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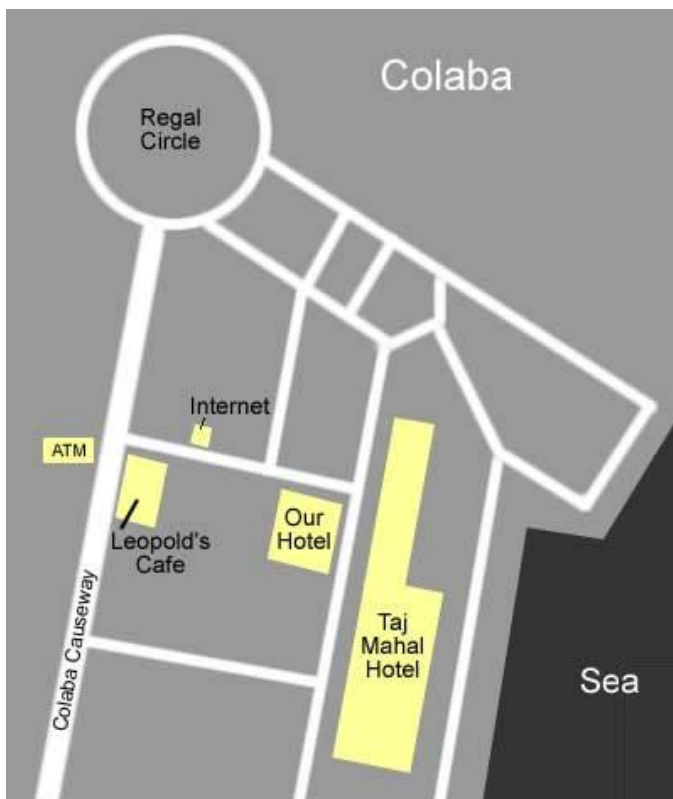
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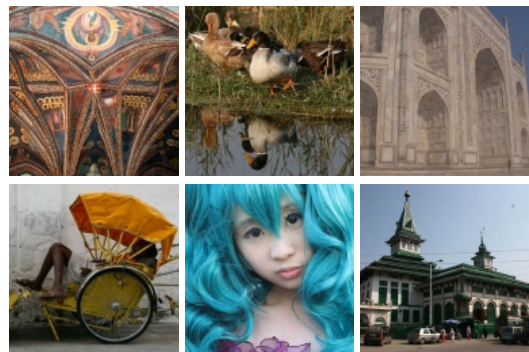
First things first, Thomas and I are both OK.

Remember there is a delay between our blog and where we are real time. In real time, Thomas and I are currently in Mumbai (Bombay). We've been caught up in the terrorist attack on the city for the last two days. If you have been



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• Looking Back



watching the coverage, then you should be familiar with Leopold's Cafe and the Taj Mahal hotel, our hotel, the Carlton, is on the road connecting the two.

Luckily, We had called it an early night and were both relaxing in our hotel room watching TV when, suddenly, we heard a series of explosions outside. Annoyed at what I believed to be another series of post-Divali fire-crackers, I walked outside on to our second-floor outdoor veranda. I noticed people running by below us, so I leaned over the railing to take a look. My brain froze.

Two men wearing backpacks and armed with machine guns were firing bullets in all direction blasting holes in a car's windows below me. The men were literally just meters below, I clumsily threw myself back into the hotel room, yelling to Thomas to hit the deck between the bed and the solid cement wall next to it. The entire time machine gun fire was continuing outside. Terrified that the men might enter our hotel, I crawled back to the door and locked it. I jumped up and quickly found the panel of switches next to the door and switched off our room lights and the TV as well as our air-conditioning system, so that it would appear that our room was locked and empty.

We lay on the ground for what seemed like forever, but must have been just a few minutes. Slowly the gun fire moved away from our side of the building around the corner. Remembering the brain dead hoteliers in Allahabad who failed to tell us that our hotel was on fire, I started to worry that our hotel owners would leave the front doors open and unlocked. I ducked out of the room and made my way to the lobby where the stunned desk man was, predictably, staring at his navel. I screamed to close the door and lock it. He just stared, clearly his English wasn't working.

