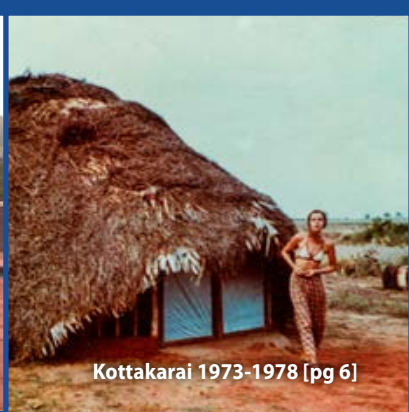


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AVI-USA CONNECT

Fall / Winter 2020-2021 Newsletter

Issue 15



View of the amphitheater from top of Matrimandir

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Missing Auroville

With Covid 19 still raging, the annual visits that many of us make to Auroville will probably not happen. Thus we asked our readers to write short descriptive essays about what they will miss most in not visiting the community this winter. Here is what they wrote.



Biggie in nursery

Biggie Swartz

As soon as I heard the theme of missing Auroville it began to spin in my head and I questioned (again) my relationship with Auroville, and what I personally can contribute to build Her dream.

For many of us the lockdown created a serious challenge in our daily life. For me it was the slow down, the stand still, no more escape into activities. But what activities? Is my modest work at the Botanical Gardens really helpful to build Auroville? When the lockdown in India was again prolonged in June I decided to leave to be with my family in France hoping that the geographical distance would give me new energies and new inspirations for my future in Auroville.

What am I missing being away? I miss my friends, our exchanges; even their jokes or teasing coming from the heart. I know I can trust each one to be sincere, even if they say something which does not please me or is contradictory to my perception (but therefore even more inspiring).

I miss the children, their laughter, their open heartedness, their striking virgin wisdom.

I miss the walks in the forest, the perfume of our earth after the rains and the breath of the leaves, the sensation of my bare feet in the red mud; I miss the shrieks of the peacocks, even if I hate to be awakened by them in the middle of the night. I miss the

games of the squirrels or the chatting of the bird community called Seven Sisters. I miss the lessons of our yoga teacher Tatiana carrying me over my own limits. I miss the walks in the Matrimandir gardens, to sit there, to breathe in something which I guess is close to bliss. Auroville is a very large embrace.

And while I am writing this there is something new developing. A Whatsapp group called "back to Auroville" was created a few days ago. All Aurovilians presently abroad form this group, and we hope to return soon.

They are true Auroville family, across the whole world, embracing all. Yes, this embrace happens throughout the whole world! To me it feels like an emerging knowledge about something unknown, something Satprem expressed in *The Adventure of Consciousness*. This aspect of adventure fascinated me 45 years ago, and I happily discover now that the adventure continues. She still has something unexpected for us to work on!

Biggie first time to Auroville in 1975. She remembers the feeling of magnetism walking in those days over the barren red land with the thoughts "everything is to be done here, and we can and must do it." She writes, "After 45 years my love relationship with the earth is as alive as at the very beginning, mixed with the profound gratitude for Their help that we overcome all challenges and obstacles. I still live in the forest of Samridhi which we planted in the 70s. I hope to see you all there one day."



Karen Miscall-Bannon.

Julian Lines: Missing Link

*Waft of Jasmine, sound of a distant chant
and morning birds calling...
The mixture of earthen dust and
choking exhaust,
Of bells and horns and
motors changing gears.
The spinning sail,
the dipping pump and a clang.
That metal on metal shower of echoes runs
up my spine still
In the Sacred Chamber,
the Light coming through
My mind, my heart, my Being.
Ah! you are the One!
The morning sun through the branches
shining on me;
And the true I shines back.*

Julian Lines is on the board of AVI-USA. He and his wife Wendy are now the stewards in residence of Matagiri Sri Aurobindo Center in Mt. Tremper, NY

Karen Miscall-Bannon

I had the blessing to be introduced to Auroville and the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and Mother via Matthew Andrews in 2016. I was then able to return to Auroville, spending the month of February into March there and at the Ashram in Pondicherry.

This year I was unable to go due to some family issues, then COVID hit, and was unable to travel anywhere. I sorely missed my visit to Auroville this year. It has been a place where I found myself at ease and was been able to do some very deep learning and exploration there. It is a magical place where creativity is high, and the environment of Auroville is such that focusing on spiritual practice is quite easeful.

I miss riding my bike and my scooter early in the morning to the Matrimandir for meditation. I miss being around people whose paths and minds are moving in a similar direction! It is an oasis amidst an increasingly

unstable world, and in my studies I have found the work of Mother and Sri Aurobindo to be vital to the movement of the planet forward towards a vision of unity and love.

I miss the lines and the waiting, the pace of life. I miss the people and the red dust that coats everything in February. I miss the bird songs and the call to prayer from the local village. I miss the noise of Pondicherry and the deep quiet of the Samadhi amidst the hustle and bustle of the city.

Though I am unable to visit Auroville in person this year, I hold it close to my heart and feel its energy and influence every day in my practice. Even though I can not be physically present there at this time, I feel its energy, its positive strength, dir, and the Samadhi feed me on a daily basis.

I imagine and feel the deep abiding sense of peace and quietness. This is what I keep. So, though I miss it and its people deeply, I feel like even if I am never able to return to that magical place again, it is a deep part of me that I will always have.

Karen is a student of all things Yoga since 1985. She shares her passion for practice with students around the world.

Livia Vanaver

What draws me to return to Auroville each year? Certainly the Matrimandir, the various international pavilions, performing and dancing with everyone at Unity Pavilion, sound baths on Wednesday evenings with Aurelio, delicious places to eat, gather and meet friends like Bread and Chocolate, the Auroville Bakery and Dharma Swasti but truly it's the people there and the deep, loving relationships we have formed since 2014 when Julian Lines first invited us to come to Auroville and see what we could offer.

