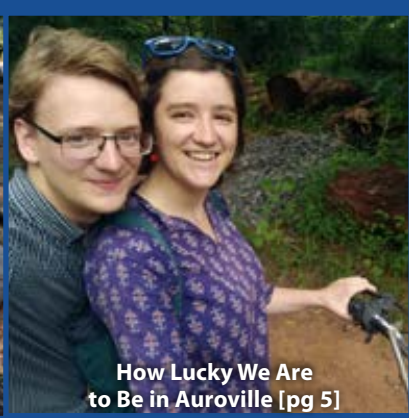
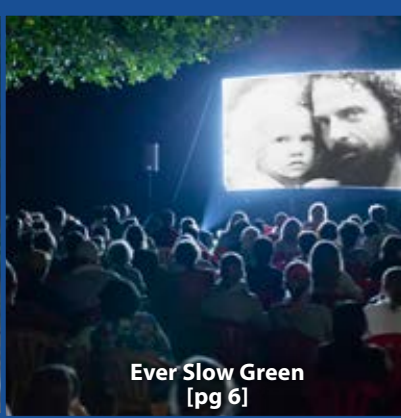


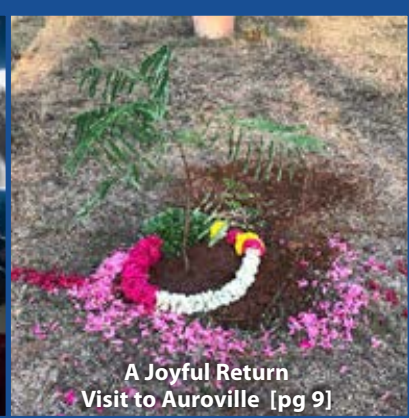
The Archaeological Park at the Matrimandir Triangle [pg 3]



How Lucky We Are to Be in Auroville [pg 5]



Ever Slow Green [pg 6]



A Joyful Return Visit to Auroville [pg 9]

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# AVI-USA CONNECT

Spring / Summer 2020 Newsletter

Issue 14



Auroculture's burial mandala [pg 4]

## CONTENTS

### CONNECTIONS

- The Archaeological Park at the Matrimandir Triangle: Long Adventure in the Making 2
- Pondicherry, a Boutique in Woodstock, NY 3
- How Lucky We Are to Be in Auroville 5

### REFLECTIONS

- Quo Vadis Covid19? 6
- Ever Slow Green: A Film by Christoph Pohl About the Auroville Forest 6
- Labor of Love in the Forest 8

### EVENTS

- A Joyful Return Visit to Auroville: February 4 to March 4, 2020 9

### UPDATES

- Remembering How to Heal, How to Dream 11

### AUROVILLE NEEDS OUR HELP

- Covid 19 Pandemic: 12

## The Archaeological Park at the Matrimandir Triangle: Long Adventure in the Making

by Bryan Walton

It all began in the late 1980s at the 'Matrimandir Triangle'. This is where three roads come together—from the Matrimandir, from the Solar Kitchen and from Bharat Nivas. That's when Poppo took some interest here: he had been at the foundation ceremony of Auroville in 1968 representing Germany, and has been a key player in Auroville ever since.

As a trained architect and archeology lover, he did some test digging in part of this triangle and found it to be a megalithic culture site, likely about 2000 years old: a Tamil heritage site. He began the first archaeological excavation there, with funds from Auroville units and 'in kind' from the Matrimandir. After finding two cairn circles deep below ground level, he temporarily fenced off the site so as to secure the land. Poppo then became busy with more urgent rescue excavation sites in other parts of Auroville where buildings would be constructed.

Much later in 2012 the idea was proposed to erect a large modern sculpture at the Triangle, but it was never done. Poppo approached the Stichting de Zaiier Foundation in the Netherlands in 2013 for funding, and received a grant for further excavation work there. The next year his work was approved and funded by the Auroville Governing Board, through the strong support of the Secretary



Poppo in his office.



*Aurovilians should be informed about the culture and the prehistory of this 2500-year-old site in their host state of Tamil Nadu*

of the Auroville Foundation. Having a license from the Archaeological Survey of India, he found more cairn circles, along with urn burials and many interesting artifacts including bronze tridents likely used in rituals. The dating of the finds was then pushed back to roughly 2500 years ago.

In 2015 with funds also from the Indian government, more underground cairn circles were uncovered, and the decision was made to create a permanent archaeological park. The huge granite slabs resting on top of the cairns could be raised above ground as well as the top stones of the circles to create a semblance of what had been unearthed below.

In 2016, however, government funding ceased, and it seemed that a final excavation and the educational park idea could not be done. But a new application to the Governing Board proved a success and funding was granted for the next year as well. This enabled Poppo to fully excavate the triangle and to begin landscaping the area. However, the final funds were not released and the work ground to a halt. Then in 2018 a private businessman, a friend of Auroville and the Ashram, offered enough money to lift the fourteen cairn circles and five capstones above ground level. At the same time permanent fencing, earth bunding and tree planting for shade were done, along with ground raising and leveling with 110 lorry loads of soil. Then the frame of a permanent information kiosk in steel was constructed.

Poppo approached us at Auroville

International–USA. For years we have thought that the park should be completed. We believe that the information and knowledge he gained from digging up the ancient past in the land of Auroville today should be fully available and kept alive. Aurovilians, Tamil Aurovilians especially, should be informed about the culture and the prehistory of this 2500-year-old site in their host state of Tamil Nadu. Adults along with school children from the surrounding villages and Pondicherry will be interested, along with archaeologists and art historians. Usually countless visiting foreign and Indian tourists and various dignitaries walk by the park on their way to see the Matrimandir each day. They could easily visit the site and the informational kiosk that will explain in simple terms the discovery of this ancient burial ground on Auroville land in three languages protected from the sun and rain by a shaded roof.

The board of AVI-USA has extended the final funding for Poppo's Archeological Park at the Matrimandir Triangle. Unfortunately, due to the recent lockdown there has been little further work done on the archaeological park except watering the young planted trees in these hot Auroville days, but both the lockdown and the heat will subside and the visitors will return.

