

AVI-USA CONNECT

Winter 2017/2018 Newsletter

Issue 09



Forming the Auroville Symbol [pg10]

photos by Fred Celestion
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In this issue we bring together several narrative personal essays (defined as a story that includes reflection) and interviews that relate to the experience of connection to Auroville. A personal essay begins with a question or questions and we have devised a series of questions (see box) which some of the responders used. We encourage you, dear readers, to use our questions to investigate, by writing a narrative personal essay about your connection to Auroville. Send your essays to gkotangi@gmail.com

We hope to hear from you.

Tell us your story using these questions to help. You can choose any one of them as a point of entry. In your story, try to include a focus on a particular moment that is significant for you (see Nierdre's story and her description of going to the Matrimandir for the first time). Take these questions as a real opportunity to reflect.

1. How did your original connection to the project of Auroville come about? Was it through Sri Aurobindo and The Mother? Was there someone who served as your "connector" or guide?
2. What was your initial reaction? Did you become involved in some way? Or continue on with your life?
3. If you became involved what was the nature of your involvement? How long did it continue or has it continued?
4. What has changed in your connections with Auroville and/or The Integral Yoga?
5. If you have visited Auroville recently, what was your experience? How do you respond to the project or the community?
6. How do you see Auroville now? How do you see your connection to it?

An Interview with Niede D'Aquino

Niede is a Brazilian who lived in the USA for many years and now resides in southern Brazil in a small fishing village near the city of Florianopolis.



Niede D'Aquino

I was presented to the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother in the 70's. We had a community called Casa de Sri Aurobindo in Brazil. It was created by Rolf Gelewski who had met The Mother. He was a dancer. A spiritual dancer. He felt very connected to The Mother and the teachings of Sri Aurobindo. I call him an initiated person. He was very spiritually high. I was in my 20's.

Rolf brought the teachings to us. It was difficult for us to understand these at the time. Very high intellectual teachings. I always felt them to be true even if I didn't fully understand them. To live integral yoga was hard but I loved it. We practiced silence. We didn't talk in the community.

We slept only four hours at night. We worked until midnight. At 4 am we woke up and worked our bodies. We had a spiritual dance school and yoga school as well. We translated the books of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother into Portuguese. We had all the book making equipment and process. I am very grateful to Rolf. This changed my life totally. I became a vegetarian there and still am today. My goal became to know myself and live according to the guidance of Sri Aurobindo at that time, though I lived other teachings after. The teachings are the same in various ways because they are in the heart.

My impression from Sri Aurobindo was this truth: "There is no Other." This summarizes his teachings for me. Until today I am thinking "There is no Other." It means so much. All live the processes of all becoming one. I understand how to live up to that. It is not easy. Then I found that this essence of the teaching was found in many teachings and they are one. So that is the influence of Sri Aurobindo's teachings for my life.

One interesting thing is wherever I go in the world somehow I find people involved with Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo is not in the news. He's not the guy with the most popular teachings. But wherever I go I find people who know him. I left Brazil and went to live in Boulder, Colorado and there was a journal and I did an interview there. Then in Saxtons River I meet you and Shea. This has been happening wherever I go. I think this is beautiful because it is truthful and deep. It is not like fashion. Some teachers are fashionable. Aurobindo's teachings are timeless.

I always wanted to go to Auroville. But somehow it didn't happen until this year. It came by accident. I was in Bangkok and realized, 'Wow Auroville is only 2 hours by plane from here and \$200 so it was amazing!' It was a gift.

My first day in Auroville was very beautiful. I arrived at night and went to Arka. I didn't know anything. There was a person sleeping on the floor who gave me my key. I went to my room and I woke up early in the morning, 6:30am to Sunil's music, which I love. So I said to myself, "I am going to follow this music." I stepped into the street. There was nobody around. I started following the music and I came to the Matrimandir.

I didn't know much about it but had heard about it. I saw the splendor of that amazing building and I said Oh my gosh! What is this? I thought it must be Matrimandir. But it could have been anything. I walked to the gate. It felt very right to just go in. So I opened the gate and went in. There was a guy who asked "Are you.....?" I really didn't understand him so I just said "Yes."

This is always what you say when there is somebody at the gate. You say YES.

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AN INTERVIEW WITH NIEDE D'AQUINO - CONTINUED

So I was in Auroville and first thing was the banyan tree. I stayed under the tree embracing every wonderful trunk of it. Then I went to the building. I didn't know where to go or what to do. First I went down and saw the beautiful marble fountain and just sat there and stayed quiet. Just listening to this delicate sound. Marvelous. Somebody created this and thought about the little details of the sound. The quality of the sound of the water.

I went up and saw a person sitting at the entry. The person waved to me and I waved back. I saw on the right a door and I went in and put my purse there. I found the socks and put them on. Off that corridor I saw a wonderful meditation room. I kept going and each one had a meditation room so I walked all the way around. I think there are 9 or so meditation rooms. Each one has a name, Unity, Sincerity, I didn't meditate; I was exploring. But I was already in a meditative state.

Then I came back and decided to go up to that golden globe. I went up and nobody was there. I thought that was odd. I started walking around. Then saw the stairs and this beautiful space with lots of grace and depth. Then I said, "What is this place?" I sat there and looked. Then I saw the ramps and decided to go up one. I came to the massive white marble door. I opened the door and, O my goodness, went into the inner chamber.

I was in a depth of light. There were two people in the chamber. I sat there. And said, "This is the place. I found the place!" This is the soul of Auroville. I didn't care about anything else. The rest is the world with its predicament. People and things and doings or not. Here is the soul of Auroville.