I miss most the Aikiyam community of students, teachers and international staff who come to bring wonderful supplemental gifts to this extraordinary school. Bill and I always look forward to walking to school and greeting all 125 in morning assembly with headmaster Shankar who has become a dear friend. We sing songs and teach various hand games and dances together with all the grades. Bringing world dances, creative movement and improvisation to the students



Livia and friend

from Creche to 8th grade (and to the faculty members, after the school day...who love to dance and be together) has been a joy to which we look forward each year.

During the pandemic starting in April, we began teaching dance on Zoom to the students living in the Malarchi boarding house every Tuesday morning. Tixon sets up the screen outdoors for the students. Over these months they have, in this strange virtual modality, become proficient in learning many dances from Israel, China, US, West Africa and also structured improvisation where they express themselves. We are all excited to see each other every week.

We are so lucky to have a wonderful dancer, Vanitha Mohan, who is a teacher at Aikiyam and in charge of Malarchi, there on the ground explaining movement details that are difficult to transmit via Zoom. Each week we see further growth in the 9 students aged 8-15. Jill Ann Schwartz, one of our teaching artists at The Vanaver Caravan has been joining us and brings her love of Qi Gong in the form of fun and imaginative warm up exercises. We speak about the history of each dance and notice the similarities and contrast of movement styles. Through dance, we learn about the world from two sides of the planet each week.

We all look forward to seeing each other in person as soon as we are able. We hope to return in February 2022 and be able to work with the whole school again. In the meantime, we are missing being with you all in Auroville.

Livia Drapkin Vanaver is the Co-Artistic Director along with her husband, Bill Vanaver, of The Vanaver Caravan Dance & Music Company, based in the Hudson Valley, NY. They have toured throughout the US and abroad since 1972 as cultural ambassadors of GoodWill, collecting and performing world dance and music. They are also known for their ground breaking work as Teaching Artists in schools, engendering a

love of learning and appreciation of cultures around the world through dance and music.

Mary Alexander

What I will miss most about Auroville this coming year is the convergence of friends from all over. Generally, when I visit Auroville in February, I see friends made over many years of connection; "Old Timers" who were there when I lived in Auroville in the early years, friends I have made on subsequent visits over many years, friends from around the world who come for Auroville and the Mother's birthdays, and friends from around the US whom I have come to know over the fifty years and have had a connection to Auroville, but who live too far away to see easily.

Much is said about not liking Auroville's "tourist season", and I get it. Roads are crowded and lines are long, and it is hard to find a way to see everyone. I also enjoy visiting in the hot quiet months when people I haven't seen for years are more likely to recognize me because my hair is pulled up and off my neck, as it was when I was younger, and people who prefer the quiet of the season are more likely to be there.

Finally, with each visit I also make new friends, and I will miss that opportunity in the coming year

Auroville has human riches to offer in any season.

Arlo Alexander, age 3

Me miss my cat, Chips. Me miss my dog, Stella. Me miss feeding Chips and Stella. Me take Stella for a walk on the path in the forest.

Romaya Alexander, age 7

I miss my cat and my dog. I miss my best friend. I miss riding horses and I miss my school.

Mary Alexander is the treasurer of AVI-USA. Arlo and Romaya are her grandchildren.

Miriam Below

My Daily Walk to the Matrimandir

Sleeping so deeply that my dreams rise into vision, I walk through my heart each morning to the Matrimandir. At every step the red dust miraculously turns into powdered gold flowing from the shining sphere, showering blessing.

Insects and motorcycles whizz around

me. Sometimes majestic oxen approach or a bus passes by spraying the golden dust on me. Images of others on this daily pilgrimage shimmer in the hot tropical morning.

The scent of plumeria and the protection of the bougainvillia lead me forward through the rising heat. Nothing matters but arriving at the shade of the banyan tree. There I rest before the ascent into stillness and concentration with the other consecrated ones.

Each day the same glorious journey into my spirit, as the future glistens around me: palpable through the air, heavy with aspiration.

A purple water lily often welcomes me at the gate with a fragrance so subtle as to force a halt but beckoning ahead is the passage way to my inner being. It leads me to the chamber of light and crystal with an inward touch of such intensity that my body quivers, as my cells gently expand to receive.

And on a final visit as I leave the psychic center of Auroville, I see a glory of lotuses blooming in the surrounding garden. Shimmering in the pond, they blaze like flames of white light. There I halt, entranced, as my soul surrenders into revelation this Supramental year of 2020.

Having hosted the NYC study circle from the mid 1980s to 2001, Miriam is a Reiki Master energy healer. www.wellnessagenda.com

Rachel Hardy

Lunch time

We straddle the Splendor, Segar in front and I in back. After two kicks, the motorcycle whirs to life, but today, we don't turn left towards the Matrimandir and Solar Kitchen like usual. We go right.

I always look forward to going over Auroville's speed breakers, an event during which I never hold on to the bike or him, just to test my balance and skill at riding. We pass people Segar knows, and he throws up his hand. Multiple times. He always knows somebody. Multiple somebodies.

We ride past the new Auro Oceanic Resort that's controversial in these parts. Past Eco Service, Verité, Celebration, Isai Ambalam. We continue down the road where both of the road's shoulders drop steeply towards bone-dry tanks. In one of the tanks, an older woman squats to rest, keeping a watchful eye



Rachel and Segar

on her grazing goats.

The road cuts right and drops, and we slowly make our way down the hill as a young man makes his way up. Children in uniform bounce down the roads on their lunch break. A woman slowly rides by on her cycle, bundles of kindling strapped to the back. Two dogs sleeping lazily in the sun barely lift their heads to see us as we pass.

More speed breakers, but smaller, village-style. The biriyani from the Muslim kadai smells amazing, but we have a different destination today. One more speed breaker, and we're there. Segar bends low to enter the keet hut, returns the proprietor's broad smile and "Vanakkam!," and orders our favorites: elumichai sadam for him and velu and puli sadam for me.