*Bryan Walton, past president of AVI-USA, started the Auroville crafts unit Fraternity in 1972 and now lives in Spring Green, Wisconsin with his wife Fanou.*



## Pondicherry, a Boutique in Woodstock, NY

by Julian Llnes

**T**rudi King was driving East! She had been with Dr. Judith Tyberg (Jyotipriya) at the East West Cultural Center (now known as the Sri Aurobindo Center of Los Angeles) and was looking for a new calling. She moved to High Falls, NY to help run the Sri Aurobindo Association offices which had taken over the work of Matagiri. I was working to distribute the books of Sri Aurobindo and Mother and the Ashram incense from Cottage Industries both wholesale and retail. We also printed and mailed *Collaboration* under the editorship of Gordon Korstange.

Trudi and I made regular visits to Matagiri to spend time with Sam and Eric. Her friendship and assistance was a great support. At one point she presented me with a Darshan card given out on Mother's Centenary in 1978 which contained a small piece of fabric from one of Sri Aurobindo's dhotis and another from one of Mother's saris. I was unaware this existed and went into a kind of reverie and was given the vision of establishing a shop with products from the Ashram and Auroville.

A few years later I was talking with the owner of Mirabai,

a spiritual bookstore in Woodstock which was one of our incense customers. Anne told me they were buying a building across the street and were looking for a tenant for the other half. As a devotee of Baba Muktananda, she wanted to open on his birthday, the full moon of May 16th. This was my birthday as well, so there seemed to be a blessing of cosmic synchronicity. And the best name I could come up with for the new boutique was Pondicherry.

With no background in retail other than the lemonade/coke stand I ran in front of my building in Manhattan at the ripe age of 7, I forged ahead making a trip to Auroville to purchase inventory. Fortunately, Prema Intano at Auromode took interest in the project and made plans with her friend Ann to come to America and help me organize and stock the shop. For years Matagiri had imported the Cottage Industries incense, but I felt they could be repackaged and designed with color and labeling to make them more "dis-

play friendly".

A local friend drew up a business plan and helped me purchase counters and racks. When I looked into the former real estate office under renovation, I opened a door

to find a poster of Krishna looking back at me. Hidden forces were at play! On the morning of May 16th, 1992 I was trying to pull everything together for my opening and the phone rang. On the other end was Shyamsunder in Pondicherry wishing me well. It was an act of great thoughtfulness and kindness and illustrated why he was able to raise so many funds to build the Matrimandir.

The hand-painted silk scarves and kaftans from Auromode were a defining addition to the shop and popular with a variety of customers. My favorite anecdote was a woman



Eric Hughes, co-founder of Matagiri, visits the shop at 12 Tinker St

who said the kaftan with its open sides would be the perfect outfit for the Saturday night formal dinner at the nudist colony.

And then there was the constant stream of interesting visitors including the former French Consul General of Pondicherry, the parents of ballerina Martine van Hamel, who had served as a Dutch diplomat and loved India and even an ex of Paul Richard. I was especially pleased when actor Mark Ruffalo came in with his daughter. He had been active with Pete Seeger and Natalie Merchant in opposing hydraulic fracking to extract shale gas in New York State, a process which ruins the water for generations. I told him about my son's activism and as he was leaving he stopped and turned around and gave me a hug saying, "My name is Mark. We won!"

One of my achievements was entirely tangential. I was heading to Maria's Café behind the shop and saw an old friend going to the shop next door. I invited him to stop by and he informed me he was selling candles wrapped in handmade paper. I told him I was importing flower candles and selling

handmade paper. He ended up becoming a US distributor for Maroma (Auroville's candle, incense and shampoo manufacturer) and his partner later became Maroma's representative and helped expand their line of products for the US market.

I served as Vice President of the Woodstock Chamber of Commerce and Arts and enjoyed the mix of Sufis and devotees of Hilda and Sai Baba and the Zen and Tibetan Buddhists who populated town. I attempted to gather them together for the 25th Anniversary of the Woodstock Festival held in nearby Saugerties. I actually had an Auroville Exhibit at the Festival with photos and videos, but the relentless rain made it difficult to do presentations. Still, we were a popular shelter from the storms.

Pondicherry moved to two other locations in Woodstock and whatever subsequent success I had was largely thanks to my marriage with Wendy, who had a sense of fashion and brought in a selection of yogawear and dresses and tops and skirts to supplement the Auroville handicrafts and the required Woodstock T-shirts, framed posters and '69 tickets for the tourists. As an attendee from August 14th-18th, 1969, I was happy to share stories with those still on pilgrimage in search of "Peace, Love and Music".

We tried to purchase more inventory from Auroville, especially from Shradhanjali, Miniature and Auromics and continued sourcing the famous hammock chairs pioneered by Bryan Walton in the first workshop in Fraternity. Our annual trips to India to purchase inventory complimented our service to Auroville International and deepened friendships and introduced us to other sides of the community.

Retail has been changing everywhere because of online sales and shopping at malls being more convenient than trudging

*I opened a door to find a poster of Krishna looking back at me. Hidden forces were at play!*

around the holiday snow from shop to shop in Woodstock. And now many malls are closing and venerable chain retailers collapsing. With the corona virus came the impossible task of greeting people up close and handling cash and credit cards and sharing air with whoever walked into our small space. So, on May 16th, 28 years to the day, I took down the Pondicherry sign. We didn't end completely so much as decide to duck the virus wave and move everything west to Matagiri. We

hope to physically reopen someday to sell down our inventory and perhaps be a kind of exhibition/showroom for Auroville products. In the meantime, your mail orders would be much appreciated at [www.pondi.biz](http://www.pondi.biz).

And then there was that issue of *Auroville Today* which came with a note written on the side of the label, "you may not remember me, but I came to your store and now I'm volunteering in Auroville..."



Julian, Wendy and Shanthi

*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*

## Saying Final Farewell to Three Friends the Auroville Way

by Fanou Walton

This year we arrived in Auroville at the end of January. During our stay, we attended 3 funerals of old friends.