I stayed for a few eternities. And then went back to Arka. I asked what was the routine about Matrimandir. So later I came back with a group. For the first week I was in Auroville I kept going to Matrimandir at 6:30am. Just a few people were there. Then I went at 10am with the group which was a different experience. It too was interesting. That impression kept staying with me, that the Matrimandir was the soul of Auroville.

The world is beautiful and wonderful but this is special.

I Think I was very deeply grateful for The Mother who had this vision and made it possible for people to create the Matrimandir.

However personally I have some difficulty with The Mother because she said Matrimandir is for everyone and then she said especially for the Aurovilians. I understand that it is difficult if we isolate a quotation because it can be in a context that is sometimes not truthful if you isolate a phrase. Probably she did this in a time when the phrase was useful for her. But she couldn't see the reverberation in time of that phrase. In my view this made a clear division of what are Aurovilians and what are outsiders. Which is totally against "There is no other." So that's my problem. However I understand the human predicament. We are all trying our best. My connection with Sri Aurobindo was deeper and stronger by my visit. It reaffirmed this truth.

When I went to Sri Aurobindo's room it was totally filled with unconditional love. It was interesting because they had already closed the room for the day when I arrived. It was my birthday. They told me it was closed. But I said it's my birthday. So they arranged for me to go for 5 minutes. There was no one



Niede in Brazil

in the room. I could totally feel the energy. I thought Matrimandir and Sri Aurobindo's room were gifts for myself, for my presence there. I'm very grateful to be able to be an outsider to have an inside experience. I'm grateful for that.

My connection with Integral Yoga and Auroville makes me feel like going back. It is a special place on earth. I'm grateful that it exists and to the people who put energy in keeping it. I was happy and fortunate to make some good connections. I have a few friends in Auroville from Brazil who were great and also I made new friends. I was invited to go to two schools to share my music expertise with children. I observed the school and loved it. I saw so many wonderful places for education. The library, theaters and galleries and places for classes. So many possibilities to offer and I did some workshops of art and music and went to some concerts. It was amazing, a beautiful experience for which I am grateful. I hope to go there again even though it is so far away.

Please Save the Dates:

All USA Meeting 2018: Celebrating the Arts & Matagiri's 50th Birthday

August 2nd – 5th 2018

Ashokan Center
Olivebridge, New York



Ashokan Center

Matagiri was founded by a painter, Sam Spanier, a playwright, Eric Hughes and designer, Lee Brooks. Woodstock, where Sam was guided to found Matagiri, is known as a Colony of the Arts.

Sri Aurobindo was a poet and play-

wright and Mother was a painter so our resonance with the arts is natural.

Sam was told by Mother "you will be a bridge between East and West" so we hope this All USA Meeting uses the arts to build a bridge between our inner and outer selves.

Registration information and costs will be announced in the coming weeks at www.collaboration.org.

Krupa's Story

We gave our little microphone to art therapist Krupa in her geodesic art dome, near the container house where she lives. As someone who has given a TEDx talk (Art as a Mirror | Krupa Jhaveri, MPS, TIEATC | TEDxWilmingtonWomen) she described her journey succinctly in five minutes.

Nine years ago I felt a very strong calling to come back to my roots in India. I was born in Colorado to Gujarati parents so I live in two worlds. With the education and opportunities I received in the US, I felt the need to share what I had gained. I was called to give this back to people in a place where it could have a lot of impact and where it could help others in a meaningful way.

It started with a personal and professional journey back home to the motherland. In 2009, I travelled to over 80 places in India and Nepal in 7 months. It was an independent survey of potential applications of art therapy but also a spiritual pilgrimage to find the right place for me to be. I travelled to a whole range of places including cities, remote villages, orphanages, NGOs, and schools. In a remote village in Nepal, the children had never used colored paints before and I understood basic needs for creativity. I also visited Gujarat to explore the roots of my own family. There I saw that traditional arts such as narrative patchwork are being used in therapeutic ways. It was inspiring to learn that art therapy was already inherent in this culture. That gave me a framework for understanding how I could use what I had learned in this country. Then I visited Auroville.

As I was travelling around my grandmother in Gujarat fell ill. My mother was flying over from the USA to be with her, and as she was flying my grandmother passed away. So we went through the traditional Hindu rites of 13 days of mourning. This was a very challenging time. We said okay now what can happen after this? My mother had never been to the south of India even though she had grown up there. I was planning to travel there next. My mom said okay, why not. We went on our own little pilgrimage to all the temples and beaches of South India.



Krupa (in yellow apron)

Pondicherry was one of the stops. We stayed there one night and then we took a rickshaw to Auroville and stayed at Center Guest House. I had read about it in the Lonely Planet and heard about it from friends. My mom is an architect so for her this is such an interesting place because it is so rich and ripe with creativity and sustainability in architecture. At Center Guest House there was a flyer which advertised a architectural sustainability course. She was intrigued and went to inquire if there were any spaces left. They said it had been booked for months but someone just cancelled, so with the perfect synchronicity, we ended up staying for 10 days in Auroville. While she was in the course, I visited the people who became my community in Auroville.

When I first arrived I had a very strong negative reaction to Auroville. I saw a lot of issues with hierarchy and with the gaps between people. This was visible to me because in my reality in Colorado where I grew up in I dealt with a lot of discrimination. So I was very sensitive to the differences between groups and confused about the ideal of human unity versus reality. I felt there were differences to be resolved. Points where there needed to be some work. I also felt strong insights about inner and outer reality. It took me time but I realized I needed to come back to be part of the solution. Art is a bridge, as it helps everyone to express and connect in some way. So that is what I am really doing here now in service through Sankalpa.