I run across the street towards the smell of the wood fire, rupees in hand. The owners know my face by now, and they smile as I use my limited Tamil to order three omelets to go. They nearly always ask if I want to add parota; I nearly always say no. As I wait and watch the man deftly cooking the onions, chilies, and eggs together over the iron surface, I try to stand in the smoke of the fire—I will be able to inhale the intoxicating wood-fire smell now and save some on my clothes to enjoy later.

Jogging back to the bike with hot omelets wrapped in banana leaf and newspaper and tied in twine, we go back the same way we came. Segar waves at another somebody I don't know. The woman and her goats have moved farther down the tank. We take only one different turn going back, and we grab a 10-rupee bag of milk. We mustn't forget that; it's part of the pièce de résistance of lunch.

We haul lunch up two flights of stairs, and Segar and Velu joke and laugh as we enter Velu's house and set up. Both guys give me the salted dry chilies tucked in between the newspaper and the parchment paper cradling the rice—I sorely miss those chilies—and we eat together. Jokes abound.

Velu empties the milk packet into a saucepan, lights the burner, and puts tea bags and too much sugar—did I say too much? I meant a perfect amount—in each of the three small ceramic mugs. The blue mug was my favorite. He pours the hot milk over the tea bag and too-much-but-really-perfect mound of sugar, but only after forgetting about the milk being on the stove and it boiling over.

And then? It's tea time and talking and laughing and happily groaning about how it was too much food. It's this—this is how I'm missing Auroville.

Rachel Hardy is a marketing and communications manager and currently lives in Chicago, Illinois, with her Aurovillian husband, Segar Durakannu. She spent five years in Auroville and Kottakarai.

Segar

I never thought I would be out of Auroville for so long. Sometimes I ask myself this question: "Segar, is this you?" This person who was so happy to be in Auroville and living the life? Doing his routines at Citadines, Town Hall, Solar Kitchen (my favorite place that showcases Auroville as it is), and Kottakarai (Udhayam Educational and Cultural Center). Now I am in America, the country I never imagined to be living in.

From time to time when I think about Auroville (home), I ask this question: what do I miss about Auroville? Lots. Some of the faces, places, the life around, and definitely some close people that mean a lot to me and the connections I have created with them over the years. Sometimes I just miss seeing them, being around some amazing people who are doing great work and being very humble.

I definitely miss being involved or taking a part in the community collective activities, even though your contributions are very small. It is a great feeling that you are giving back to the community. It's amazing how it happens.

The other thing is that I never thought I would get involved in something like Udhayam. I was part of this village program for over ten years in my own village which focused on creating a communal space for the village and for kids' educational activities. I miss going every day, being around the kids, youth and the team; involved in the activities and planning, discussing how to bring the

center active and more community based.

I miss going to Certitude for basketball, football—to sweat and shout, and going home full of red dirt. Early morning cycling, observing quietness of the Auroville community and fresh chill air. It's so beautiful. Our Sunday cycling crew. Once every couple of months we cycle to Tiruvannamalai. The fun we have on the road and our favorite idly place, tea stops, and walking around the mountains.

Being away from Auroville, it's even more interesting. Identifying the beauty and the beautiful things you were part of, and at the same time, noticing the repeating pattern that is still going on. It is a little sad, but it's a very small amount compared to the amazing things that are happening there.

Segar Duraikannu was born and raised in Kottakarai and joined Auroville as a teenager. He has been living in Chicago, Illinois, for nearly two years.

Matthew Andrews

It's morning in Auroville. As the dark sky begins to lighten, birds take up their perennial chorus. A breeze flows through the window and rustles the curtains. I rise from bed.

I just arrived in Auroville last night after an exhausting 30 hours of travel from the other side of the world. Part of my consciousness is still there, shivering in the Massachusetts cold. But my body is here, embraced by birdsong and the morning call to prayer. I get dressed, grab my motorbike key and Matrimandir pass, and leave my room.

Riding along the sandy roads in the predawn light, I feel my heart lifting, like the hull of a boat gathered up by the rising tide beneath it. I pass some cows, a dog, but no other humans are out and about on the crown road at this hour. The watchman at the Matrimandir gate smiles a greeting as I ride through and park. He welcomes me back to Auroville with friendly eyes and a warm smile. I reach for the pass in my pocket, but he waves me through, brushing away the formality and reminding me that I am home.

I feel a radiant warmth in my chest as I pass through the gate and into the Park of Unity. The sun is not yet visible above the horizon, but the sky is growing lighter by the minute. My heart leaps out to embrace the banyan tree, and the Matrimandir itself comes



into view. The Park is empty but for birds in the Champak trees and tittering on the lawns. I walk blissfully toward the morning entrance, passing the petals encased in red brick on one side and the humming peaceful vibration of the gardens on the other. I slip off my shoes, then follow the sloping pathway up toward the main door of the Matrimandir.

I walk slowly, feeling the earth beneath my feet, savoring each breath and the sensation of air on my skin. But more than these outer experiences, it's my inner experience that draws my attention. My heart glows, my eyes tear, my soul smiles. I have traveled all around the world, seen countless beautiful vistas, and felt the joy of adventure and exploration. But this is something different. Nowhere else have I felt this sense of home, like my soul can rest in a divine, welcoming embrace. Layers of stress and armor fall away.

What I feel in the presence of Matrimandir is a kind of peaceful joy, a profound alignment of my outer being with the depth of my soul. I feel safe and held, not so much protected from outer turmoil or physical pain, but safe to invite the silent witness of my inner being into this tumultuous and unpredictable world. It's not a choice I make, but a natural response to the space around me.

Inside the golden orb, I sit in the silence and put on socks, and then start up the spiral stairs into the open middle region. My breathing, soft footsteps and the tinkle of water cascading from above echo off the orange walls,

and I bow to the still candle flame at the base of the upward reaching path. I ascend with my hand on my heart, walking gently toward the inner chamber.

I miss so many things about Auroville. I miss friends and food, sights and sounds. I miss the riot of smells that pervade India and the warmth of the equatorial sun. But this sense of being home is what I miss most of all. I have found purpose in my life here in the United States, and I'm grateful for the blessings of my life. But a feeling remains of being far from home, on a mission in a far-away and unfamiliar place. I was born here, and not there, so this feeling makes no sense. I have spent most of my life here, only visiting Auroville once or twice a year. But I am not speaking to you of sense and logic. I am sharing my heart and soul, which defy linearity.