Apparently, none of the other foreigners had seen the gunmen so they were confused, not really understanding what was happening. Hearing my yells that there were gunmen below and my demands to lock the door, another foreigner standing near the paralyzed desk man pushed him in the direction of the door thus kick-starting his brain.

Suddenly, I heard screaming below and the sound of dozens of running feet. The sound of machine gun fire revealed that the gunmen were moving back to our side of the building again. I ran back to our room and we lay on the floor as the second round of shooting took place. The hotel was dead silent. Nobody knew who the gunmen were, what they intended, or where they were going. We were absolutely terrified.

After another several minutes lying on the ground, the gunfire moved further down the street. It appears now that they must have entered the Taj, a landmark luxury hotel in front of ours.

As we emerged from our rooms, shaken guests started rattling off what they had seen. Several Indians claimed that they had seen armed "Americans" shooting people in the streets. (Read foreigners rather than Americans.) But I saw the gunmen myself, and they certainly didn't appear to be specifically foreign to me. In fact, they looked south Asian or Middle

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Eastern. However, they were carrying backpacks, which may have been the reason why the Indians thought they were foreign.



After a half an hour, two shaken German flight attendants, who had run down the street and taken refuge in our hotel, recalled what they had seen. They had been sitting in Leopold's Cafe, a well known expat watering hole down the road from us. Masked gunmen had entered the bar, randomly shot several people, and then run down the side-street past our hotel, which must have been when I saw them. I shuddered at the thought – we were in that bar last night. Another British traveler said that there were two armed police guards across the street from Leopold's Cafe who stood by and did nothing as the shootings took place. There is also a police department nearby. Absolutely no help.

Another Russian guest had successfully woven her way back from the Colaba Market, armed men running right past her screaming for all of the foreigners to get out of the way. It wasn't clear if it was the gunmen or other Indians who had taken up weapons and were trying to protect people. Complete chaos.

And so we sat, knowing the gunmen were still at large in Colaba. English-language news were reporting coordinated attacks across the city. Gunmen in the Taj and Oberoi hotels, shooting in CST train station, several shots in Leopold's Cafe, a bomb blast in a taxi, and attacks at the national airport in Santa Cruz. There were live pictures of people in the luxury hotels who had smashed their windows and climbed out onto the ledges to hide fearing the gunmen might go from room to room. Typical India to air live images of people hiding. Duh! Let's hope the gunmen were equally stupid and didn't think to turn on the TVs in the hotels. Suddenly, we were watching the hotel across the street. They were carrying out someone's body and a doorman was rolling out an injured person on a luggage trolley. And then the Oberoi hotel was on fire, flames engulfing one of the floors. It was too much to take in.

And then a bomb went off outside our hotel.

It was like time fell into extreme slow motion. A surreal sonic wave flowed through our room reverberating through our bodies. We dropped back into the space between the bed and the cement wall and waited and waited. But nothing else followed. Eventually, I reemerged from our room along with several others. The explosion had come from the Taj across the street. Shots in the distance. Someone yelled to get back in our rooms and turn off the lights. Back inside, we turned on the TV again and witnessed a mushroom of smoke rising from the hotel just meters from ours.

On TV, we could see that people were trying to defuse a bomb RIGHT ACROSS THE STREET! Insanity. The news coverage switched to views to the Oberoi Hotel to discuss an ongoing hostage situation, 40 people were being held ... BOOM, A second explosion reverberated through our room. We had just been watching them defuse it. This time we just sat on the bed stunned rather than diving to the ground.

Manic reporters struggled to comment on the second

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explosion while jumping from reports of new attacks in Mumbai suburbs and fears of a boat full of explosives in the harbor near the India Gate in front of the Taj. On TV, we could see large numbers of police in front of the Taj, yet at our location behind the hotel, we couldn't see one single police officer. Apparently, nobody could conceive of the idea that somebody might walk out the back door. Clearly, the Mumbai police were completely overwhelmed and unprepared for such an extreme situation.

And so, on TV and from our veranda, we watched the scene around our hotel play late into the night trying to figure out what the hell was going on. It seemed like all of Mumbai was coming apart. Believe it or not, sometime around 2:45 AM, I actually fell asleep. I slept so deeply, snoring so loudly that Thomas said I slept through the third bomb blast. (How crazy is that?). However, sometime around 5:30 AM, we were both awoken by machine gun fire coming from in front of our hotel. A French tourist staying in our hotel reported that a crowd of blood-covered tourists had run by our veranda fleeing the Taj hotel. We hoped that was the end, but local English-language TV reporters described an ongoing hostage situation in the hotel.