Of course we had heard about Farewell and Adventure. The bodies of the departed are brought to Farewell to be prepared for their last journey. There, parents and friends can express their love and their last goodbye to their loved ones laying on a bed of ice surrounded by peace and flowers, under the tender smile of the Mother.

Each time we have been in Auroville, we had paid a visit to Adventure, the burial and crematory ground where so many of our friends' remains or their ashes are already resting. So we knew of them, but had not yet experienced the quiet, clear and beautiful atmosphere of Farewell and the serene, simple and always unique ceremonies at the burial ground. The experiences of both sites were



Subash's grave

profound, grounding and tranquil in their simplicity, beauty and the enveloping presences of Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Not many words, an abundance of flowers, and around the freshly dug grave, flows of love and gratitude for the friend or relative lying there now forever. So much care and love have been given to the preparations at Farewell as well as at the burial ground where a trail of fresh

flowers mark the way to the new grave or cremation site. Baskets of petals are ready to receive and cover the body and the earth covered burial.

Our first friend to pass away was Subash whom we had met at Isaambalam where he introduced an innovative way of teaching. He had taken us to his office to show us note books after note books where he had copied passages of Sri Aurobindo's writings: his priceless and secret treasure. So much dedication, care and love moved us deeply. Subash went back to Mother's arms surrounded by the teachers of his school and many Indian villagers and Aurovilian friends. We were glad to be among them.

Two days later, our old friend Navodite passed away. Navodite came in the 70s. Very soon he took a leadership role in our young community, not so much because he wanted to, but because we all recognized his calm and witty wisdom and his strong aspiration to do only Mother's work. Navodite

had been a talented poet all his life and like Homer or Borges, he finished his life, serene and blind. In addition to one of his own poems, he also asked to have read at his burial one poem from Rumi or Hafiz where the poet asks that no money be spent on flowers at his burial, but on wine, celebration and happiness. His last witty smile of our friend, the poet Navodite.

*Navodite had been a talented poet  
all his life  
and like Homer or Borges, he finished  
his life, serene and blind*

The next day, our friend Auroculture joined Farewell and Adventure where a beautiful mandala made of flowers gathered all around Auroville was waiting for her. Auroculture was a unique personality, with a sharp mind and an absolute love for flowers and beauty. For years, she collected flowers everywhere in Auroville and in the Ashram, flowers already on the ground. She then made everyday a new mandala on top of the mandala of the preceding day. Later all these beautiful mandalas were recycled as compost. One year I joined her every morning. She always had a happy and quiet presence but it was the spark in her eyes that impressed me the most.

As soon as the ceremonies were over and the people gone, then the sacred cows of India, which were waiting patiently behind a bush, came to feast on the beautiful fresh flowers which adorned the new grave. And so continues the cycle of life.

I'd like to express my thanks and gratitude for everyone who has worked at creating Farewell and the burial ground of Adventure to honor and remember these three friends who recently passed away, and the many friends who have chosen Auroville and Adventure as their last home.

*Fanou Walton lives in Spring Green, Wisconsin with her husband Bryan Walton.*

# REFLECTIONS

## How Lucky We Are to Be in Auroville

by Leo Keller

I am writing this from COVID-19 lock down and I am grateful every day that we're here in Auroville. I can't imagine a better place to be in quarantine. For a start, my partner Allan and I live in a community for volunteers next to Citidines with 8 others, so our "isolation" is expanded to a community of 10 who share common facilities like kitchen, toilets and showers.

As I write this looking through the mosquito net wall of our little pod I can see trees, the young papayas and bananas Allan planted, the community dog Roof lolling in the shade, clear skies and sunshine, our badminton "court" that is used every evening and many bushes of the most beautiful magnolia with such vibrant pinks and oranges and white that are a feast for the visual senses. I can hear all kinds of birds, the occasional peacock that Roof loves to chase into the trees and at night we hear jackals. And I know, just out of sight in the daytime, there is a rat snake or two lying in the undergrowth that sometimes we are lucky enough to observe.

We can walk out of our rooms straight into the woods and carry on walking for a good while without seeing much sign of human life (particularly during lock down), and this is the town centre. A few community members are allocated shoppers for essentials and the rest of our fruit and veg we get from Allan who works at Auro Orchard, an Aurovilian organic farm. As I said, we are very lucky to be "stuck" in this paradise.

It is hard now to imagine not being here. We first came to Auroville last year for two months to see what this strange place, labeled by some as a 'cult,' was about and take our learning back to Europe to perhaps start or join an eco-project there.

Within a week of being here we started seriously debated moving here instead, much to the dismay of loved ones back in Europe who we had promised we were only going to look, and not to move...

What captured us back then was, in essence, the Auroville Dream, but what made us consider moving here was the Aurovilian ability to self-criticize. It was refreshing to see so much self-reflection which then prompts action. We saw people willing to talk about

issues and willing to do something about it. Admittedly, there was/is plenty to criticize and plenty to improve on, but what struck us then, and still does, is that generally everyone is trying. Everyone is trying to better themselves and the world around them.

Having moved around and travelled a lot in my life, this is something I believe to be quite unusual. Sure, there are always a few people around who are trying to develop and push themselves, but a whole community? 2000-odd people, plus thousands more volunteers and long-term guests all striving towards something greater than themselves? That's something I hadn't come across before on this scale, and it immediately made me feel at home.

So, after 7 months back in the UK saving and preparing for the move, Allan and I returned to Auroville in October 2019; Allan driven by the possibility to experiment with climate resiliency and human adaptation to climate change on a larger scale, and me driven by the social experiment and aim of achieving human unity. We are beginning our newcomer process and intend to stay and contribute what we can to realizing the Mother's Dream.

A question that is often asked is what brings two young professionals to a place like Auroville? I've highlighted some of what drew us here, but what feels particularly pertinent in these strange Coronavirus times is also why we left our traditional lives in the UK to come here. Allan is a town planner by profession, and I am an occupational therapist; both of us found our work unfulfilling, despite having professions that we liked and autonomy and flexibility in our work and focus.

At the time, I was living in London, where half of my income was going for rent for my tiny room in a little flat, and I was cycling up to 90 minutes one way to work because I simply couldn't justify spending so much on public transport.