I first arrived in India on my 21st birthday, just about exactly 20 years ago. It was an immediate awakening to an experience of home that supplanted what I had known of home before. I've lived half of my life in the presence of this mystery. There's a Sanskrit word, *guha*, that means something like secret, a hidden jewel tucked away into a cave. Muruga, son of Siva and brother of Ganesh, is sometimes called *Guha*, the embodiment of mystery. I embrace this mystery, this *guha* that is central to my life. And I wait now in this time of collective mystery, the future clouded by so many overlapping unknowns, for the inevitable tomorrow that hides from view. My heart knows that my relationship to Auroville is mostly hidden, and what will come of it remains to be seen, like a secret whispered in the cave of my heart.

Matthew Andrews is current President of the Auroville International USA Board and Director of Yoga Center Amherst in Massachusetts. He's also a writer and musician, and you can find his latest album at www.matthewandrewsmusic.com.



Matthew Andrews.

Life in Kottakarai: Reflections on an Early Auroville Community by its Members

Origins

by Constance

Kottai means “fort”, karai means “shore”, “edge”, “river bank”. In place names *karai* can also mean “near to” or “next to”.

The forest may be implied and Kottakarai could mean “the fort near the forest”. Or the name could refer to the village itself as being near the fort.

The large late megalithic burial ground (from Bharat Nivas, along the Matrimandir Nursery up to the second banyan) was always visible in the exposed wall foundations, looted graves and eroded burial pots, but the site of the fort is still to be located. A large stone pendant found near the Kottakarai Kali temple was inscribed with a pre-Brahmi script (identified by Jagannath, the Ashram linguist,) as originating possibly 300-500 BCE) indicating great age for that temple site.



Jaap and Chandra

I arrived at the Ashram on July 22, 1968 with a one-way ticket to India and moved immediately to the center of Auroville. Mother accepted me in November. I then built a house in '69 in the mango grove that would later be the site of the Matrimandir Nursery. In late '70, when the nursery was about to begin, I built a house inside Kottakarai village on a plot that had been one of the earliest in the area to be purchased. My focus was the present realities of (and future impacts upon) the land and, especially, its people.

Mother was always accessible through correspondence. In June of '71 (the year Mother gave me the name “Constance”) the growing community around Silence was requested to relocate so that Bharat Nivas could be constructed – and I suggested that they consider moving into the village. After some exploration, this became next to the village - onto land that provided broader opportunities.

Iris and I decided to leave the village in '73 and on the 27th of March asked Mother

for her guidance in choosing our next work. She replied to us in part, “. . . all Aurovilians must take up a work and do it as Yoga.” Her emphasis was on Yoga— regardless of what we chose to do. This would be Mother’s last message to Aurovilians.

With a brief stay in the MM nursery for the birth of Hira and her first two years, we eventually built a house in the Kottakarai community near the pottery.

In '78 (during Auroville’s “Great Depression”), we moved back to the USA, accompanied by Daniel and family, to Santa Cruz, CA. I worked with my dear friend June Maher and was a board member of AVI for thirty years, while at the same time Iris, Daniel and I ran a business together. We continue to be close to Auroville.

Kottakarai 1973-1978

by Andrea van de Loo

Kottakarai was a small community of Aurovilians who had settled right next to the village of that name. It was primarily dedicated to reforestation, agriculture and village relations. The original pioneers to settle there were Jocelyn and Binah, Jaap and Lisbeth, a Dutch couple, with Mukta, their first daughter; the Americans Constance, who built himself a house in the village itself; Daniel and Iris with their young son Mitra; Roy and Larry.



My first hut



Constance in his Kottakarai house

Larry lived with Diane, a Belgian woman with her little boy, Auroloouis. Then there was Big Piet, also Dutch, with Judith who was British. By the time I arrived, Daniel and Iris had separated. She and Constance had moved to the Matrimandir nursery, taking Mitra with them.

From Kottakarai, you could, in those early days, look over the vast plains of barren red earth all the way to the Matrimandir. Halfway between Kottakarai and the Matrimandir, along the dusty path, were two small jungle groves which had been saved from the general devastation of villagers cutting firewood, their goats and the torrential monsoon rains, because these were temple lands. In the one closest to the Matrimandir, the Kali temple was located, a low rectangular structure with a black iron gate, no windows and a statue of the goddess in the back. The grove nearer to us was considered Kali’s house, home to a gigantic cobra. It was in the shade of the tall cottonwood trees of Kali’s house, that Daniel had built a hut for himself.

Into this community, I was warmly welcomed. A simple octagonal bamboo hut out in the fields was available for me. It had a dirt floor with a few mats, a small dresser and a simple cot with mosquito netting. It provided me a peaceful space to make myself a temporary home.

The community was situated just across a canyon from Kottakarai village, which consisted of simple homes made of mud walls and palm leaf roofs, haphazardly placed around a village square. The grandfather of Radhakrishna, one of our friends in

the village, had planted a tree there many years ago which now offered a huge canopy of shade for all to enjoy. Walls and floors of their huts were regularly rubbed with a paste of fresh cow dung mixed with water to disinfect and clean the simple dwellings. It smelled delicious. The village had a temple but was so poor, there was no Brahmin priest to tend to it. Auroville at large employed quite a number of the villagers, the men mostly for labor, the girls and women for house work, child care and handicrafts.

When you came to live in Auroville, you let yourself be guided by what was true within you. Nobody told you what to do or where to go. You found your work by expressing your natural inclinations and allowing yourself to be led to wherever you happened to be drawn. In that surrendered state, things just seemed to flow. Small miracles became everyday fare.

