

AVI-USA CONNECT

Fall 2014 Newsletter

Issue 03



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REFLECTIONS

Only Connect

BY BRYAN WALTON

"Only connect," E.M. Forster, the author of *Passage to India*, famously advised us. We have all had our passage to India. Our passage has included Auroville where one can experience a human unity worth participating in. Whether it's planting trees from around the world in Sadhana Forest, or working with Tamil children at one of the outreach schools, or working with volunteers to build ecologically sound houses, the stories that you read in this newsletter are from those who have connected.

One of the main goals of AVI-USA is to help make and keep these connections between Americans and Auroville. We help make financial connections from donors to Auroville as well as personal ones.

We need friends and members to ensure the dream of Auroville for all of us. It's that simple. With your membership we can keep building the city of human unity in Auroville and cover the costs of supporting that work in the USA. Just as Auroville needs volunteers, donations, and residents we need friends and members to ensure the future dream for all of us.

Financial Report

FROM TREASURER MARY ALEXANDER

AVI-USA's fiscal year runs from July 1 through June 30. As this 2013-14 year came to a close the board celebrated a record year of donations. \$249,246.89 was received. Thank you all. And this does mean more work for us as our CPA informed us that we will now have to file the 990 long form and add policies for increasing our responsibility to you our donors. In addition we will have to report to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) how we monitor distributed funds to the following recipients in Auroville:

Wasteless, The Farewell Fund, AIH, The Dental Clinic, Savitri Bhavan, housing, land, Matrimandir, Auroville Schools, Sadhana Forest Kenya, and Auroville Greenwork.

This benchmark for giving is partially a result of AVI-USA's Planned Giving program. Molly Kurtz of Chicago, Illinois passed leaving significant contributions to the following projects in Auroville: Land, The Tibetan Pavilion, Auroville Village Action, Unity Pavilion, International House/USA Pavilion and AVI-USA.

Molly's gift to us will support our basic overhead costs for the coming year. As the fiscal year came to a close her planned giving made it possible for us to contribute to the following projects in Auroville; Auroville Sports Resource Center which provides opportunities for the local villages to hold sports events along with health clinics; *One Asia* which will take place in Taipai this fall; The Farewell fund which is working to complete the new building; and Kamataru a new project in the green belt stewarded by Rishi who was born in Auroville.

Molly was inspired by the Universal Mother. She felt Her igniting the fire of consciousness in humanity and that if we are receptive to it some kind of peace and healing will be manifest on our planet. The AVI-USA Board appreciates her planned giving gift and we are confident that Auroville moves with The Mother for the realization of human unity.

To find out more about how to do Planned Giving to support the development of Auroville contact us at info@aviusa.org.

AVI-USA Annual Meeting August 6 & 7, 2014

BY BILL LEON, SECRETARY

Bryan Walton, Bill Leon, Julian Lines, Binah Thillairajah, Jack & Mary Alexander, and Jeanne & Gordon Korstange met in Taos at the Kachina Lodge for 2 days prior to the A.U.M. Raina Imig joined us by phone and B. Sullivan attended for the closing session.

Our opening visioning session helped us identify the fact that we are the connectors between Auroville and interested people in the USA. In Auroville people are reaching out for more help. To maintain our channel for tax deductible funds we have to be able to absorb our basic costs for communication and financial and tax filing fees. Without this base we cannot continue our mission. We discussed the need to cultivate a membership that could begin to support the organization here in the USA.

A second major function is bringing Aurovilians to the U.S. or connecting them to people and resources here.

The other great need in Auroville is for people to come as volunteers, guests, and newcomers who might find their place in Auroville after a year in the community. The board wants to support those from the USA who have experienced Auroville through any opportunity from volunteer to guest to newcomer.

Since the AVI meeting in Auroville this past February all AVI's have focused on their role in developing the International Zone. AVI-USA continues to think that we achieved the first step on that path by building International House which is now managed by B., Nandini, Manu, and Garima. Amy, a USAian Aurovillian, will be the caretaker at the new well which is now providing water to Krupa's container house and the budding African pavilion.

With the planned gift from Molly Kurtz for the USA pavilion we are now looking for the next step toward its manifestation in the International Zone. AuroMesa was an inspiration to us. We visited Tizia and Paul O'Connor's Earthship and during the A.U.M. heard Mike Reynolds speak of his adventure in transforming tires, bottles and cans into houses. While we are not sure yet what lies ahead for AVI-USA in the International Zone we are ready to explore everything from housing to installations to cultural programs for our next action to manifest something of the USA in Auroville.