The situation calmed somewhat around 6 AM with a couple hours of bizarre silence. The roads were empty, no honking taxis, no buzz of the normal morning Mumbai crowds. CNN was reporting that the terrorists had been rounding up people with British and American passports. Several foreigners had been killed. I was desperate to get a message out to my family that we were OK, imagining my mother sitting in front of a huge Thanksgiving Turkey crying into a bowl of mashed potatoes. I went to the hotel front desk and begged to make a phone call. Yeah, that wasn't going to happen.

I slipped down the stairs past a small army of police and military all nervously staring up at the Taj fingering their weapons. Pressed up against the wall of our old colonial building and carefully staying under an overhanging ledge, I slid along the road the terrorist had run down the night before. I passed the car with the bullet ridden windows. In the street, a pool of thick blood slowly drained into the gutter. Somebody had dropped a bag of steamed rice which had ripped open and spread across the sidewalk. I ran across the street and pounded on the closed door of the Internet cafe / telephone center.

A man opened the door and barked at me, "We're closed!" The man standing behind him seemed to recognize me (we are on the Internet a lot) and pulled me into the small shop. I asked to make a call, but they refused explaining that the police had shut down Internet cafes and public phones. (Like the terrorists wouldn't invest in a cell phone for their attack, they're going to stop by an Internet cafe and send some emails during the fight!) I begged to use the phone, but the shop owners refused. Luckily, the man who had pulled me into the shop seemed to understand my desperation. He handed me his cell phone, and let me call the U.S. (He also generously refused payment for the favor.)

After making the call, I returned to the hotel, no easy task as police and military seemed to think I was a curious tourist

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trying to make my way into the center of the action. It may seem strange that I returned to our hotel so near the Taj, but Thomas was still there, and I had nowhere else to go. Technically, Colaba was under curfew, so standing around on the street didn't seem like a good idea. It took ten minutes to talk my way back into the Carlton.

A couple of minutes after I reentered the hotel, another round of machine gun fire broke out. Oops. Clearly, it is not a good idea to go outside.

THURSDAY 3:15 PM, Nov. 27th

We've been sitting around the hotel all day. For some reason, the water is off, so showers and toilets are not really working. A British couple slipped out and came back with bags of fried rice, bread, and bottled water. I don't know where they bought it, everything is closed. I was starving and quite thankful for the food, which somehow seems appropriate considering it's Thanksgiving.

Eighteen hours into this, we were thinking that the worst was over, but another three bombs, or possibly grenades, went off a few minutes ago. The hotel guests reaction to the explosions coming from across the street have changed dramatically over the last 15 hours. A Spanish woman had pulled out her traveler's water boiler and was making coffee for other hotel guests. A British woman was passing out pieces of cake. And so, we sit here waiting for the shooting and the explosions to stop.

Glancing over the edge of the veranda, I see two armed men below, one in a brown surfer's shirt holding a pistol and another man wearing scraggly clothes and plastic flip-flops holding a machine gun. I have no idea who these men are – clearly, they are there to protect the hotel and the surrounding businesses, but they certainly don't appear to be police. Have the police gone around passing out guns to locals?

THURSDAY 4:25 PM

The insane Russian woman in our hotel was just explaining to me how the entire siege was clearly an American and Israeli conspiracy when another huge explosion went off in the Taj. This one, which was much louder, really shook up the guests toning down the coffee and cake hour.

It also clearly shook up the reporters on the other side of the Taj. With virtually live coverage, I walked back into our hotel room to witness the reporter's reflex twitch as the explosion went off behind her.

THURSDAY 4:39 PM

We were trying to decipher the Prime Minister of India's bizarrely robotic televised address as another massive explosion swept through the hotel rattling the walls and furniture. That one really scared me – it was huge – I have no idea what the hell is going on across the street. Clearly, it really scared the crap out of the reporter because she dropped to the ground on live TV. How strange is it to be watching the

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other side of the hotel on International CNN. Two more smaller explosions, perhaps grenades, I can't tell.