I started by going out into the fields to weed around the newly planted trees. After the bustle of the Matrimandir workers' camp kitchen, I worked in blissful solitude, enjoying the quiet, the heat, the critters. Lisbeth and I took care of the food distribution from a small storage room, where we would receive the foods which came by bullock cart from Pour Tous, Auroville's distribution center in Aspiration. We would divide the foods into baskets for each individual or family amongst us.

Andai Amma, the old lady who lived in a hut next to the Banyan Tree when the construction of the Matrimandir began, had moved back to the village. We all felt that she was in touch with the occult. She lived like a shamaness on the outskirts of Kottakarai. She had three sons. Rajili and Vijayrangam were hired as watchmen. Her third son was an unabashed cross dresser who wore sarees and jewelry and seemed to be completely accepted in the village. Rajili became involved with Larry's bakery and married the young, feisty Boomadevi who I had befriended during my time working at the Center Kitchen. Both brothers clearly felt a spiritual connection with Mother and were aware that Auroville was



Andrea pregnant with Antara

Her creation. Vijayrangam would often go around and mark our foreheads with ashes and red paste from the temple, all the while murmuring sacred mantras. Then, there was Murugesan. Such a fine and kind man. It reminds me how Mother said that the Tamil villagers were the first Aurovilians.

Together with them, hundreds of holes were dug, trees planted and bunds built up around the fields to keep the monsoon rains from running off and eroding the soil. Once a week a large green water tank mounted on a bullock cart was drawn by Morris, our bull, through the arid fields. We would fill bucket after bucket and carry these to the young trees to water them.

We had a rather primitive community kitchen in the palmyra grove. One day a boy from the village came limping in, crying. His knee was bleeding. Using a small first aid kit, I cleaned and bandaged his wound. I got a big smile in return and off he went. The next day he came back with a few of his friends, some of them with infected sores, others with scabies. I treated them all from my little box. This eventually led me to open a small first aid clinic in the house Constance had built in the village, where he no longer lived. Radhakrishnan came to help me and over the years we treated over 4,000 villagers coming in on foot from far and wide. I would like to write a separate story about the clinic!

I was impressed by Daniel's gracious relation with the villagers. Tamil is one of the oldest living languages on the planet and exceedingly complicated. Daniel spoke Tamil with surprising fluency, even able to make jokes. Besides being involved with planting trees and care of the land, he had become the local cobbler. He was making handsome leather sandals for any and all who needed them, including the villagers who were quite amazed that this *vele karan* (white man) would stoop to a work that was normally only done by Harijans, the outcasts. Small wonder that the villagers adored Daniel. We couldn't have had a better ambassador for Auroville in the village of Kottakarai.

Larry built Auroville's first bakery which became famous for its whole grain hearty breads. Sundaram and Jayram became Larry's devoted helpers. Like many of the original workers, they later became Aurovilians themselves. Together with a number of village men, a large well was dug for the bakery's water supply. It became a refreshing communal swimming hole for all of us.

Larry and Diane had a little girl, Auralice. Piet and Judith gave birth to Angiras and before too long, Daniel and I got together. I came to live with him in the little bamboo hut under the cottonwood trees where our two daughters were born, Hiranya and Antara. A month after Hiranya's birth, Boomadevi and Rajili gave birth to Tushita, who is still living in Auroville.

I regret and apologize that I cannot do justice to all community members and their activities in those early years. I can only reflect on my immediate experiences, never to be forgotten.

Andrea arrived as Angela in Pondicherry in 1972. She lived in Auroville, first at Matrimandir Worker's Camp then in Kottakarai till February 1978. For several years she ran a small first-aid clinic in the village of Kottakarai. In Santa Cruz, California, she became a certified practitioner of polarity, acupressure, Reiki and hypnotherapy. She was in private practice until 2007 when she retired. Mother and Sri Aurobindo are at the center of her life. She can be reached at andrea-vandeloo@gmail.com.



Daniel driving

How AV Kottakarai Began

by Daniel Brewer

Before the move to Kottakarai, those of us living at Silence community were informed that we were living on the future site of the Indian Cultural Center, Bharat Nivas, and we would soon have to relocate. With an open



Daniel in Kottakarai village

heart, and a number of AV property maps, a small group of us set out to find a home for our community.

Since Auroville had many plans for the future, we realized that if we located near a village, we might not get moved again.

We wrote to the Mother asking for permission to live in or near a village, specifically Kottakarai. We felt that locating right next to the village was a good idea. This was an unusual request, a unique request, coming from velekars (white people).

When the Mother did give us her blessing, as members of Auroville, she encouraged us to be humble. She said that villagers were innately more spiritual than us, and that we as Westerners shouldn't think we knew more than them, and we shouldn't be egotistical in our thoughts or activities, feeling proud that we were doing so much to "help" the villagers. I remember feeling very moved by this.

Daniel Brewer, born in Southern California in 1938, traveled overland, arriving in India in 1969. He made Auroville his home for the next 10 years. He has 4 children, three of whom were born in India. He has lived in Mexico for the last 22 years.

Kottakarai 1977-80

by Gordon Korstange

We came to Kottakarai from the fury and flux of Aspiration that had brought about the closing of Auroville's first school where we had worked. What we found was a quiet greenbelt community, close to the land, which had taken the name of the village nearby as a gesture of unity.

It made sense. Kottakarai, the Tamilian village, was and is completely within the Greenbelt



Murugesan

and partly in the Auroville city center area. There are at least 4 other villages nearby which are partly or completely within the Greenbelt corridor. Auroville's relationship with these villages was and still is a contentious issue. AV Kottakarai was an attempt to address this by living with the village, not apart.

At first we were somewhat disconcerted, staying in one room of a cleared out workshop, a hastily built open air bathroom next to it with thatched walls. It was the greenbelt after all, not the town, but in those days almost all Aurovilians lived similar lives cloistered under thatched roofs. So we adjusted, we stayed.

When we arrived there were almost 30 members of AV Kottakarai, most of them Dutch and American with some Kottakarai Tamilians.

While Jeanne worked in the Matrimandir nursery, I attempted to help Jaap and Daniel with tree planting and other agricultural activities. There were fields of red rice and local grains, cows, a tree nursery. Both of them spoke fluent Tamil, which meant that it had become the main language of communication among community members. It was here that I finally became confident in speaking Tamil.