I came back to be a volunteer for six months with Thamarai. My heart lies with the people who are marginalised; I am aware of privilege and I feel my purpose in offering this work. So I started with youth, adolescents and women in the villages. This is the major population I work with and focus on bridging awareness and connection through art.

Sankalpa: Art Journeys

By Krupa

(Here is Krupa's description of the work she came to Auroville to do, taken from the Auroville News and Notes)

Art Break Day: Collaboration

Our 5th year of a global art revolution in Auroville was shared simultaneously by 47 other sites around the world on September 1st, 2017! The generous funding from the US-based Art is Moving was no longer available this year, so simplifying this community ritual of art-making allowed us to focus on one large art piece together. Since shifting to India from the US eight years ago, I often reflect on the ability to be resourceful and imaginative in the face of difficulties. It is a major part of everyday life here to adapt and persevere, and this year included several creative responses to challenges.

Behind the Visitor's Center Cafeteria in Auroville, there is a 20-foot green shipping container used for storage of grains and goods for cooking meals for our

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community. We gathered about 75 people including youth and all ages, from all backgrounds to create a community art mural on this container for Art Break Day 2017: Auroville. The design of this mural is based on a simple kolam pattern (traditional ground drawings done by local women each morning), layered with colors and patterns which allowed original self-expression.

As the local workers are the ones who see and use this container everyday, it was a gesture of gratitude to honor and celebrate their culture in this piece.

As rains poured down on us in the morning, the staff smiled as we repeated meters of kolam and chalk lines to lead visitors to the mural hidden in the back of the campus. Many watched us with curiosity and during the afternoon tea break, we managed to gradually encourage many

of the shy ammas (women) to join us one by one, until there was a cacophony of laughter and play while they each made smaller kolam designs and images within the larger mural. This

was a powerful moment of social justice and true human unity through art, where an equalizing space of creativity was engaged by all.

Auroville is an international experiment in human unity, and most will admit that this vision works better on some days than others. By choosing to do only one piece, this mural became an investigation in how we find ways to work together without hierarchy. With seven years of



Krupa with Art Break painters

niche experience in bridging gaps through art in Auroville, I found that providing a structure allowed each individual to find their place and make their mark. Humility, equality, cooperation, communication, coordination, dedication and patience are some of the values which came alive during our journey together. As always, the process was more important than the product, though the vibrant result is worth a visit in person.

Discovering Auroville: 1972 to 2017

by Tom O'Brien

Tom O'Brien was introduced to the Integral Yoga in 1972 when he was drawn to the Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center where he lived for some time and there learned about Auroville. The following excerpts from his story describe his continuing relationship with Auroville.

During the summer of 1972 there were centenary celebrations for Sri Aurobindo at Matagiri and my discovery of Auroville. Once I discovered what Auroville meant, I felt a longing to go there and meet the Mother. That took four more years . . .

In 1976 I traveled overland to India where I stayed in the Delhi Ashram, then traveled by train, along with Neeltje, Matthijs, and Dr. Madhusudan Reddy to Pondicherry.

While living in Golconde in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram I visited Auroville several times. The eroded desert landscape was a bit overwhelming but I admired the Aurovilian tenacity to fulfill the Mother's dream. When I went to leave to buy a train ticket for New Delhi (where I expected to

get a bargain flight back to the USA) an inner voice stopped me: 'Why are you going? This is what your heart and soul has dreamt about.' My practical mind balked: 'You only have enough money to fly back.' But something else prevailed.

Thus 1977 became my introductory year for living in Auroville. It was never easy. Besides the heat and unforgiving sunshine, Aurovilians often disagreed with one another quite regularly. I understood quickly that many voices of interpretation were acceptable and in fact necessary to be opened up before any type of consensus could be established. Weekly meetings were open to all Aurovilians who wanted to attend (Pour Tous).

My experience of Her Grace grew



Tom O'Brien (3rd from right) with Gordon, Dhanalakshmi, Rudy, Kamala, Amudha on top of the World Trade Center in the late 1980's

deeper as I watched how harmony generally prevailed.

However, the atmosphere eventually became progressively more controversial between the chairman of the Sri Aurobindo Society and the the residents of Auroville who disagreed with him. Plus there was Satprem's falling out with the Ashram and the growing divisions within Auroville itself. I felt solace while working on the Matrimandir and an ongoing trust in Her Grace. It was like a great Shakespearean play with a complex cast of characters.

A year later when a monsoon flood brought over 18 centimeters of rain in one night, my little hut had over a meter of rainwater and mud filling it. I had to move. After a day or two at the Worker's Camp, I discovered that Andre T. was looking for help with the new opening of Boutique d'Auroville in Pondicherry. There was no place to live in Pondy, so Andre put a keet (palm leaf) roof and a weave of reeds on his house for another residence. There I lived on his rooftop until March, 1979 when I finally decided to return to the West.

During the 80's Tom and his life partner Rudy Phillips (who became president of the Foundation For World Education) lived in New Jersey and hosted many Aurovilians. In 1989 they went to Pondicherry.

While Rudy attended meetings, I tried to ride a motorcycle on the streets of Pondy in preparation for Auroville. It was a disaster! I could not manage my balance while facing traffic that included bullock carts, darting cycles, cars and an elephant!

I fell and was unable to drive anything for a week. Rudy had to venture out to Auroville on his own. He managed and I learned to ride on the back seat of his motorcycle.