The Acres for Auroville (A4AV) campaign to raise money for the purchase of land in the center of Auroville received \$26,000 through us. We believe it is important to ask for a monthly report from those managing the land purchase in order to account for how the land fund puts these dollars into action and will be updating everyone about how the money is used.

After setting our goal of maintaining enough money to pay for our annual expenses, we found that we could donate to projects in Auroville. The board agreed to keep donors/friends/members informed of the projects which we were able to support: Kamataru Forest, Farewell Room, Outreach Sports and Sacred Groves housing project.

Anyone wanting more information about Auroville, such as opportunities to volunteer, visit, become a newcomer or learn about the Auroville projects needing funds, go to AVI-USA Facebook page, or contact Julian Lines by calling our toll free number (866) 243-5728.



AVI-USA BOARD L to R: Julian, Bryan, Gordon, Bill, Binah, Jeanne, Jack, Mary
(missing: Chetana & Raina)



AuroTejas Hemsell performing for AUM



Aurovilians from the '70's.... all together again... Rod, Constance, B, Jack, Bryan

HIGHLIGHTS

AUM

From Chiang Mai to Taos and Back to Integral Yoga

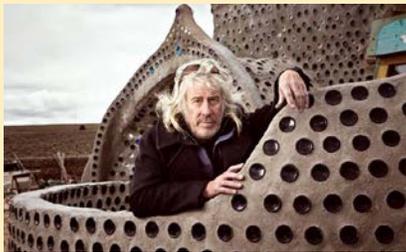
By DANIEL GOLDSMITH



Daniel Goldsmith far left



AUM group photo



Mike Reynolds: Earthship Biotech



International Advisory Council / Governing Board/ Working Committee: L to R Sir Mark and Frederick, Shaunaka and Ameeta, Vishakha, Daniele, Eric and Gillian

In a manner reflective of my entire interaction with Sri Aurobindo and The Mother's teachings, I first learned about the AUM conference at a café in Chiang Mai, Thailand, while sipping a fruit shake and holding my six month old baby on my lap.

I suppose it really wasn't all that unusual that my family and I happened to cross Tizia O'Connor on the other side of the world. At first, I was amazed by these types of synchronicities, but as they've begun to occur with greater frequency, I've come to see them as responses to my aspiration to know and live in Truth.

As soon as Tizia described the program, I knew I had to go. Even though it was the first I had ever heard of an AUM gathering and I had no idea what to expect, I felt myself drawn to the high, dry, windy Taos mesa to be with a group dedicated to exploring Integral Yoga.

I don't think that anyone walked away from these three days feeling uninspired. With its emphasis on sustainability, the conference showed us what it looks like when individuals infuse matter with higher consciousness. Michael Reynolds' earthships offer a bold, practical, and affordable vision for future housing in a changing climate. Aviram Rozin's discussion of his Sadhana Forest project showed us what can happen when aspiration meets surrender.

It helped that all this took place against the backdrop of Auromesa, Tizia and Paul's fantastic home. Their living space is a living example of how Integral Yoga manifests itself on the physical plane. I couldn't help but walk away from their space and think, why am I not doing something like this?

For people like me, who don't really have an Integral Yoga community around them that they connect with, this year's AUM was a fresh injection of energy that encouraged me to continue my own individual practice. To see how other people implement the teachings in their lives inspires me to do the same.



Sound Healing with Tizia, Paul & Rebecca

East Coast Report

FROM JULIAN LINES

A joint meeting of the Governing Board of Auroville and the International Advisory Council took place the first weekend in August. Highlights of my visit to Auroville included slide shows by Priya Sundaravalli and Adil Writer about their respective trips to South Korea and Bali to work on their pottery. Both showed remarkable output inspired by the local culture and exemplified the wonderful way Art crosses boundaries and cultures, mixes with them and expands, then returns home again, enriched by the experience, leaving some seeds of Auroville behind.

I also saw the trench sending water from the new well (financed by the Auroville Internationals) next to International House (where Amy is constructing a new structure) over to Krupa's new Container House. It seemed everywhere one turns, Auroville is experimenting and innovating with housing including Sacred Groves.