I also learned to milk cows and plough a few furrows in a field, to use an alangu (long crowbar) to break open the hard red earth in order to create a huge open hole, to be filled with enough compost to nourish a single spindly sapling, a lone splash of green rising above the red earth. It often had to be replaced, the victim of voracious goats. Like other greenbelt communities, a wadai (gully) ran through it, carrying monsoon rainwater and red dirt. The trees helped to hold soil from being washed away.

I wrote a lot of poetry.

We lived closely with the Tamil villagers. Twice a week I walked to the road and took the afternoon village bus into Pondy for a lesson in Carnatic music. The bus was always jammed with villagers going to market, often to bring things to sell, like chickens or vegetables. It would stop just outside Kottakarai and the abrasive conductor would take ten minutes

to sell tickets, constantly trading insults with the passengers.

One evening, Kuppusami the watchman turned up with some friends to borrow an oil lamp so they could go out into the fields at night to hunt bandicoots ("pig-rat"), large ugly rats that provided protein.

Whenever we came back to our workshop home we would pause at the door to allow time for scorpions to scatter from the open floor. We learned to proceed with caution before reaching into any confined space in that dwelling.

After Daniel, Andrea, Constance, Iris and children left for the USA, we moved into the small house that Daniel had built on the edge of the large grove of silk-cotton trees, its cuplike flowers considered sacred to Shiva.

Good-bye to electricity. Hello to oil lamps and hauling water up from a well. One day, during a drought, a large group of village women came up the dirt road with offerings to do a puja to the deity of the grove to induce rain.

*On full moon the trees swayed
in the ocean breeze
branches bowing, nave upon nave
opening onto the force of lucent air,
Shiva's leaves shimmering with delight*

After the Pongal festival, marriage season commenced in the village. Weddings were held in people's houses, and Tamil film songs would begin slashing across the fields at 4 a.m. from rented, scratchy speakers loud enough to scare away

*the demons that lie in wait
just beyond the marriage bed.*

Joop, a Dutchman, and his family moved into a house near the bakery. Every morning, as I went to pick up bread, I could hear him recite from memory the Lalita Sahasranam, the 1000 names of the goddess, in Sanskrit for over 45 minutes.

I planted a garden. Murugesan and Kuppusami came to look. When we went through the garden gate, built to keep the goats out, they wondered why I didn't take my sandals off because you should always treat a garden like a house or temple.

Then there was Ivar, a Dutchman, who had divested himself from any personal items that could be stolen, and dug wells for days on end:

Ivar who owns nothing except his faded clothes and sleeps in his garden

It was a small world unto itself. Roy was building a Japanese-style pottery; Larry, Sundaram and others were baking bread early in the morning; and occasionally the motorcycles of Aspiration would swarm down the road, engines roaring, on their way to some meeting, leaving behind dust and uneasy quiet.

At Pongal we all gathered in the cow shed to sit on the floor and eat off of banana leaves while the animals looked on.

Andai Amma, the old woman who had been a fixture selling foodstuffs to travelers under the banyan tree at the center of Auroville, had been moved out of her hut and taken into the Kottakarai community. She came to the workshop one day asking for her allotment of rice. It was not distribution day and I told her so but then she erupted

*like a sudden squall
comes the carrier of skulls,
Kali, glutton of worlds . . .
I stare stupidly at the fiery eyes,
for I do not know the words
to speak to that presence
smoldering under the wrinkled skin
and I close my book, lose the place,
get up to fetch the rice.*

I held classes in the hut for awhile with students at loose ends after the school closed. I played tennis at Certitude in the mornings at 6 a.m. Angad moved in to take over the pottery. The half-formed shape of the Matrimandir did not grow rounder.

The days were scorching. The nights were enchanting. The Milky Way arced above our paltry oil lamps. It was so dark that the Southern Cross constellation could be seen hovering above the lackluster lights of Pondicherry. The sea breeze roamed over the barren lands of Auroville all the way to our hut bringing the cries of jackals from the wadai. Above us rustled our silk-cotton trees.

The months went on with no resolution to the conflict with the Sri Aurobindo Society. The weekly Pour Tous bullock cart brought less and less, including barely edible seaweed. We began dipping into our savings simply to buy essentials. Boils appeared at various places of my body with regularity. I weighed 150 pounds after two bouts of jaundice.

And then one day, like many USA-



Mitra, Antara, silk cotton grove

Aurovilians of those years, we left, walking down the path from our little house with our backpacks to catch the evening bus to Pondy and beyond to Bombay. Murugesan and Rajagopal were there to bid us farewell. We would not return to Auroville for five years.

Many original members of AV Kottakarai eventually moved on to other parts of Auroville: Jaap now plants trees in the lands beyond Forecomers. Roy, Larry and Auralice ended up in Aurodam. Lisbeth became a teacher in Transition School. Sudaram still bakes for Ganesh Bakery. Angad's Mandala pottery has become an Auroville success story. Ivar started the Isaiambalam school and Bobby is still there running Auroknits, the sweater-making unit she started in 1980.

Others of us settled in the USA. Daniel lives in Mexico and, of course, speaks fluent Spanish. Murugesan, who was a good Tamil poet, became well known in the villages and beyond.

Did AV Kottakarai succeed in its goal? Like many Greenbelt communities the relationship between Westerners and Tamilians was one of equality and friendship, though it was always clear who was in charge. Like elsewhere, the ethos was to work with Tamilians as much as possible. Part of its success, I be-



Lisbeth milking

lieve, was because community members tried their best to speak Tamil and two members were fluent. Daniel's trips to the village tea stall were essential.