Allan was commuting hours by train

*What captured us back then was ... the Auroville Dream, but what made us consider moving here was the Aurovilian ability to self-criticize.*

Leo and Allan in the mirror



across rural Somerset and sometimes on these train journeys he'd wake up as if from a daze noticing another few months had gone by and wondering what he had done to combat the inevitable impending climate related social and economic collapse.

Despite our efforts to live low impact lives (eating a local, vegan diet where possible, minimizing unnecessary consumerism, cycling or using public transport, etc), we calculated that we were using at best 1.5 times our share of the sustainable global resources. We were fed up of being part of the problem and wanted to find an alternative, kinder way of living.

Now, in the time of Corona, I watch the global North with concern as I see the real risk of social interaction and study going online long term, of mass mandatory personal data collection by the State and in control of the State, of societies moving rapidly but quietly and subtly and by most, unnoticed, towards fear driven, isolated and "safe" societies, where everyone survives and no one lives.

This is not the article to write about those fears or the implications of them were they to become true (I'm only just starting to grapple with that potential reality), but it highlights again how lucky we are to be in Auroville, in Tamil Nadu and in India. Social distancing, isolation, quarantine... it all feels a lot less permanent in a place where the aim is to strive for human unity. I don't worry that this will become a new normal. India, and especially rural Tamil Nadu, is not set up for everyone to have smart watches which measure your health, and with it your reactions to what you're doing, watching, reading, seeing, later to be sold to anyone who wants to control your thoughts, either for advertising, for politics or for power (or similar "safety precautions").

# REFLECTIONS

HOW LUCKY WE ARE TO BE IN AUROVILLE CONTINUED


The Mother, on initiating Auroville, invited those of good will to join the adventure to search for the Supreme Truth and invited us to use such challenges as opportunities for development and transformation. As I worry that the post-COVID-19 world may slide further into economics, politics and lifestyles governed by fear, safety measures that come at the expense of human rights and freedoms, and a kind of frantic desire to selfishly hoard survival items, I am relieved that Auroville

exists. I am encouraged that something I'm apart of is striving towards overcoming the ego and working towards a new species that can live in harmony with each other and our beautiful planet that sustains us.

I don't know if Auroville will achieve what it set out to, but I have hope, and that gives me hope for humankind.



Volunteers dining at Citidines.

Leo Keller is an occupational therapist at Deepam for children with special needs. 

## Quo Vadis Covid19?

by Renu Neogy

I am certain I wasn't alone in wishing the world would stop. The exaggerated pace seemed like it was accelerating towards a finale that none of us were eager to see. No amount of alarm warnings seemed able to break the habit of a frantic capitalistic species.

And then the world did stop. The constant hum of busyness was stilled. Country after country halted. No amount of campaigning or protesting would bring about the global pause that the pandemic succeeded in doing. The peace was palpable as everything fell silent. The wind rustling in the trees and the birds were all I could hear now. Auroville moved into coordinating its basic needs and safety. We were, after all, a high-risk group, due to foreign travel and tourism. Volunteers took up cleaning, sanitizing and crowd control at the food outlets, they joined in waste pick up and food deliveries organized for those in the high-risk category.

And then the two issues that had bothered and perplexed me most were instantly

*... without the distraction  
of tourism,  
which engages our  
energies outwards,  
we were turned  
back inwards...*



resolved;

- 1) The disappearing role of the Aurovilian in building its society,
- 2) And an increasing economy predominantly focused on tourism.


Covid19 has changed all of that. Aurovilians stepped forward to help with the running of essential services, and without the distraction of tourism, which engages our energies outwards, we were turned back inwards, providing the needs of our members, a long-forgotten atmosphere of peace and intimacy returned.

To witness a community working for its members energizes the atmosphere and made me grateful towards the members as it showed us a better version of self-sustainability. Physical work activates comradery, destroys the class structure and leaves you with an honest pride of your achievements that I felt we were losing. We are able to make efforts in times of crisis. But how long would it last? No one knows how far reaching the effects of the lockdown will be. It may take a longer time for us to adapt and support another society, one where residents contribute

their work and creativity for the benefit of the collective as well as building another economy that shifts to less intrusive forms of income or reducing tourism as the new normal; but if we do, we will really be building a resilient community and a powerful atmosphere.

Auroville is grappling with what these changes will mean and how to re-organize our food security, health, economy as well as support each other, and we are going to need new approaches. Currently ideas are being shared but eventually they will have to be put into practice.

These 'crashing' circumstances may well force us to make better choices simply because we will have less choice. The Mother's words of 'Wake up and Collaborate' may well be our only way forward and through.

*Renu Neogy: "I had the good fortune of growing up in the Ashram and living in Auroville since its inception. I have lived in California and upon returning to Auroville, we have been carrying forward Ed's work here in Forecomers by planting hardwood trees for the future Auroville carpenters. I am also engaged in the Auroville Land Board and at the Auroville Art Service."* 



Hero, Renu, Erisa, Frederick at the Inauguration of Auroville

## Ever Slow Green: A Film by Christoph Pohl About the Auroville Forest

Introduction by AVI-USA board member Margaret Greer; Interview published by Auroville Today; photos by Marco Saroldi. The text has been edited for length

One of my favorite events during the three months I spent in Auroville this past winter was attending the screening of *Ever Slow Green*, at the Auroville Film Festival of 2020. It was a beautiful evening, clear skies and warm temperatures. I arrived about 20 minutes early with the hopes of getting a good seat. While waiting for the doors to open I was able to see and visit with friends I hadn't seen in a couple of years. By the time the doors opened, there was quite a crowd eager to get in. I snagged a seat by the door and on an aisle with a walkway in front of me so no one could block my view. The theater is pretty large, I'd guess a couple hundred people could easily fill the seats. And, they filled rapidly. Then the steps and aisles filled as people were standing along the edges. At least 30 people were turned away and several hundred were already inside. The lights dropped and the film started.

The film was absolutely breathtaking. Beautiful, poignant, encouraging, and just rewarding to see. I had been in Auroville in the early 70s for three years and remembered the dry and barren conditions and now could see for myself the changes that had been brought about by the early pioneers, those featured in the film.