A highlight of that trip to Auroville came when we went to the top of the still-under-construction Matrimandir. It took my breath away to see the land that I had known a decade before. Desert had become a tropical forest and tears of joy flowed. The land I knew was unrecognizable. New work units had sprung up throughout Auroville from computer technology to appropriate technology, featuring windmills and budding solar components. Incense and weaving were also growing, as well as new designs in leather and clothing. I felt an optimism that was contagious.

In 2002 Tom and Rudy moved to Cape Cod and continued their hospitality to Aurovilians and Ashramites.

By 2009 it felt right to return to Auroville again. This time we brought our dear friend Angela and my nephew Tim. After a few

days of orientation in Pondicherry, we went to stay at Verite. Bhavana was an old friend who helped make the visit rich and meaningful. Besides spending time each day at the Matrimandir, we visited a number of schools, handicraft units and people we have gotten to know over the years. Tim, Rudy and I managed to navigate around on motorcycles while Angela rode quite comfortably on the back of Rudy's motorbike. All of us were deeply impressed by the trees and greening of Auroville. Renewed friendships with many Tamil Aurovilians felt happily very gratifying. We concluded that visit with hope for Auroville's growth and a president in the USA who inspired us.

In 2017 I returned to south India with two more friends, Ellen (Neha) and Betty. We began by staying in Pondicherry. Unfortunately the air pollution had some ill effects for Neha so we were all very grateful to move to Auroville. Auromode apartments suited us well. We walked daily to the Matrimandir for an 8 a.m. meditation. In the beginning we stayed together for visits to different areas in Auroville while I introduced the women to people I knew.

We took several trips to various units, farms, Quiet Healing Center by the sea, and friends in the Green Belt. Ellen and Betty made inspiring discoveries and we all felt uplifted by the dedication seen by old timers as well as many newcomers.

Auroville faces many challenges as it goes forward into the next fifty years. I could never be able to articulate what should happen next or even into the far future. That said, I do wish to express some hopes for the further realization of Mother's Dream.

May the Aurovilians remember the "whole world is going through big changes," a paraphrase of what the Mother declared years ago. We all are in this world transformative process together. Auroville contains within itself a microcosm of what the whole world is enduring. Old fears of 'others' have risen up, scarcity thinking, and extreme polarities of those with a great deal vs. those in poverty. We all know some of this. We must do better collectively and find the true unity that naturally connects us all; not only all of humanity, but all the

diverse elements of our biosphere. A victory anywhere is a victory everywhere.

Thank you Beloved Mother for your tremendous love, *shakti* and grace that sustains our efforts.



Thank you, Auroville



Ellen (Neha)

by Neha (Ellen)

In February 2017 I spent twelve days in Auroville. What a privilege to witness and be part of this laboratory of Human Unity in its 49th year!

Our hosts, Jean and Gordon Korstange and Marlenka, facilitated a full schedule of opportunities: line dancing with Livia and Bill Vanaver; Bhutanese lunch at Terra Soul; a Sound Bath of chimes, gongs, drums; the annual Marathon through the forest; Gordon's concert of poems and flute; an exhibit of Auroville's history through photographs by Dominique Darr; visiting with young architecture students on a break from building Sacred Groves; a tour of Earth Institute by Lara Davis; two evenings with Loretta speaking on "The Coming of the New Force"; lunch and a tour of Prakash's farm in the Green Belt; playing badminton with a rickshaw driver Palani in the nearby Tamil village of Kottakarai, and a spontaneous international (Indian, Danish, Swedish, Austrian, Canadian,

Japanese, German, Columbian, American, Indian-American) get-together over Uma Prajapati's dosas! Not to mention the probing discussion of culture clashes, development challenges and how to move from distrust to trust—personally and globally.

Each morning I walked the earthen path in the early morning mist through the forest to the Matrimandir. Sit. Breathe. Come away with a refreshed spaciousness inside me. And outside me. Circling the gardens as slowly as I could, lingering. So rare is this silence. Protect this silence. To cultivate purity of heart.

I am still absorbing the impressions of this kaleidoscopic view of Auroville. Such a crossroads of people: those who live and work there, those who just work there, those who visit there. And then this subtle network of the quiet, one-pointed souls on bicycles (the way it used to be) on their way to... weeding gardens, spear by spear; maintaining archives, page by page; fixing water hoses, hose by hose; washing white socks, sock by sock. Luckily I brought home DVD's and a phone full of photos to bring me back to these images and state of mind/heart at will. I'm also sharing "City of the Dawn" DVD with local library audiences. Such rich discussions afterwards!

Auroville is unique. The Mother's vision in 1968, heralding the future, is still evolving "Human Unity". It's not just an inspiring phrase. Not just a living experiment located in India. But a call to all of us to grow up, deepen and widen and challenge ourselves to find a "new way." Wherever we are. To reach for our best way of being now and now and now.

Thank you Auroville for holding this promise and living into new possibilities for us all!



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during the month of December

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An Interview with Ariel

We originally met Ariel at the Amherst, Massachusetts, A.U.M. We met her again at the Montague Bookmill, a used books store housed in an 1842 grist mill set on the banks of the Sawmill River, a few miles north of Amherst.

My relationship with Auroville truly is a magical story. It underscores the fact that God has many things in mind that can emerge from all that happens to you, even if certain developments seem unimportant or even painful at the time they occur.

How this happened for me begins in 1978, when I was hired as the assistant office manager for a small private foundation, based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, that was focused on a project called Hexiad. Hexiad embodied a compelling inner vision received by Peter Callaway. He saw three points of light shining out from specific places on the globe.

Peter initially had no idea what these three points of light might represent, but on maps they turned out to be three intentional communities in formation: Arcosanti in Arizona, USA; Findhorn in Northern Scotland; and Auroville in South India. Peter felt a mission to connect them and see how they could help each other.