THURSDAY 5:15 PM

The bombs in the Taj have set off a series of fires again. (It was burning most of last night.) Fire trucks pulled up along side our hotel and several rather old looking firemen climbed out and stared at the fire and the truck as if they had no idea of how the two related to each other.

They turned on the hose and immediately lost control of it squirting water all over the side of the Taj but coming nowhere near the actual fire. Frustrated, they packed up and drove away. Oh, India... incredible India.

THURSDAY 7:45 PM

The British couple slipped out and brought back more bags of fried rice and chapatis from the same restaurant. Enough for everyone in the hotel, including the ridiculous hotel staff. I, personally, would have chosen to let them sit there and watch all the hotel guests eating while they starve. They should be getting the food, surely they know the restaurants and stores around here and could convince someone give us something. I have no idea where they are getting the food, everything is closed. From their descriptions, it sounds like they traveled quite a distance to one particular restaurant which appears to be secretly open.

How insane are the Indian authorities to close everything down. We can't eat, we can't call or email our families. And watching them in the streets is like watching a bunch of keystone cops.

THURSDAY 8:20 PM

Bizarrely, it's like someone out there read what I just wrote.

Some kind of special military unit has arrived and is taking up position around the hotel. Strangely all the soldiers appear to be Sikhs. They are quietly slipping by below us winding in and out of the columns supporting the arcaded walkway in front of the hotel. At least they look like they really know what their doing.

The military has also set up a huge truck-based system of spot lights with one hell of a generator.

FRIDAY 7:10 AM, Nov. 28th

Exhausted, I fell asleep early after my last posting last night. On edge, Thomas stayed up watching the news. Evidently, there were a few more explosions as well as gunfire. And the Taj was burning for quite some time. I was really hoping to wake up to discover that this was finally over, but evidently terrorists are still holed up in the Taj and Oberoi hotels. A lot of the attention has shifted to the Nariman House, where several Israelis are still being held hostage.

The stupid authorities still have the water turned off. Idiots! With all the tourists in their hotels, what the hell are they thinking?

FRIDAY 9:57 AM

The Indian police have been sitting on their asses for two days. During the last twelve hours, they have announced at least a hundred times that the siege is almost over.

Thomas and I are going out to look for some food and Internet access.

***** Updates below were added on November 29, 2008

FRIDAY 1:30 PM Nov. 28th

Well, as you know by now, we posted the content above around noon. Although the stand-off in the Taj is still going on, there had been no movement for hours, so, yet again, we were prematurely assuming that things had calmed down.

The hotel let us out through the locked door and we slipped down the stairs to the arcaded walkway in front of the hotel where about ten soldiers hid behind columns staring up at the Taj rear windows. We walked to the end of the arcade and, once again, up against the wall under ledge, we carefully inched our way down the street until we were clearly out of range of fire.

Everything in Colaba appeared to be closed, but when we went to the same Internet/Communication center that I went to yesterday, they unlocked the door and let us in. This time, they let us make phone calls and use the Internet; however, it was clear from their strange behavior that they were not allowed to be open. A crowd was gathering outside and the owner refused to let me step out to see what was going on, warning me that if I stepped out I would not be allowed back in!

After a little Internet time, we scoured the accessible streets of Colaba for a restaurant. Everything was locked up, except one men's clothing store and one very crowded restaurant. (Dare I ask if they belonged to the police chief's brother?) Well frankly, I don't care who the restaurant belonged to; all I cared about was their delicious food, which was all the more delicious after 36 hours in the hotel.

Next, we tried to withdraw money from the ATM, but three armed guards refused to let us near it. Perhaps, they were worried that terrorists might stop by to withdraw some escape money. They've shut down communications, turned off the water in our area, closed all the restaurants but one, and now the ATMs are shut in Colaba. Without money, we can't hire a car to get us out of here. I have no real idea what is going on in the rest of the city or whether buses/trains are working. I don't feel like going on a wild goose chase through Mumbai hunting for an ATM. And all this while the actual terrorists are still running amok in the Taj and the Oberoi.

As we were standing there pondering the ever-increasing idiocy of the police/military/banks/waterworks, shots rang out from somewhere down the street, we thought near our hotel. We quickly walked down Colaba Causeway unsure where to go, a man walked up to us and ordered us to walk down another side-street. "Where the f**k to?" I raged. "Where the

hell are we supposed to go? Our hotel is near the shooting, and everything is closed.” Thomas pulled me down the street anyway, and we sat on a short wall.