At the end of the film there immediately erupted enthusiastic and sustained applause. And, more and more and more. It was incredible. The audience absolutely loved the film. And, I concurred!

Once back in the taxi, I asked the driver if he had seen it. Yes. Then I asked what he thought. His response? "It is very important." Yes, I agree. I'm looking forward to the film being available to a wider audience as the message is important.



Christoph Pohl

**CHRISTOPH:** I'm originally from Duisburg in Germany, 80km north of Cologne. After graduating from university I moved to Berlin and started working as post production supervisor in different post-production studios mainly for TV and TV-commercial productions.

I started *brainfever media* as an Auroville activity in 2011 for various media productions I got involved in. Those were mainly short videos of maximum 10 minutes length for different projects in Auroville. Until today brainfever media productions is a one-man-unit, cooperating with others on a case-by-case project basis only.

(See all videos: <https://vimeo.com/brainfever>)

One of the aspects of Auroville that impressed me most when I first came were its forests. I could hardly believe when I learnt that all these forests were created from scratch and that Auroville was a barren desert plateau when it started in 1968. Back in Germany, whenever I was in a forest, I had the impression that it had always been there and would always be there... well, unless it was cut down.

I wasn't aware that it was possible to create a forest from scratch and especially in a short time of only 40 years. Even though I only learnt later that this forest is still far from being mature, it already looks like a real forest. So I became interested in forestry and started living and working in a forest community in Auroville. For the past two and a half years I have also been one of the co-stewards of an Auroville forest.

So, being involved in filmmaking and media on the one hand and forestry on the other, it naturally led to the idea of making a film about Auroville's forests. Making a feature-length film had been a dream of mine for a long time, as it probably is for any filmmaker, feature-length being the king's discipline of filmmaking. And the basic concept for *Ever Slow Green* was born.



Johnny in Fertile Forest

The film features 17 people currently involved in forest work in Auroville. With most of them I already had some personal relationship. What I wanted to achieve with the audio interviews that I conducted was to get some very personal, intimate stories of the forest.

The film doesn't really tell the story of Auroville; it just concentrates on the aspect of how the forests of Auroville came about, and I consciously left out all other aspects of Auroville. There are already other films about Auroville as a whole and Auroville is a very complex place and idea. So for me it was important to only focus on the forest aspect.

What I think came across in every single interview is each person's love for the forest. I really hope that I managed to get this across in the final film, this really deep-seated passion for this forest and for creating and protecting this forest. Forestry is not seen as a job; the work is done with passion, and that's why it is so successful.

The duration of the film is 56 minutes. I have started to submit the film to various film festivals around the world, many with a special focus on the topics of environment and nature but also some renowned festivals for documentary films in general. It was invited to the Rishikesh International Film Festival which took place on March 11 - 17, 2020, and won best director.

The usual procedure for films like this is to get it into film festival rotation first. These festivals require submitted films not to be published on the internet or to be broadcast. One purpose of sending it to festivals, apart from finding international audiences, is to find a distributor who can help getting it into streaming platforms, TV channels or even theatrical release around the globe.

The main soundtrack of the film is taken from the album "Curling Pond Woods" (2004) by North American musician Greg Davis. This album had been in my personal music collec-

# REFLECTIONS

EVER SLOW GREEN CONTINUED

tion for years. I really like the slow pace and slightly edgy style of the music, and it came to my mind when I decided on the slow pace style of the film. Not knowing him personally, I contacted Greg by email and he liked the concept of the film and agreed to a minimal fee and royalty contract. Additional music was composed by Aurovilian friend and sound artist Chloé Sanchez especially for the film. She is also responsible for all the bird sound recordings used in the film, which were all recorded by her in Auroville.

Firstly I want to share with the world, as mentioned earlier, that it is possible to create a forest from scratch within just 50 years. This however should not be seen as a justification to cut down forests—global deforestation urgently has to stop. And still this film can give hope. It shows that re-afforestation, like that done in Auroville can happen within a lifetime.

Secondly, as also mentioned earlier, the magic that's possible if things are done with passion. A reforestation project carried out by hired labor would not have the same success.

The title, Ever Slow Green, is a play with words. Firstly, what sets the unique vegetation type in the coastal belt of Tamil Nadu apart is that it is predominantly composed of evergreen species. Most other vegetation in tropical dry climates loses its leaves in the dry season; evergreens retain their foliage, and thus shade, throughout the year. Evergreens are most efficient to deal with global issues of climate change. So I wanted to have 'Ever' and 'Green' in the title. 'Green' also because that's the dominant color in the film! Then, I as I was playing with words, instead of 'ever so green' it became 'Ever Slow Green' because of the overall pace of the film and the consistent use of slow-motion. It also refers to the slow process of growing trees.

The choice of using slow-motion throughout the film is linked to the very slow process of growing trees and creating a forest. Even though only 50 years appears to be quite fast

to grow a forest one needs to keep in mind that this forest is still far from being mature and it will take at least another 100 years for its species to reach maturity. Having slow-motion on the visual side of the film was also meant to counter the rather dense amount of information given on the audio side with voices more or less talking all the time and requiring a lot of attention from the audience. From the beginning I was clear not to have any talking heads in the film so all interviews are off-camera.

Why do I want to live in Auroville? It is absolutely unique by providing the space for growth and experimentation in every aspect of life.



Audience at Ever Slow Green

## Labor of Love in the Forest

By Lara Davis

The first phase of the 4 Sisters' Pioneer Memorial Dry Garden project in the American Zone came to a close around the peak of this year's hot season. Prior to this, my work and that of my forestry assistant, Charan, was limited to the initial cleanup of this 3.5 acre forest (with an additional 1 acre cared for in the International Zone). For the first 5 months, we cut all of the remaining 'seritu muluh' – a tenacious and very painful invasive bull-briar – out from under the tree canopies, felled the standing dead wood, burned and mulched all bio-waste for soil regeneration, and significantly thinned out the invasive, pioneer tree species so that the indigenous trees can continue to grow and mature. From what appeared to me at the beginning to be a continuous, literally impenetrable wall of thorny briar and low-value, first generation forest, an extraordinary indigenous forest – with no less than 70 distinct tree species, predominantly TDEF (tropical

*90 meters (295 feet) of water line trench, at 65 cm (25 inches) deep, a total of nearly 30 cubic meters of soil, dug by one woman with only a good American spade and a pry bar.*



dry evergreen forest) has finally been able to express its inner beauty.