Each of these groups had different philosophies and organizational ideas, but they had in common the intention to create a model for humans to live together on the Earth in more idealistic ways than we saw around us in modern Western societies. A key shared value among the three communities was a commitment to live "ecologically"—that is, harmoniously and sustainably within a living, life-giving environment.

My understanding of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother at the time, with my limited knowledge of their teachings, was that the Divine spiritual stream that flowed through them had called for Auroville to be built, as an international community of peace and mutual respect that would support the spiritual aspiration and progress of each soul. Even then, in 1978, it was clear that Auroville differed from Arcosanti, from Findhorn, and from any other intentional



Ariel

community we had ever heard of, in two essential and challenging ways:

- ◆ Auroville was a township, in which any number of communities would be born and must learn to work positively with each other;
- ◆ By Mother's word, this township was open to *all*. There was no single unifying practice or "way of life" laid out in advance that each individual or group drawn to Auroville would need to follow. Whoever came was going to have to figure that out together.

The consequent challenges were shared with us who were based in Cambridge during 1978 and 1979. Many of our Aurovillian visitors and correspondents were worried whether, and in what forms of expression, Auroville would survive. During my year at Hexiad I met or corresponded with many people who were building relationships among the three communities and beginning to cross-pollinate their wisdom, skills, spiritual understandings, and their perspectives on how to live in community.

On the surface, my job at Hexiad was to be a paper pusher and account manager. I think at that level I did very good work.

On the human level, though, I didn't quite mesh with some of the other Hexiad staff and visitors, and I never felt clear about what they expected from me as a person. As a result, when I left that job after a year, I wasn't feeling the personal love connections that would have motivated me to keep in touch with everybody.

In the next several years, Hexiad morphed into Merriam Hill Center—an outstanding educational and networking program that introduced thousands of college students and others to the study and practice of intentional community, with hands-on experiences in Auroville, Findhorn, and

Arcosanti. I was excited to hear that so much good was coming out of the seeds that Peter and his closest colleagues had planted, but I never jumped back in.

Then suddenly, almost 40 years later, Auroville landed in the middle of my life, completely unexpectedly.

This happened when my spiritual teacher Julie had a connection with Auroville that surfaced for her during this past year. I had met Julie in 1991 and soon recognized her as a Divine being in Service to the Earth and all souls. I experience Her as embodying the Christ Light that has been recognized by many cultures in many times and places, and that many human souls aspire to emulate. And I came to know that my soul was Created to serve God's purposes at Julie's side.

Earlier this year, 2017, Julie began to experience a very deep and powerful calling in connection with Auroville and with The Mother and Sri Aurobindo, and with the sacred energy that is in the land and spiritual history of India itself. This awareness initially emerged through her relationship with Matthew and Corinne Andrews, who own and steward Yoga Center Amherst. Matthew and Corinne are each intrinsically rooted in Auroville and in India and also intrinsically connected with Julie and the stream of Divine Light that she embodies and transmits to the Earth.

For a soul to be part of more than one stream of spiritual Light is not unusual. Julie has always been aware of this; and there has never been anything exclusionary in her work. Julie's work is always to help each individual find her or his soul, and learn to hear the soul's callings. She helps people to get in touch with what God is calling them to do and to become.

Julie's growing connection with Auroville led to her being asked to join the planning committee for AUM 2017, and becoming a keynote presenter. In the spring, Julie began to share with the Light Omega Community about AUM 2017, and invited us to participate according to our own guidance.

In this context, my own connection with Auroville woke up. It felt like: *"Wait—where's Auroville in me? It's missing. I never got there, all those years ago. I need to go!"*

And then a quite miraculous event happened. One of my brothers is involved in deep service with an orphanage and life-skills center for girls and young women in Sri Lanka. This is Grace Girls Home, located in a Tamil-speaking area only 240 miles south of Auroville. My brother invited me to join him in a service delegation to Grace with other supporters from the U.S. And he would sponsor me financially.

I felt deeply honored by his invitation and his generosity. Then he asked if there was anywhere else in that part of the world where I would like to spend a few days before the start of our delegation. I shared my wish to visit Auroville, and he said "Done."

I remain so humbled by this beautiful gift. My brother even remembered that I had worked with an organization connected to Auroville 38 years ago. God's intention was clearly manifesting in this situation. Thus I came to have my first experience of Auroville at the hottest time of year, mid-June 2017.

My sense of belonging to this land and its animating spirit came quietly, though unmistakably. It started when I arrived at dawn and sat down under the banyan tree that anchors Center Guest House—after 36 hours of travel with very little sleep. "Ah...home," said my exhausted body and dizzy mind. "Home."

I am a soul blessed to feel home in more than one place on this planet. Yet this awareness that Auroville is an essential home I must continue to be part of was there from that moment and has been "alive and kicking" in me ever since.

My six days in Auroville were low-key on the outside. Working through several mishaps such as phone failure and illness, I soaked up the peaceful comfort of Center Guest House, its anchoring banyan tree, ever-present bird song, 24-hour internet access, wonderful food, and kind, knowledgeable managers. Sitting in the lovely screen house/dining hall, I explored the meanings of our visits with the handful of other guests who had been called to visit at this time despite temps ranging from 90s to 120 F.

Having never been comfortable on a bicycle, I walked to many places and accepted many scooter rides from passers-

by. I experienced Solar Kitchen, and the consciousness of waste management and sustainability throughout the township, as models for the whole world. I had a serious skin infection that led me to appreciate the medical service at Aspiration as second to none. After the various manifestations of what I came to call my "challenge gateway" to Auroville had all subsided, I began to meet with treasured friends of Matthew Andrews and learn of their experiences and contributions that are part of Auroville.