The five member International Advisory Council was in full attendance including broadcaster and writer Sir Mark Tully, Vishakha Desai, who has left Asia Society to teach at Columbia University, Kabir Shaikh, who returned to the UK after his stint starting up the Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (MGIEP) in Delhi and Shaunaka Rishi Das, Director of the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies (OCHS) and myself.

The team proposed a community-wide Auroville retreat lead by an outside facilitator for 2015. I'm looking forward to the outcome.

I was honored to end my stay by presenting the retiring Secretary, Mr. Balabaskar, with a copy of *The Letters of Marshall McLuhan*. Balabaskar served the community in the right spirit during his two terms. He will go back to teaching but will stay in touch with Auroville and has even looked into building a home nearby. An insightful interview with him was published in *Auroville Today* which now comes in both a print and digital edition. See the newly revised www.auroville.org website for details.

Lastly, I suggest you save the dates and funds to join us at the joint AVI/AUM August 20th-23rd at Menla Conference Center near Woodstock, NY.

UPDATES:

Sacred Groves Update

BY MANU GOPALAN

The 250,000 liters rainwater storage tanks and the common house and new dormitories to house 17 more volunteers are completed. A bank of shared composting toilets, baths and some camping platforms are being finished. Once this infrastructure is in place we will be able to house more volunteers. The work on the first three model houses is now in the stage of building the walls.

There are Sacred Groves volunteers who are taking the steps to become Aurovillian New-comers. In response to their needs we started Buildfree a program to construct houses from earth, clay, stone, straw, grass, wood, bamboo and recycled materials. www.buildfree.com gives details on this program to support new people in Auroville.

The ongoing costs of maintenance for the Sacred Groves volunteers and Aurovilians remains our biggest challenge. Monthly donations to our project are the best way for us to keep going. www.sacredgroves.in will keep you informed of every step on our way. *Thanks to all for your support.*

From Coast to Coast - Sadhana Forest Director Crosses the US

BY AVIRAM ROZIN

I send many many thanks to the amazing team at AVI USA for helping to make my month-long trip to the US a huge success. Stopping off in Taos, St. Louis, Boston, Martha's Vineyard, New Hampshire and Washington DC, Sadhana Forest made many new friends across the country, sharing in the spirit of human unity and progress, as well as the spirit of wick irrigation and composting toilets!

B. Sullivan and I made a visit to Sadhana Forest Haiti. There we discussed launching a mobile reforestation unit through the purchase of a truck that could travel to surrounding and remote areas with a team of volunteers to provide training and distribute trees. On my return to the US, this new project received a powerful kick-start. While presenting Sadhana Forest at a dinner gathering in New Hampshire an attendee generously offered to match all donations toward the cost of getting the unit up and running (\$30,000). Thanks to AVI and many supporters across the US, we are well on our way to meeting this goal!

Meanwhile, progress in Kenya and India continues with enthusiasm. India saw the reopening of our "Children's Land," a section of forest set aside for the local children as space to learn, explore and participate in the project through the principles of free progress education. Four different groups with children ranging in age from 4 to 13 visit us each week, bringing their joy, creativity and energy to apply to the project however they choose.

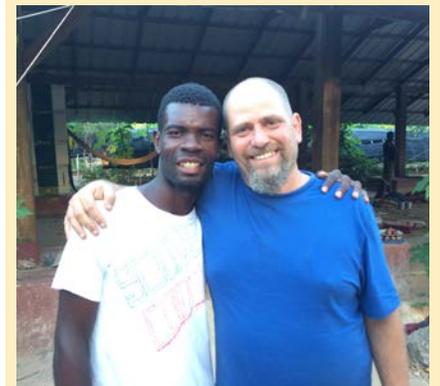
While only six months old, Sadhana Forest Kenya is capturing the hearts of local Kenyans and volunteers alike. In a very short time, the project has gone from a remote and barren piece of land, to a highly functioning learning center and community where many dozens of people come each week for training in tree planting, tree care and water conservation. With our nursery up and running, we are also distributing and planting trees as fast as we can to keep up with the demand!



The international team of creators at work on the Auroville Botanical Garden Labyrinth, a project of AVI-USA.



Setting the shuttering in place



Yonice and Aviram Sadhana Forest Haiti

CONNECTIONS:

Diaries of a Caretaker

BY NIKIL CHASLA BHOWMICK



Nikil Chasla Bhowmick, an Indian-American, recently took over the management of Meera Youth Community on the Auroville beach. Here is an excerpt from a longer piece which can be read in full on our Facebook page www.facebook.com/AVIUSA.