As we were arguing over how to behave during an attack, another wave of running people forced us to backtrack leaving us right back where we had started near the ATM. Another man ran up to us claiming the shots had been fired near Regal Circle, totally confusing us. Suddenly, we had no idea if there were new attacks or whether shots from the Taj were sending people into a frenzy. With full stomachs and two liters of drinking water in our backpacks, we decided to make a run for our hotel ducking behind objects and running along the walls the whole way. I’m sure it sounds ridiculous from a distance, but we had no idea what was happening.

FRIDAY 3:05 PM

The government seems to be blocking CNN and BBC at the moment, we presume they are trying to prevent live pictures of the Taj and Oberoi from being broadcast during some sort of operation. One of the Indian English-language news channels as well as a Hindi news channel is kind of coming in, but seem to be partially scrambled. I don’t blame the government for doing this as the stupid news agencies were showing live pictures of helicopters lowering soldiers on to the roofs of one of the hotels. Duh!

Six more middle-sized blasts from the Taj hotel as I am writing this. We have no idea what is going on.

FRIDAY 3:11 PM

Another huge bomb went off sending shock waves through the hotel. This is the first big one since last night. It really starts to rattle your nerves after a while. There are several foreigners out on the veranda who seem to be drinking themselves into a stupor. Since the news channels are off, we have no idea who is causing the explosions.

FRIDAY 3:35 PM

Another massive blast. Another shock wave. Is it wrong that I barely flinched that time? Thomas came walking back to the room looking rather pale.

Sitting down to write this entry, the news channels suddenly came back on with a statement that the government was apologizing for shutting down the news services, but that the measures were “temporarily necessary.”

In barely comprehensible English, the reporter hysterically reported that another blast had gone off. Tell us something we don’t know.

FRIDAY 4:46 PM

The very spirited smokey-voiced Indian Irish woman on the veranda was sharing her conspiracy theories with me just now when four more large explosions came echoing through the hotel. We moved back to the television to discover the military is launching grenades into the windows of the Taj. Great.

Operation “Black Tornado,” as they have dubbed it, appears to be in full swing. I’m not sure “Black Tornado” is appropriate for an action that took two days to prepare. Let’s hope they can shoot grenades better than they can aim a fire hose.

There goes another explosion.

FRIDAY 5:07 PM

Three bystanders just got shot outside the Taj. Clearly, the ducking and sliding along the wall, which I mentioned above, was quite merited. The police/military have announced that the siege is over so many times that the reporters are basically laughing at them on TV. I’m sure the people who just got shot would like a few moments alone with them.

As I write this, explosions are continually going off in the background.

Clearly, we won’t leave the hotel again until this thing is over. But how are we going to determine that it is actually over? We are quickly approaching 48 hours of fighting.

FRIDAY 6:45 PM

“Black Tornado” is still in full swing. Grenades have been going off for two hours. I walked out on the veranda, which is shielded from shots fired from the hotel by the angle it looks out on to the street, and glanced down. Special troops, again all Sikhs, were below me running from arcade column to column. Perhaps it’s their reputation as excellent warriors, but somehow the Sikhs seem reassuring.

An armored ambulance pulled up to the back of the Taj, carefully parking in the “shadow” of a large cement wall. A door opened and the military wheeled someone’s covered body out and loaded it into the bulky vehicle.

FRIDAY 8:54 PM

I just went back out on to the veranda, the gun battle is still continuing with the occasional grenade. The armored ambulance is back and people sitting on the veranda reported that the military loaded five more bodies into it. Ironically, the media is all out in front of the hotel reporting very little, while the military is going in and out through the back.

Saturday 3:35 AM, Nov. 29th

We both finally fell asleep some time around midnight. The shots and explosions had become a sort of white noise in the background and, bizarrely, we were both sleeping soundly until a few moments ago. A sudden burst of very loud gunfire and several grenades sent both of us flying up into a sitting position in bed. God, it sounds like we are sitting in the middle of a war zone. The authorities were claiming there was only one gunman left – clearly that can’t be true. I really don’t believe anything anyone says anymore.