Even though I have long known "*there are no coincidences*", I feel astonished with awe and gratitude when I witness God's hand so clearly as in the timing of this first visit to Auroville. Because my soul's connection was activated in June, I came to the AUM Gathering in August totally open and eager. I was newly exploring, but exploring from "inside," not "outside."

And I came as someone who had already begun to ground in my own body the spiritual streams of Auroville and India working together with the spiritual stream of Julie. I feel myself participating in a sacred joining that is taking place to help the transformation of the Earth and all of its beings into a state of Divine Love and Light and Unity.

Again reflecting back 38 years to the Hexiad experience that I left feeling I wasn't part of: What is happening now is such a lesson in humility and trust. I hope to stay conscious that any time I feel pain or confusion about an experience, I can turn it over to God and say, *"God, I await your Word. I await your timing to share with me what this really means."* Because 38 years later, I know how important the seed was, that Hexiad planted in me.

My next journey to India will be in January and February, starting with a time of seva in Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Delhi. This visit will begin to fulfill a calling I knew at the moment that Tara Jauhar looked into my eyes at the AUM gathering and I experienced her infinite Love and her soul lineage with Mother. After this, I am honored to be joining with Julie during her second (embodied) journey to Auroville. 

Travels with Julie

by Will Moss

It all started with the A.U.M., as all things in the created Universe begin with OM. In my case, it was the All USA Meeting of 2017 held in Amherst, Mass. In February I saw that Matthew Andrews had put out a call for help with planning the A.U.M.. Since this was the closest that A.U.M. had ever been to my home, I decided to offer to join the planning committee.

We met for the first time in March, 2017. I drove down from Maine and met with the group at their Yoga Center and toured the space where the conference would be held. Then Matthew asked us to join them at the home of their long-time teacher, Julie of Light Omega, to get some guidance and support from her as they had asked her to help with the conference itself. We went, met with Julie who seemed to be very wise and loving.

Julie commented during the gathering that she was feeling a sudden connection to the “energy of the Divine Mother” as a result of our being there, and explained that it had something to do with my presence in the group as well as those others who were connected with The Mother, for the Divine energy was coming through her. Afterwards, we went on to meet one last time at the Andrews residence. And then I drove home.

That seemed to be all, except that I found myself feeling Julie’s presence during my morning meditations more and more, guiding and supporting me. A month later we met again, but as I couldn’t drive down again I tuned in online. Again, Julie announced that she was feeling an even stronger connection to the Divine Mother in a completely new way during our meeting. And afterwards, my inner connection with her grew even stronger.

Then, during the conference itself,

I finally met with Julie one-on-one, and at one point she turned to me and said, “This is going to come completely out of the blue, but I feel called to go to Auroville, and I would like you to accompany me.” She explained that I could be a bridge between her and Auroville. I wanted to explain that I was no Aurovillian, having only visited there once years earlier, even though I had followed and supported the development of Auroville and Matrimandir in my small way from the early days. But she seemed certain of her choice, and three weeks later she wrote and told me that she was leaving on October 1st and would I agree to go? I was

stirred from the foundation of my being by the possibility! I couldn’t refuse, even though I felt it would be impossible to make it happen on all kinds of levels. And yet, a few days later, everything had fallen into place, and I was going!

We were met at Chennai airport by Balu, of Verite Guest House and the Mohanam Community. He and his wife Rajaveni

[both featured in the last issue of AVI Connect] had met Julie at A.U.M., and were immediately taken with her. When they found that Julie was coming to Auroville, they immediately offered to host her, and us, and assist with her visit in any way they could.

Julie’s calling consisted of an adesh to go and meditate at the Matrimandir as much and as often as possible. All else was left to be determined according to Divine guidance later on. She would be going to Matrimandir not for her own benefit, but



Balu and Will Moss

to benefit the world, Auroville, and her mission to the Earth.

Once we had arrived and settled in, Rajaveni took us to get our passes to Matrimandir, and brought us to the MM offices to arrange for visits as soon as was possible. Later, we were granted passes for an early time slot so that Julie could spend as much time as needed in the Inner Chamber. As I was accompanying her as well, it was a magnificent opportunity for me to be in that other-worldly space every morning for 45 minutes, day after day. Each day I felt my communion with that glowing crystal deepen and grow. Afterwards, we would explore the gardens, and Julie made a special connection with the Divine Mother emanating from the Spirit of Water, both at the Garden of Unity and the Garden of Consciousness.

Julie had expressed a strong desire to have contact with the poor of India, those in the villages nearby, and Balu and Rajaveni responded by bringing us to the school they had started in their home village for the little ones. Julie immediately fell in love with the little children, and they with her. It was a delight to see them playing joyfully in the large playground with the toys and games provided, and then watch them line up for lunch or for simple learning activities. Julie had brought a suitcase filled with children’s books donated by the Light Omega community in Amherst, which were welcomed by the teachers with delight.

Later, Balu and Rajaveni brought us to Mohanam, the Bamboo Forest Learning Center where they had classes for older village youth in crafting bamboo, but also crafting their own futures with training in working together, in leadership skills, and entrepreneurial skills. On weekends, they would bring in children from outlying



Julie Greeting Young Women



Julie Speaking at Mohanam

villages who went to government schools, but never got opportunities for cultural and creative activities. It was amazing to see the energy and enthusiasm these two were putting into these efforts to engage and uplift their fellow villagers,

to bring them new possibilities as well as to reacquaint them with their ancient heritage which has fallen into disuse.

