burly over Valentine's Day in Uttar Pradesh. Indian men are entranced by the Western conception of sex and intimacy, but find themselves deeply conflicted over the attendant realities. In their magazines and films they mix their newfound appreciation for scantily clad women with a Victorian or even Iranian conception of modesty and human sexuality.

This would explain the seeming frigidity of the women of the *India Today* survey. Indian women are only reacting to the mixed signals of male-dominated Indian society. Too often sexual desire is blamed on women, as if their allure were some sort of intentional threat, while a man's lack of self-control is seen as an unavoidable given. A true Sexual Revolution, as occurred in America in the 1970s, entails the rehabilitation of sexual expression from the realm of the taboo and the forbidden to its

acceptance as natural and desirable for both genders in equal measure.

Perhaps Indian women are not ready for Gloria Steinem, and Indian men are not quite ready for Alan Alda or *Iron John*. Still, there is a growing awareness that Indians, like Americans, are ruled by Eros and want to choose their own spouses and lovers. More romance could be a positive change for the subcontinent. In a country like India, which struggles with ideas of equality, sex is ultimately egalitarian. The poor find just as much solace in the embrace of a lover as the rich. Poor girls can marry princes and poor boys sometimes wed heiresses. Cinderella romance offers the possibility of social mobility to all. In the free-market of love and sex, every dog (or donkey) has his day. □



*A donkey (presumably content) crosses the street.
(photo D. Simon)*

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A lecturer in Philosophy, Asian Religions and Logic at Rutgers University, Rick Connerney is spending two years as a Phillips Talbot Fellow studying and writing about the intertwining of religion, culture and politics in India, once described by former U.S. Ambassador John Kenneth Galbraith as "a functioning anarchy." Rick has a B.A. and an M.A. in religion from Wheaton College and the University of Hawaii, respectively.

Kay Dilday (October 2005-2007) • **FRANCE/MOROCCO**

An editor for the *New York Times*' Op-Ed page for the past five years, Kay holds an M.A. in Comparative International Politics and Theory from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, a Bachelor's degree in English Literature from Tufts University, and has done graduate work at the *Universiteit van Amsterdam* in the Netherlands and the *Cours de Civilisation de la Sorbonne*. She has traveled in and written from Haiti and began her journalistic life as city-council reporter for *Somerville This Week*, in Somerville, MA.

Cristina Merrill (June 2004-2006) • **ROMANIA**

Born in Bucharest, Cristina moved from Romania to the United States with her mother and father when she was 14. Learning English (but retaining her Romanian), she majored in American History at Harvard College and there became captain of the women's tennis team. She received a Master's degree in Journalism from New York University in 1994, worked for several U.S. publications from *Adweek* to the *New York Times*, and is spending two years in Romania watching it emerge from the darkness of the Ceausescu regime into the presumed light of membership in the European Union and NATO.

Nicholas Schmidle (October 2005-2007) • **IRAN**

A journalist and researcher for the Pew Forum on Religious and Public Life, Nick is finishing a Master's program in Comparative and Regional Studies (Middle East/Central Asia) at American University in Washington DC. He is studying intensive Persian — as is his fiancée, Rikki Bohan — in anticipation of his departure for Iran after his marriage in autumn 2005.

Andrew J. Tabler (February 2005 - 2007) • **SYRIA/LEBANON**

Andrew has lived, studied and worked in the Middle East since a Rotary Foundation Ambassadorial Fellowship enabled him to begin Arabic-language studies and work toward a Master's degree at the American University in Cairo in 1994. Following the Master's, he held editorships with the *Middle East Times* and *Cairo Times* before moving to Turkey, Lebanon and Syria and working as a Senior Editor with the Oxford Business Group and a correspondent for the *Economist* Intelligence Unit. His two-year ICWA fellowship bases him in Beirut and Damascus, where he will report on Lebanese affairs and Syrian reform.

Jill Winder (July 2004 - 2006) • **GERMANY**

With a B.A. in politics from Whitman College in Walla Walla, WA and a Master's degree in Art Curating from Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, Jill is an ICWA Donors' Fellow looking at Germany through the work, ideas and viewpoints of its contemporary artists. Before six months of intensive study of the German language in Berlin, she was a Thomas J. Watson Fellow looking at post-communist art practice and the cultural politics of transition in the former Soviet bloc (Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Croatia, Hungary, Latvia, Romania, Slovenia and Ukraine).

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