When Darkali first started planting this forest 30 years ago, there was nothing in this area but red soil and scorching sun beating down – with no shade cover – as they displaced a mind-boggling 1.3 cubic meters of soil for each and every tree planted (1 cubic meter plus the bulking ratio of soil). I cannot even begin to guess how many trees they

have planted on this site – literally hundreds. Working in this climate in the hot season (often 90+ degrees Fahrenheit with 90% relative humidity) is almost insupportable to the body on a good day. This work is for me virtually unimaginable without the cooling effect of the canopy cover. Every day of work brings to mind a deep gratitude for the superhuman work of the early Auroville pioneers. In fact, the spirit of the work becomes an integral



part of the spirit of the land, the voice of the forest. You can feel it.

By the time early June/July came along, it was no longer possible to keep pruning in the forest without disrupting the delicate ecosystem and balance between sun for tree growth and shade for protection. This year saw one of the most significant droughts in 30 years. Large swaths of “work trees” planted by the early pioneers began to brown and die off from lack of rain. It was not safe to bring any more light down to the forest floor.

After 5 months of carefully working ahead of Charan for the cleanup efforts, I had to continue alone and shift gears to more generative activities on the site. This was a serious and troubling reminder of the value of low-water-intensive forestry and gardening with local species. Like a great science experiment – with 70 species, spread over a 30-year period – the climate has selected those species which thrive best without water. The native Coromandel coast trees, while slow growing, have thrived.

In the forests of tropical Tamil Nadu, water is truly life. And so the first task after the initial forest cleanup was to bring water on to the site. But with the project permission not yet granted, there were severe limitations to what could be done. And truthfully, working alone in such an extreme climate, having had several



Lara in a tree.

this work. And there is no better way to do this than the hard way – 90 meters (295 feet) of water line trench, at 65 cm (25 inches) deep, a total of nearly 30 cubic meters of soil, dug by one woman with only a good American spade and a pry bar. When the summer rains began, bit by bit – it was clear as day, at 98 degrees – that this was the task at hand.

What began as an apparently immature act of persistence (or even defiance) became a life altering experience in the yoga of work. Kali’s chrysalis. What to say, except that the most extreme form of physical labor is truly a way to the liberation of the mind and the spirit. Some people have not understood why I would do something for which I am “so over-qualified”. Ha! After a lifetime of

setbacks in the permissions process, I was beginning to lose faith. I have experienced over a career of 25 years a truly inordinate number of setbacks and overcomings, so my instinct was to prove to myself beyond doubt that I would do

hard labor, and exposure to the academic elite, I believe this notion to be a total farce. The brightest minds – free of care – imprison themselves, while those that know work are set free. The intellect and poetic subtlety of thinking by the average laborer would surprise most. And the soul and spirit of Auroville has been forged by this karma yoga.

I have learned a great deal about the Auroville pioneer in these first 9 months of work. It has brought me – every day – a profound gratitude, bliss and joy in the work. 50 years later, Auroville is no longer in the period of its pioneers. But pioneering work and pioneering spirit can be constrained neither by time nor by place. It requires simply devotion through work, modest, daily, dedicated service to something we feel called to serve. And now – the first testing complete – the water lines laid in the nick of time before the monsoon, the heart and mind turn to what is next... the sacredness of the water, as we await the rains.



Clearing underbrush

*Lara Davis is an architect, a mason and co-director of the Auroville Earth*

*Institute. She wrote about creating the Four Sisters Pioneer Memorial Dry Garden in Issue 12 of Connect, Summer 2019*



## EVENTS

### A Joyful Return Visit to Auroville: February 4 to March 4, 2020

by Tom O'Brien

The past year and a half have brought major changes into my life. In late 2018 my life-partner of 35 years, Rudy Phillips left this world. During 2019 my older sister Barbara and my beloved nephew Tim also passed away. Returning to Auroville for a month this past February appealed to me as a time for healing and rekindling the enduring connections I have had there. This was the first time I was coming by myself to India and Auroville, since first traveling overland back in 1976. Little did I know how important this visit was to be.

Coming to Needam guest house near

Certitude became another first. Amrit, the developer of Needam, is an older Aurovilian whom I met back in the late 1970's. His writings of the last two years have inspired me, so I was looking forward to meaningful conversations with him. They happened several times, often accompanied with other residents of Needam. Additionally, some other former Auroville residents were staying at Needam. Bryan and Fanou Walton, as well as Jack and Mary Alexander became my guest house neighbors for the month. It brought back warm feelings of connection which have lasted for decades!

B Sullivan visited shortly after my arrival



B and Tom plant Rudy's tree

and had me over to his “Trash Mahal” for several meals with wife Nandini. Sometimes Nandini played the Veena! B also introduced me to Govindaraj, the electronics specialist who runs Qutee Electric Vehicle service center. Govindaraj

# EVENTS

A JOYFUL RETURN VISIT TO AUROVILLE CONTINUED

has been servicing Aurovillian electric mopeds and cycles of all types as well as solar panels and other electronics for years. Through his assistance, I purchased an electric scooter with which he drove me around Auroville. My cycling days are over now, given limitations with balancing. Tremendous gratitude goes out to Govindaraj for his superb navigational skills around Auroville and into Pondy.

There were other chance meetings walking around Certitude. Francis stopped on his way home and invited me to his cool pool for a very refreshing swim! Quietly, Gloria and I crossed paths while walking and exchanged warm greetings. Marlenka and Shinso lived further away, but we discovered that we could walk to one another's homes! Several outings and meals were shared and I could deliver the magnifier bought from America for Marlenka. Iyyanar and I reconnected at the Visitor Center. This led to a meal at his home and an outing to Pondicherry with his family. In Pondy, his older son is working as a cook who makes traditional Belgian waffles! We all indulged. Umm!