The previous year had witnessed the sea submerge our backyard, infiltrate our well and destroy some of the community's main structures, but that wasn't all. As a unit of Auroville, we are located six kilometers outside of the Green Belt radius, which means that our daily interactions are exclusively with the Tamil villagers living around us.

Most of the time, these interactions are very cordial, but sometimes we have to face the fury of the local fishermen who still see Meera Youth Camp as a vacation house for westernized folk with money. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, my stay at Meera has filled me with a sense of pride, because there is a sentiment here that we are maintaining the spirit of the first Aurovilian pioneers.

We have very basic accommodations, no fans to counter the heat, no internet connection, no hot water or shower for that matter, minimal twelve-volt lighting in our rooms and we never go to sleep alone. If it's not the cockroaches it's the red ants or other bed critters that will make us feel their presence, or the crows nonchalantly flying into our rooms in the early morning and defecating on our mosquito nets.

Living in Auroville, one is accustomed to the abundance of fauna and flora and even the occasional green Naja naja, or cobra, sighting. Also be wary of where you swim. My last dip in the ocean resulted in a bite from a very mysterious creature. Sudden numbness and terrible pain ensued, which resulted in a brief hospitalization with many injections and vaccinations. Now word on the beach is that it could have been anything from a local toxic fish to a sea krait to an extra-dimensional entity sent by Vishnu himself that made its way from the Himalayan glaciers melting into the Ganga and arriving all the way into the Bay of Bengal.

I find myself in Meera for the same reason that most of our residents do: it is first and foremost to leave the comfort zone that the West has created for us... In contrast, it is fascinating to note how different the Tamil philosophy is in comparison to the logos-based Western philosophy of discourse stemming from the ancient Greeks. What better place to test the limits of the West than Tamil Nadu...

There is much we can learn from the Tamil people - which The Mother always viewed as the original Aurovilians - and they from the Western mindset... After all, there is truth in the cliché that Western people are in India, the soul of the world, to learn about themselves, whereas Indians are seeking a better material life. As human beings, integrating both philosophies into a single consciousness might be a good place to start.

On a personal level, I am still very much on a spiritual journey and the more I trust my intuition and let go of my tendency to control and project every aspect of my life, the closer I feel to that source that beckons me.

My Journey to Auroville

BY PAUL DEJONG



Auroville for me is a multi-faceted place, a kind of umbrella community where Aurovilians of all backgrounds mix not only with the Tamilians who live in and around it, but also with many visitors of diverse backgrounds. This openness and inclusion is partly what helped me to decide to volunteer for three months here.

My work life has been spent mainly overseas for the past thirty years as an English teacher, usually with college age students but also with migrant worker and asylum seekers. I've long wanted to take a break from teaching and explore and develop other skills and roles. I came to know about Auroville through a lengthy stay last fall at a Zen center in Tamil Nadu. I heard about Auroville from the Aurovilians who came there to meditate and saw a possibility to volunteer within the context of a spiritually aware and engaged community. My volunteer commitment is with the Auroville Village Action Group (AVAG), a group that AVI-USA has recently donated several thousand dollars to in order to maintain its microfinance program to provide microloans to more than 4,000 area village women.

My time here has been a rewarding mix of seeing successful development work first hand in villages while exploring and deepening my own spiritual path. The time spent at AVAG has already created a sense of commitment and concern for seeing it succeed, despite the difficulties of sporadic funding and needs that go beyond AVAGs' capacity to address them, such as supporting the children of low caste women (Dalits) in getting a proper education and a chance at a better future.

An American Artist in Auroville

BY AUDREY WALLACE-TAYLOR

I've been an Aurovillian for about eight years but have been visiting since 1993. The community of Creativity wanted to have a workshop but had no one to make it happen. I house sat for people who were traveling while I established it. The atelier is a cooperative space where anyone can work. I provide materials and can cover my costs through donations and from the workshops I give on drawing and color.

The deepest challenge I have right now is working closely with groups of people as we develop the cooperative gallery, Neelanjani, Auroville Visual Artists Center.

Neelanjani is committed to working as a cooperative with artists to finance and build a gallery on the first floor of the Auroville Visitors Center. The space will be a center of support, display, marketing and information on Auroville visual artists. From there will come shows inside and outside Auroville, installations, murals, and other artistic expressions. Neelanjani will bring those working in visual expression together for stimulation, information and support.