Now AV Kottakarai is not one community, but an area containing Verite, the pottery, Ganesh bakery, Svaram, Pony Farm, Auroville Consulting, among others. When I go there, I can no longer see the Matrimandir in the distance. The trees finally reach up so high that it's impossible to distinguish the layout of the original community, but in my mind's eye I still see the fields, the bakery, the silk-cotton grove and Murugesan's daughter who often came to our well to get water,

*gingerly lifting a full brass pot
with two slender hands onto her poised
head,
and looking into the clear mirror of her
body,
she tilts it this way and that until it fits,
then infinitely pleased with herself
and infinitely more wonderful
than any lady in any hat,
she puts another brass pot
on top of that.*

EPILOGUE: One day in 2019 I stopped in the Lakshmiapuram bazaar to get my sandals repaired by the road side cobblers. While waiting I mentioned to them that I had lived in AV Kottakarai long ago and one old man, still working, exclaimed that they were all from Kottakarai village and that he had learned and worked with Daniel, during the old days, starting the business they were still engaged in. Suddenly, even while traffic swarmed around us, I had returned to Kottakarai

Gordon Korstange lived in Auroville during the 1970's. He is the editor of Connect and lives in Saxtons River, VT

Early Days 1970-1985

by Lisbeth

For those who came in the early seventies the focus, the work laid out, was clear: starting new settlements, saving the severely eroded land by planting trees, bunding, making dams and other earthworks; starting vegetable gardens for the community; keeping livestock; trying our hand at dry agriculture, planting fields with millets, rice, groundnuts and cow fodder; learning from our close village neigh-

REFLECTIONS

Early Days 1970-1985 CONTINUED

bors the amazing survival skills to live in this unfamiliar dry, hot and barren tropical corner of the world .

Life was so different from today, concentrated in small settlements, simple, innocent, more intimate and related to the land where we found ourselves. Distances and life styles between Aspiration and Kottakarai, then a continuous large, vibrant community where we lived, seemed vast.

We walked and cycled, worked together with the first Tamil people who joined Auroville. There were no servants or workers; we were all working hard alongside each other (while daylight lasted.) Water from open wells was pulled out by the bucket which, through a chain of helping hands, was stored in barrels fixed on a small bullock cart to water the tree saplings we planted all the way to the Center.

The Mother was still with us and this was a great blessing, She received Aurovilians with their questions and we went for blissful darshans . She named the children born here, the names always having an Auro in it as the 'family name'. A peaceful time it seemed -before all the strife that followed, the globalization of India, the accelerated pace which the internet brought and the chaotic world events that took place began to trickle into our awareness.

We did not move far afield, visiting close neighbors, exchanging ideas and experiments. Children were often born at home in small huts with a flickering storm lantern. They were always coming along, tough, barefoot little troopers playing with whatever was available in nature.

In 2018 for Auroville's 50th birthday I put together a photo exposition called 'Early Days' looking through and scanning analogue black and white photographs. Some are included here.

Now in 2020 I still live in Auroville, it is almost 50 years ago to the day that I came overland from the Netherlands to travel east for a year ... Auroville is my home and although sometime I hark back to the simplicity and innocence of the early years I've grown with Auroville, my family and grandchildren all live here (the older ones study abroad), I

love my good friends, my work in education, organizing field trips to amazing natural places in the bioregion, studying sea erosion with my students, my photography, giving hatha yoga to teenagers and walks in the wonderful, magic greenbelt .

Lisbeth was an original member of the AV Kottakarai community. The following are excerpts from the introduction to her Auroville photo exhibition in 2018.

Dosai Amma

by Binah Thillairaja

I was a child in Kottakarai with the same birth year as Auroville running barefooted down the dusty dirt paths. The wind whistled through the casuarina trees of the forest and Dosai amma's one room watchman mud hut perched at the edge of the trees

Dosai amma? She must have had a different name once but if she did I never heard it. To my young eyes her wrinkly chapped skin was older than the trees. Her eyes twinkled under a sparse head of hair and her ear lobes hung low with bolts of gold, her life's savings right where she could touch them. She always seemed to wear the same brown sari in the style of a widow with no blouse.

Dosai amma shouting out to me in



Mukta and Lisbeth

Tamil in greeting... 'come eat.' Dosai amma who made meen korumbu, vegetable sambar and rice in mud pots on her small wood stove fed by sticks from the forest.

Dosai amma who would pick the best pieces of fish out for me and set them on my plate with a toothless grin.

In front of her one room hut was a tiny porch and fire place fashioned of mud and sani (cow dung) where we sat some evenings talking and eating. Perumal and I would perch on the edge of the porch and laugh as she complained about her aches and pains. We would eat, throwing the fish bones to the village dogs that patiently waited all around the hut; strays or guard dogs?

In the pitch dark of the night in the forest the only light came from a single kerosene lantern hung from the roof over us. It was quiet on her porch, with the smoky fire and her cackling voice for there was nothing else but the company, the food, the sound of the casuarinas and the dark night.

She seemed to be older than the trees and the land we stood on, and on nights when she cried drunkenly after drinking some local arrak. I wondered about who she had been before she was Dosai Amma—old lady of the forest?

Binah Thillairajah grew up in Auroville and moved to the U.S. to pursue a B.A. and M.A. in International Development. She currently serves on the board of AVI USA and lives in Denver, CO with her husband and kids.

Kottakarai Reunion



L-R: Larry Nagle, Sundaram, Gordon, Daniel Brewer; Above standing: Amudha, Jeanne, Lisa Brewer, unknown woman.

Joan Tomb: 1934—2020

Joan passed away peacefully, surrounded in her final days and hours by family and friends in her beloved apartment at Atria Campana del Rio, Tucson, AZ. Joan lived a full and fulfilling life of 85 years and her memory will be deeply cherished by her surviving children: Laura



Reddy, Leslie Katz, David Tomb and Libby Tomb; their spouses/life partners, Paul Pinthon and Leo Katz, as well as many nieces and nephews and a host of friends.

Joan was an adventurer, seeker, mentor, and friend, a true matriarch of her family. She touched hearts and impacted minds from her roots in New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, to her community in Auroville India, to her final home in Tucson.