Auspiciously, I saw John Harper when visiting the Matrimandir office. After goodwill hugs, he helped me ascertain a pass for visiting the Inner Room of Matrimandir. Meditations there were inspirational and a few of the Matrimandir workers were old dear friends: Patrick, Dhanalakshmi and Shinso. I also met up with Dhanalakshmi at the Solar Kitchen. We made plans to have some meals at her home. There we reconnected with son Satya, daughter, son-in-law and her new-born granddaughter!

Pre-dawn meditations at the Amphitheater were deep and auspicious. The Mother's Birthday on February 21st was very peaceful and less attended than the other meditations later in



Auroville birthday bonfire

the following week. Many people chose to go to Pondicherry on the 21st where they visited the Mother's room at the Ashram. However, the atmosphere at the Amphitheater felt so positive, feeling deeply the Mother's Presence. Later that day there were a variety of activities for people to choose from. At 5:00 p.m. I met Miriam at the Unity Pavilion where George

Nakashima's Peace Table was adorned with flowers. Shortly thereafter we had a lovely group meditation followed by some readings of the Mother's and music performed by Nadaka.

For Auroville's 52nd birthday on the 28th of February, the Amphitheater meditation was attended by Aurovilians, visitors and local villagers alike. The organization for admission was well orchestrated by the security team and young Aurovilians. We were all escorted with flashlights and polite guards. After the Amphitheater was filled, Sunil's music and the Mother's words brought us into a meditative state. At some point the bonfire was ignited and gradually the flames grew. Eventually people were drawn to the fire to feel its warmth and purifying flames. Flowers around the perimeter base of the Amphitheater spiral walkway kept observers from getting too close to the sacred bonfire. This morning meditation invited us all to a beautiful birthday beginning for Auroville.

Events were scheduled throughout the day. Later on I ventured to the Unity pavilion where various lectures and performers offered presentations. Acres for Auroville also sponsored beautiful art to be purchased. On most of the walls and throughout the pavilion one could see paintings, sculpture and artistic expression wherever one looked. Nimo Patel presented video images, music and some youthful dance performances that inspired all of us who were present. An Indian man who lived in NYC for years, he has since returned to

India where he writes music. He is something of an Indian/American rap singer who works largely with young people to spread joy. He can be reached at [EmptyHandsMusic.org](http://EmptyHandsMusic.org). On his CD cover he wrote "When all is said and done, kindness is all we can leave behind".

On February 29th, an early pre-dawn gathering took place at the Amphitheater for the "Golden Day", commemorating the Mother's experiences from February 29, 1956. In 1956, the Mother occultly experienced Herself facing a huge golden door that was keeping the Supramental force from entering



Govindaraj, Tom and Christian (of AVI-Canada)

the known universe. She took a mammoth golden hammer and smashed the door down, allowing a flood of Supramental Force to enter. This has been considered by devotees a pivotal moment for the earth's consciousness. Every leap year since, people meditate and celebrate February 29th as the "Golden Day". Again, many people attended the meditation and listened to the Mother's words broadcast throughout the Amphitheater.

Finally, on March 1, 2020 we had a ceremony at the Sacred Groves Vaastu Garden to plant trees for American friends who have passed away. Each one had a relationship with Auroville over the years. Rudy Phillips became a board member of the Foundation for World Education and eventually its president for a decade. He brought business discipline to help coordinate meetings and prioritize grants. During his time, funds were dispensed to help Auroville grow and to help purchase the Matrimandir crystal. Together we traveled to Auroville for two visits, one in 1989 and another in 2010.

Margo MacLeod followed Rudy's footsteps and became president of the FWE for a number of years. She and I first met in Auroville in 1977 and we remained friends ever since. Before passing Margo became absorbed with "Awareness Through the Body" which she taught with many people on several continents. Timothy Hoch was a nephew of mine whom I brought to Auroville in 2010. He so enjoyed being there that he wanted to return. Before his tragic passing, he told me how he hoped to join me on a future visit to Auroville. Alas, that was not to be, but some of his ashes were brought instead.

The Sacred Groves Vaastu Garden was beautifully festooned with flowers and garlands, thanks to Jeanne, and a host of helpers. Three pits were dug for the planting of trees in memoriam for Margo, Rudy and Tim. A cross section of Aurovilians took part in the ceremony of remembrance. Stories about Rudy,

Margo and Tim were shared by Tom, Miriam and Jeanne, while many others helped place soil and ashes into the tree pits. Aurovilians such as B, Paula, Nandini, & Aurelio besides various Tamil Aurovilians (Raman, Selvaraj, Jyoti, Dhanalakshmi, Satya, Govindaraj) former Aurovilians (Gordon, Jack, Mary, Bryan, Fanou & Tom) and old time visitors such as Miriam, Christian and Andree all participated. We meditated, listened to Gordon's flute playing and

heard Raman recite an old Tamil sacred poem. Eventually we chanted "Om Namoh Bhagavate" and spontaneously made music to the sound of elemental percussion instruments that Aurelio and his Svaram group had brought with them. It became celebratory with joy, honoring the love we felt for these departed friends. Sweets followed which we all enjoyed.

In a couple of days it was time for me to head back to the USA. Renewed I was by

the Mother's Presence and the many personal experiences within Auroville. Returning to America I felt rekindled by the strong connections of the many who share this dream ~ to see the development of "The City the Earth Needs."

*Tom O'Brien lived in Auroville during the 1970's. He is now a psychotherapist living on Cape Cod.*



## UPDATES

### Remembering How to Heal, How to Dream

by Kavitha Urvase Selvaraj

Growing up in Auroville made it hard to imagine any other place I would rather be. I left it several times to explore the world, to educate myself, but I was very deeply aware of my connection to the soul and purpose that Auroville had called me to work towards. Indeed Auroville is, and will always be, home.