We did go in to Pondicherry twice, and I made sure to visit the Samadhi each time – always a special Grace emanating from that courtyard. We also made an overnight trip to Tiruvanmalai, to Mt. Arunachala, and the land which Balu has purchased with the intention of building a healing center called The Sound Temple (Nada-Brahma), using techniques of sound healing he has learned. Julie performed a ritual there given by Divine guidance to create a vibrational connection between the Sound Temple, Auroville, and Light Omega Center in Amherst.

Returning to Amherst, and Maine, at the end of our brief visit I felt as though filled with Light, and transformed by the experience. In the end, I came to realize that to be a bridge one didn't have to belong to either side, but simply have a firm hold on each. And Julie came to realize that, while America had always been the land that her soul had brought her to and that lived within her, India was also the land of her heart and soul, and working towards the joining of the two lay in front of her as her own Divine calling.

For more about Julie go to www.lightomega.org.



Forming the Auroville Symbol, February 28th, 2017

By Julian Lines

Last February Auroville International was looking for ways to celebrate Auroville's 50th.

Muna Wagner from AVI Germany had been part of a "human mandala" during her high school years and thought forming the Auroville Symbol would be a good kick-off for the anniversary year. AVI fully supported the concept of something universal showing human unity and especially wanted the event to take place in the International Zone.

Photos taken in Auroville of hands together or feet in a circle which were all different shades and hues had spoken to that "unity in diversity" theme. When AVI met in Auroville this February, 2017, a spontaneous committee was formed to manifest the idea. Fabienne could provide the required permission to fly a drone to take the photo from above and said Fred Cebron had the necessary equipment and expertise to capture it.

I tapped French-Canadian architect Nadia Begin, who was visiting Auroville from the Arcosanti community in Arizona and staying in the nearby International House to do the plan and layout of the symbol. Scouting the surrounding area, the plot between Canada's Inuksuk and the Pavilion of Tibetan Culture seemed a good candidate for a wide flat area. Nadia was able to use Google Earth to identify the location and superimpose the AV symbol to provide a template. The first location seemed too uneven and too large. We were trying to calculate how many people we would need to "fill" the symbol. And would we hold hands and stretch if we had too few or double up if there were too many?

A more suitable and smaller plot was found closer to the road where people heading towards the Visitor's Center could see the site. Nadia estimated it would require a little over two hundred people to fill the symbol. But would they come?

Juergen, the AVI Ireland liaison, had



Rice Flour Auroville Symbol

also volunteered and along with Max from Denmark and Chris from AVI Germany formed the ground crew. Kavitha offered the help of Youthlink to organize a tent and refreshments along with a critical Facebook Event page.

With a rented tent, juice donated from Naturellement in cans loaned from the Unity Pavilion, all we needed to purchase were birthday cake and cookies from the Bakery. Juergen also calculated the symbol and fashioned a rope with one meter intervals to measure the radius of the inner and outer circles. He bought rice flour to mark the circle, though there was some concern the ants might eat it up between the creation of the symbol Sunday morning and 7:30 am Tuesday after the bonfire.

We gathered at the site and tried to imagine how it would look from above. We decided to make the largest circle possible without getting under the branches of the trees on either side. Interestingly we found a concrete marker exactly where we found the center of our circle. Using a pipe and Juergen's rope we marked out the two circles spilling the flour as we went, then marked where the 5 spokes should go, then connected them. While everything connected, from the ground, the circles did not look in the correct proportion relative to each other. Fortunately, Fred did a test shot that afternoon.

Nadia promised to check on the legibility of the rice flour over the next two days and make sure the ants had not devoured all the flour overnight. "If you build it, they will come" is the mantra from the "The Field of Dreams" film. In our case, with some help from Youthlink and Vani, word got out.

After greeting friends at the bonfire on the 28th, Wendy and I headed towards the Visitor's Center to see if we would hit "critical mass". The idea of not serving the

refreshments until the end was quickly scrapped and a pleasant gathering ensued as people continued their birthday greetings and exchanges. Juergen and Christoph had tested the megaphone loaned from the Auroville Marathon by Chandresh and had extra batteries on hand. Vehicles were kept at a safe distance and a diverse crowd was gathering. Now all we needed was our photographer. Fred Celebron, who had already filmed part of the birthday bonfire, drove up and set up a battery to recharge while a fresh one was loaded into the drone.

Flat bells played by the team from Svaram were organized by Aurelio and rang at the front of each of the spokes, creating a harmonious atmosphere. The inner and outer rings formed, then the rest of the spokes and a group of children circled in the center. As the dot in the center of the symbol is solid I requested they all gather within the circle rather than around it and we waited to begin filming.

Juergen, in his resonant German/Irish English entertained and cajoled as the drone finally circled overhead, "Raise one hand and wave, now both hands..." We wanted to get a variety of photos before the direct rays of the sun cleared the trees. While we were focused on getting some photos for publishing, Fred knew the power of zooming in and up with the drone. After fifteen minutes of zooming in and out and down and up our cooperative spontaneous gathering had done the needful.

There was something quite special and harmonious how everyone came together to help, a sweetness in attempting to greet the rest of the world, so I wanted to acknowledge everyone who pitched in. And I was deeply delighted to pass the site a few days later to find two cows following the circle licking up the rice powder. I don't know exactly how many nations were represented, but the group was quite varied and full of good will and we all offered our greetings to the great Up Above...

For more about Auroville Symbol photos go to www.aviusa.org/links.

Savitri Around the World & The Nakashima Foundation for Peace

by Miriam Belov

On Monday, October 23rd, 2017 the Nakashima

Foundation for Peace happily participated in the "Savitri Around the World" project celebrating Auroville's 50th birthday. What a brilliant idea it was to do this. Thank you to Auroville International and to all those who read around the planet!