Her passion for life, learning, and the evolution of the human spirit was endless. It was this passion that led her to Auroville. Joan had first heard of the Mother through Dietra (Claire Worden). In 1971 she decided to go to India to meet the Mother, together with June Maher. It was a momentous event, of which she later wrote "Extremely lucky to have met the Mother in this lifetime, without whom nothing would have been possible."

She was one of the first Aurovilians to build a tree house in the Certitude area, and later had a house built nearby which she called 'Recueillement'. She became a guardian angel to many in Auroville.

Back in the US she also worked for a time as a tour guide at Biosphere 2, as a volunteer with hospice, and as part of several intentional community circles.

We will miss Joan's unique and powerful presence in our day to day lives but hope to carry her legacy into the future through our actions to care for each other, our communities, and our world. Tax deductible donations may be made in Joan's memory to AVI-USA. Funds will support projects that provide housing, care, and community for seniors in Auroville, one of Joan's passions.

AVIUSA will be hosting Nadaka, Gopika and Keshava

in a concert and discussion planned for early January.

Please visit our website and Facebook page and be sure we have your current email address to be kept informed of this special musical event.

RagaMantra
Indian & World Fusion



NADAKA GOPIKA KESHAVA

Ever Slow Green Film Wins Award

I'm happy to share with you that Ever Slow Green received one of the People's Choice Awards at the Eugene Environmental Film Festival 2020!

The film received the second most audience votes in the festival. Thank you very much for your support and for spreading the word. Kindly, Christoph



Kevin Katsuya Nakashima 1954-2020

by Mira Nakashima

Kevin, the only son of George and Marion Nakashima, finally lost his month-long battle with congestive heart failure and aspiration pneumonia shortly after midnight on November 7th, at the same hospital where he was born nearly 66 years ago in Doylestown, Pennsylvania.

Kevin last came to Auroville with his sister Mira for the dedication of the Hall of Peace which houses the Nakashima Peace Table for Asia in 2014.



Kevin Nakashima (Center) at the Dedication of the Hall of Peace, Unity Pavilion, Auroville



UPDATES

Please Donate to Auroville's Unity Fund

The limitations and challenges of this time are felt the world over, and Auroville is no exception. The Unity Fund supports Auroville's schools, farms, roads, safety, health care, and other essential services. It relies on income from commercial units (including guest houses, restaurants, and sales of everything from paper to clothes to musical instruments to spirulina). Many of these units have already closed, some permanently, and others are expecting a very lean winter, which is usually when they do the most business.

Auroville's monthly deficit is significant and growing. Your help

is urgently needed to bridge the gap until the Auroville economy begins to function again. Our goal is to raise \$100,000 this winter to help Auroville during this time of heightened financial constriction. Please consider what you can do to help this effort. We welcome your contributions at www.aviusa.org/donate, where you can sign up to give a recurring amount each month.

If you'd like to help our outreach efforts by making phone calls, sending emails or letters, or hosting an online fundraising event, please send an email to info@aviusa.org.

You can also donate via check to:

Auroville International USA (or AVIUSA), P.O. Box 188158, Sacramento, CA 95818

On behalf of all Aurovilians, thank you.

AVI-USA AND DONOR FUNDING OF AUROVILLE PROGRAMS

THANK YOU, to the 101 unique donors and 38 first time donors who generously supported Auroville in some way between January and June 2020. Some of the donations are earmarked for specific programs, some donations are given to AVI USA to pass through as the need in Auroville dictates. Thank you to all. Your support is greatly appreciated.

Through the first half of the year, many of our usual programs were maintained but our efforts, starting at the beginning of April, were tailored toward the needs in Auroville and the surrounding region due to the effects of COVID-19. To this end, AVI USA has sent the donations received as a response to the early summer fundraising drive to the Budget Coordinating Council (BCC) to be used as they see the need.

EDUCATION: Normally, our support of local villages is in the area of educational programming. This changed after the effects of the pandemic began to be felt. The schools AVI USA usually supports during the year were forced to close in March due to COVID-19 but faculty members worked to identify who among the region needed food support and donations continue to support teachers.

AUROVILLE VILLAGE ACTION: While Auroville continued to pay regular workers during lockdown, the day labor population struggled without pay and itinerant work-

ers tried to find transport to their home regions. Therefore, Village Action partnered both with Auroville schools that normally serve children from villages and the governments of local regions to create food baskets for the neediest families of the area. An estimated 5,000 families in the region were served. This continues.

Also, Coast India worked to find transport for workers wishing to return home to northern India and was able to purchase two busses and arrange passes for them. AVI USA helped provide funds for this happen.

LAND FUND: AVI-USA continues to act as a funnel for donations to purchase lands for Auroville with a large portion of gifts for this purpose. Auroville is in charge of deciding which missing lands for the township should be purchased.

MATRIMANDIR: Some funds are always dedicated to the support of the Matrimandir, the heart of Auroville. The surrounding park continues to be developed with the Garden of the Unexpected currently under construction, supported in part with donations funneled through AVI USA.

INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS: A few individual projects were supported in the last half of AVI USA's fiscal year. The Auroville



10th Anniversary of Eco Femme
Jessamijn and Kathy - ecofemme.org

Archeological Park, at the junction of the roads to Solar Kitchen, Visitor's Center, and Matrimandir is an area where an archeological dig has uncovered items of historical significance to the region. In past years, AVI USA gave money to help fund this project. This year, a

grant was given for its completion which will allow Aurovillians and visitors to Auroville to learn about the history of the region. Additionally, funds continue to be directed to Eco-Femme for making cloth pads and womens health.

GREENWORK: AVI-USA continues to provide funds for Sadhana Forest for ongoing reforestation and growing local organic food in Auroville, Haiti, and Kenya. Additionally, a grant was given this year to help bring the film, Ever Slow Green, to fruition. An article has previously been written about this film. Christoph's website is: www.brainfever.in

A FUNDRAISING EVENT: AVIUSA will be hosting Nadaka, Gopika and Keshava in a concert and discussion planned for early January.

PLEASE VISIT our website and Facebook page and be sure we have your current email, and mailing address and phone.