Today, my partner Michael and I live in Bali. Live in Bali?! We just landed here in early March 2020 for a conference. We had been invited to speak about Auroville. Flights, food and accommodation were covered by the inviting organization: Co-working Unconference Asia. What a privilege to be able to serve the community and be so well taken care of! We took a handful of days following the conference to visit Ecovillage projects in Bali, networking for our YouthLink organization back in Auroville.

Little did we expect that India, and later Indonesia, would close their borders. As French and Dutch nationals we had to make a choice—fly to Europe, or stay put. And so we stayed. But did any of us really expect that a flu could shut down international traffic? Indeed we hoped for many years that perhaps poverty, war, or even climate change may move our international leaders to act quickly and enforce protective measures. But we all know that hasn't happened. It is almost surreal, that the world has been locked down for a flu... but it also brings my partner and I a deep sense of calm and a little excitement too.

Is it fair to be excited about the crisis we face today? There are millions suffering—we

hear the news every day, and we feel the guilt. But maybe we were born into this generation for a reason. It seems that we have been waiting for our opportunity to be "pioneers." We have been waiting to be called into action—to have a cause that we can call our own.

It is invigorating to finally see it is possible to slow down, and even to stop completely. We were told at a very young age that the global economy is based on eternal growth, and that the powers were too strong; that no individual or collective effort could ever stop such a massive machine. But indeed the "little flu" has done the trick—helped us all stop the endless need to consume and exploit the natural resources of our Earth.

Now we have the chance to think twice. To think thrice. To dive deeply into our contemplation. To notice our agitation, triggers, and anxiety. What moves us? What has not healed? Why do I still feel like crying or shouting at times? It is such a privilege. I get to finally have a chance not just to read Joanna Macy's books, but to actually experience the stages of grief I feel inside, to finally have the chance to allow myself to express



Kavitha in Bali

myself more vulnerably; to show them all my fears, to feel my pain. It has been so long that I have accumulated small wounds. I have even forgotten their origin. But now I get to heal. Thank you universe!

To wake up in Bali is a blessing. We feel like the luckiest people on earth. We are hosted in a beautiful educational community campus - the Biosphere Foundation. Learning from Sierra, Gaie, Laser, Rosa, Marie and their team is not just inspiring, but feels like coming home. The Biosphere 2 project, which took place in Arizona in the 90s, has inspired many around the world to shift their worldview from a fragmented one to one of holistic interdependence.

We get to wake up in the mornings with a view of volcanoes in the distance and a forest being planted further up our hill. We can also see down to the coast, with the Biosphere Foundation's ship, Mir, shining in the bay. The



Bali sunset



## UPDATES

REMEMBERING HOW TO HEAL, HOW TO DREAM CONTINUED

tourists have either gone home or retreated into their bungalows. So finally the Balinese have their island back. We shop at the local bazaar, enjoying the abundance and variety of fresh fruits and vegetables. We are picking up the language fast, as the vendors try to teach us their heritage and wisdom. Even with faces half covered, we can enjoy smiling eyes.

There was no coincidence to finding this home and family in Bali. We had burnt out in Auroville, we needed to be woken up, to be forced to slow down, to be allowed to heal. It is comforting to see, and now believe, that there are many places that exist that share the Auroville ideals. So today we sit peeling peanuts as we watch wistfully while the sun sets behind the volcanoes. I have learnt to count in the local currency and name the local ingredients behind their muffling masks. Some mornings we borrow some flippers and snorkel slowly over the colorful reefs. Without the motorboats and tour-

ist paddle boats out, the reefs appear to be recovering faster. We now have time to plan our menu more concisely, to buy local, to experiment with new recipes. We finally have time to clean the household, to write a cook book, to massage each other, to plant more herbs in the garden, to sort seeds from their seed bank. The seasons change fast. We have been enjoying the local harvests of peanuts, chili, corn and grapes. The list goes on, the more we slow down, the more we see, the more we do, the more we learn, the faster we grow.

We have begun dreaming about how to bring more youth and Aurovilians to this beautiful corner of Bali. We have begun dreaming of how to bring some local heroes from here to visit Auroville. We share a simi-

*We have begun dreaming about how to bring more youth and Aurovilians to this beautiful corner of Bali. We have begun dreaming of how to bring some local heroes from here to visit Auroville.*



lar culture, ecosystem and intention. We can cross pollinate seamlessly on many topics—forestry, farming, oceans, waste management, and connecting to the local. I have noticed two fireflies that have come to join us, I have not danced with fireflies years, have you?

*Kavitha Urvasie Selvaraj wrote about organizing an Auroville branch of the Global Ecovillage Network in issue 8 of Connect, Summer 2017. She helps direct Youth Link in Auroville.*

## COVID 19 PANDEMIC: AUROVILLE NEEDS OUR HELP

In this unprecedented time of the global pandemic, Auroville needs your help. With 50 years of hard work from many international volunteers and local Tamil people Auroville has succeeded in creating an oasis of lush green forests on what was once fairly dry land.

Many local species of wild life have returned to these forests and are flourishing. Like nature, many innovative thinkers have come to Auroville and created breakthroughs in alternative energy, progressive education, music and arts to name a few.

But, all this is severely threatened by the global pandemic and national conditions in India. All transport across India by plane, train and automobiles is limited to emergency services right now. The con-



sequence of this limiting of travel is that almost all commercial activity in Auroville has halted. Guesthouses, restaurants and small businesses are unable to function due to social distancing; people are not being allowed to work and there is a lack of patrons.

In addition, places of inspiration and meditation such as the Matrimandir, Savitri Bhavan, and the Botanical Gardens are closed to the public. The city services of Auroville such as schools, dining halls, transportation services, road work, volunteer maintenances all

rely on funds from the Auroville economy and all of that is compromised indefinitely due to the pandemic.

There are also thousands of people from the local villages that have been employed by Auroville for decades. They rely on Auroville for wages to support their families. The implications of a major financial contraction in Auroville are significant for the bioregion, and for the promise embodied by the City of Tomorrow.

**Every dollar can carry a long way in Indian rupees.**

**No donation is too small.**

Please give what you can today at

[www.aviusa.org](http://www.aviusa.org)

or mail a check to

**Auroville International USA,**

**P.O. Box 188158, Sacramento, CA 95818**