Mira Nakashima, her brother Kevin and husband Jon Yarnall drove up from New Hope, PA. It is there where George Nakashima, one of the earliest American disciples of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo, lived and worked. Sundarananda is the name given to him by Sri Aurobindo when he was overseeing the building of Golconde and lived at the ashram. It means "one who delights in beauty" and George fulfilled this destiny.

Julian Lines and Miriam Belov were the Nakashima Foundation for Peace Board

advisors who joined in the readings. We were given wonderful passages to read. It was a summer day and felt like Auroville's warmth had come to NYC. Indeed, Aviram of Sadhana Forest, Wendy of Matagiri and my daughter Maddye were also present to give loving support. Irene Goldman had helped to organize this but could not join in the actual readings.

We gathered around the great Peace Altar in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in NYC. Mira asked Miriam to lead a meditation during which she concentrated all of us on the joyous task ahead and invoked blessings. We each



Julian, Mira, Kevin, Miriam, Jon with the Plaque

had rose petals – white tinged with pink – which were placed on the Altar.

The readings then began. You may hear some ambient noise and also other people talking in the background. There were tours happening and some came to look at what was going. Since this was done in a major NYC attraction, there was the usual curiosity and interest.

The Altar is one of 3 monumental Nakashima works dedicated to peace. It was consecrated in 1986 and we have held meditations around it since so it can be a living force. The Sacred Peace Table

in Auroville was placed in the Unity Pavilion's Hall of Peace in 2014. The third is in Moscow at the Russian Academy of the Arts. It was originally consecrated at the Cathedral for the United Nations' 50th birthday,



Maddye, Wendy Lines and Mira Nakashima

travelled to the Hague Appeal for Peace and then on to Russia in 2001. Readers also gathered at these peace tables for Savitri around the world. Mira made this plaque which holds 3 candles, symbolizing the venues.

We are honored to have done this for Auroville around the Peace Altar in NYC. We look forward to seeing the final project on YouTube in February 2018.

May all our readings fulfill the inspiring words of The Mother, "Savitri is a mantra for the transformation of the World."

For more info see www.auroville.org/contents/4333



IN MEMORIAM: Bruce Davidson

by Gordon Korstange

Bruce Davidson, one of the founders of the Sirius Community, passed away recently after a battle with cancer. Along with his brother Gordon, Bruce founded Sirius in Sunderland, a rural area east of Amherst, MA. They had lived in Findhorn and took their inspiration from that community.

Bruce was a self-taught master builder who cut and used trees from the nearby area to build many ecological structures, including the Sirius community center, constructed around a massive tree trunk. He was also the chief renovator for the Merriam Hill Center conference center in the 1980's where two All-USA-Meetings were held there.

Merriam Hill's mission, led by Peter Calloway (see Ariel's interview), was to connect Auroville, Findhorn and Arcosanti. To that end they funded a program that brought several Aurovilians to Sirius to participate in community life and to help build the community center. Bruce, with his complete acceptance of these Aurovilians, gave them the kind of environment that supported their stay and experience.

In turn, he was inspired to visit Auroville on at least two occasions. Despite his love for natural, wooden structures, he resonated deeply with the Matrimandir.

In recent years, he was a charismatic presence at the A.U.M. which was held in Sirius in 2012 to bring together the many young people, especially from Living Routes, who had spent semesters in Auroville.

Bruce was one of those individuals who was able to put his ideals and those of the community into a life-long practice that did not become dogmatic. He was a delight to be with and was the embodiment of the Sirius spiritual philosophy:

Our 'spiritual' foundation reflects awareness of an underlying presence giving rise to and uniting all things. We regard this presence of many names as the essence of who we truly are individually and collectively, and as provider of the insight, inspiration and guidance that calls on us to awaken from purely self-centered material orientations and competitive living strategies.

His light will continue to guide the Sirius community.

In Loving Memory June Wilkin Maher

January 15, 1938 - April 25, 2014



Dance to Life's Creation

*O Sing, sing to me a Song
Holding in its golden cup of music form
Bright rhythms
Poured at Her feet,
The Song rising, rising,
As together we build the City
Of Love and Truth*

June Maher, Founder of AVI-USA

Four Sisters Guest House

A European House, inaugurated last month, is under construction next to International House and it is scheduled to be completed by the end of the year.

The guest rooms honoring June Maher, Anie Nunnally, Bhavana Dee, and Juanita Cole and kitchen facility will be open to guests and the Europeans are pleased as it will compliment their infrastructure. They even requested the rooms to be sited a bit closer so as to be more accessible. This is a welcome collaboration by all concerned and has passed preliminary planning approval.

International House has been a low cost choice among students and researchers coming to Auroville. The original building, constructed by AVIUSA in collaboration with the University of Washington Design/Build program, has been complimented by an ecological triangular dorm where roof panels were constructed from



June's Tree
in the Garden of Remembrance, Auroville

corrugated tetrapack recycled material, mud and palm fiber walls (literally built from the site) and innovative staircases made with railings of used hoses.

Manu Gopalan is the lead architect in collaboration with B Sullivan. Both live on site. Satyavan Alexander has agreed to join an oversight committee along with Ing Marie Putka and Alok Aurovilian.

The response from the families has been very positive and inspiring and a confirmation we are on the right track to honor the memory of these very special American women.

**DONATE TO AUROVILLE
during the month of December**

Paypal Foundation will give 101%

www.paypal.com/fundraiser/charity/59015

or tinyurl.com/aviusapf

please email us your allocation