I’m feeling really stupid for coming back to the hotel. Last night before we went to bed, the news aired a story about the crowd of people who ran towards us claiming shots had been

fired near Regal Circle. That was all mass hysteria created by echoing shots from the Taj. We should have tried to find another hotel – hindsight is 20/20. We can't even walk out of here because we don't have enough money to pay the bill, remember the ATMs are blocked. Maybe we will just walk out; we can always come back and pay them when this is all over.

Saturday 7:10 AM

When I woke up this morning, it was completely quiet outside. After the fight last night, I was sure the whole thing was over. Absolutely no noise. I peaked down from the veranda and saw soldiers in the street, but they seemed relatively relaxed. Surely their presence was a technicality. I switched on CNN. No coverage of Mumbai. No coverage on the BBC either. YES!

I turned on the local Indian English language news. They were blasting a graphic at the bottom of the screen that read:

Terrorists Plan to Blow Up the Taj Mahal Hotel.

Suddenly, a woman was describing how a chef working in the kitchen had been there for months and had been in on the whole plan. It appeared that the ultimate end to this whole thing was a plan to bring down the Taj Mahal Hotel as the World Trade Center had come down in New York. I couldn't tell from her description if this was a foiled plan or whether the fight was still ongoing.

Suddenly, a new burst of gunfire and grenades answered my question. And then the reporter continued on describing how there were a couple of terrorists left in the Taj, but the end of the battle was near. They were moving reporters and camera men further away from the hotel. We suddenly realized this was a far more elaborate plan than we had ever understood. We envisioned the last terrorist desperately holding a remote control for his final act. Why hadn't the authorities cleared out the hotels behind the Taj?

We debated the new threat versus the shooting outside for about ten seconds, but the answer was clear. We packed a few essentials and got out of the hotel, high-tailing it out of there up against that same wall under its wonderfully convenient ledge.

We'll come back and get our stuff when this whole situation is over.

SATURDAY 12:15 PM

We are sitting in Crosswords Bookstore in Central Mumbai far, far away from the Taj. Downstairs on the wall, there is a personal letter from J.K. Rowling to the store, apparently sent by "Owl Post." This must be THE bookstore in Mumbai. There is also a photo of Madonna in front of the store and an article claiming that she had described the blueberry cheesecake here as "better than sex." We thought if it's good enough for Madonna, it's good enough for us.

Clearly, Madonna is having some pretty lousy sex.

The television has just announced that it is all over. This is about the thousandth time that they have announced the “end of the siege.” As the soldiers are still “sanitizing” the hotel, I’m still skeptical. We’ve decided to wait for a few hours to see.

SATURDAY 3:15 PM

We’re back in Colaba sitting in another coffee house. Just as we were walking down the street to our hotel another massive explosion went off. The military claims we were hearing “unused” explosives. Are they setting them off inside the Taj? Honestly, I don’t believe anything they say anymore. They are still blocking off our street, so that must mean something. The problem is that they will let us walk into our hotel because they know us, but they won’t tell us if being there is dangerous. Maybe they don’t even know themselves.

At least this coffee house is open. That’s a good sign.

There is a young guy sitting next to me here in the coffee shop. Both hands are bandaged, and the bandages look quite new. He is sitting hunched over, his head down, and he has been staring at a package of sugar lying on the table for about ten minutes. I feel like I should say something, but what? Just as I wrote that he got up and left. We have seen several wounded foreigners wandering around in a stupor.

Also read our [Mumbai Follow-Up](#) from January 2009.

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15 Responses to “Attack in Mumbai”

-  [carrieannmarco](#)
[November 28th, 2008 at 3:41 am](#)

I have been thinking of you from the moment Europe got the coverage. I just held my breath and waited to read that you were OK. My heart has been seemingly still, because of everything my mind had imagined. I am so relieved right now. Do what you can to help people. Share love, listen, and stay in control. In my mind, I knew that if you were in any situation in Mumbai, you would maintain your control. I love you both. xoxo
Will write you soon-must go teach!

-  [eckege](#)
[November 28th, 2008 at 4:07 am](#)

Meine Nerven,
passt auf Euch auf!!!

-  [carrieannmarco](#)
[November 28th, 2008 at 6:40 am](#)