Our proposal is complete with architects plans, budget and specific layout of the gallery. We have put on two solo shows and two group shows as fundraisers, the last one with over forty Auroville artists participating. With that income and an additional gift we have 7% of our budget. We've also painted a 80' x 7' mural called Cosmic Cows on the wall at the entrance to Bharat Nivas.

Right now we are maintaining a display of Auroville painters four days a week on the outside wall of the Visitors Center facing the Shining Path Cafe. Sculptures will be placed on the grass in front of the temporary gallery.

Please contact me (audwallatay@gmail.com) if you want to help with Neelanjani and please watch our video here: vimeo.com/55664330



the UNESCO Chair for Earthen Architecture for Asia. However, I had at the time a strong sense that I was being drawn here for other reasons beyond my understanding, a sense this was, finally, my landing place in the world.

Originally a Rhode Islander, I grew up on the small island of Conanicut, in a tiny town with burgeoning class conflicts and bridges on either side. The island is also the site of one of the largest known historic Native American burial grounds on the east coast. As a young girl, I grew up playing on the stone walls around the burial grounds, helping archaeologists sieve soil to excavate 4,000 year old native artifacts, walking often heel-to-toe while thinking of the Wampanoag family I never knew, and feeling somehow a lost soul searching deeply for a culture beyond the material world before me.

I studied art at Alfred in upstate New York, and learned to work many different materials with my hands. I began working in landscape construction, planting trees and building patios in stone, brick, and cobble. I worked for five years in various New England cities on construction crews with new immigrants—young men from all over the world, most often low-income urban youth and immigrant laborers from places like Puerto Rico, Morocco, Cambodia, Tibet, etc. I was a woman – and was often reminded of this of course on new construction sites. But I had a strength and determination far beyond my size, and I used sweat equity as a tool to build trust and mutual respect among my crews, out-working the boys to cross barriers of gender, nationality, class, ethnicity and religion. I gained a sense of self and solidarity through this work, travelling home dirty and exhausted from construction sites on public transportation, and seeing the world recoil from this.

Then I left my home in the ghetto of Flatbush, to study architecture at MIT. It was rather a shock to my self-constructed working class identity. There, I focused my studies with a structural masonry engineer, and came back after a time to the work that I loved – building with bricks. Building vaults, I advanced in the world of masonry engineering. I joined a research group in Switzerland, travelling widely, building and teaching in the UK, Ethiopia, and Singapore. I had the opportunity to build an affordable housing prototype in Ethiopia, and my experience working with Ethiopian laborers on the scaffoldings in Addis Ababa, Deri Dawa and Bahir Dar completely changed my world view. This is what I had been searching for; a combined intelligence of the hand and the mind, a work of the heart, and a service for and with people.

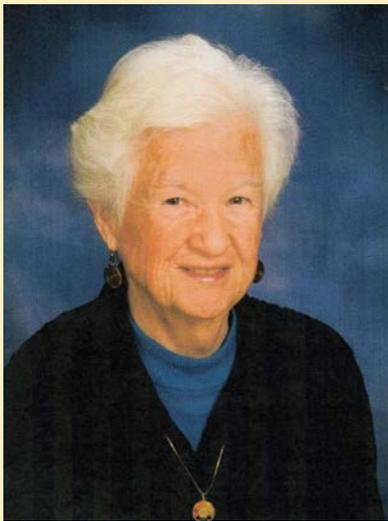
In the midst of this itinerary, I landed for research in Auroville in April 2012... and it quickly became my home. I am now a Newcomer, permanently based at the Earth Institute as faculty and technical expert. I give lectures to students on structural theory of masonry and teach workshops in the field in various countries, where people are searching for sustainable and affordable ways to build (most recently in southern Algeria). The director, co-director and I are working together to realize an ambitious dream for the extension of the Earth Institute School, to build a new campus of 6,500 m2 with best practice, sustainable construction using earth as a building material, including plans for probably the largest earthen vault in the world. But the aim is larger still: To create the only center in the world for education in earthen masonry available to all socio-economic levels: architects, engineers, technicians, foremen, masons and laborers. There is a lot of work yet to do to realize this dream, but it is the work that I was drawn here to do – to build for a sustainable future, and for unity between people.

The Unity of the Mind & the Hand

BY LARA K. DAVIS



I first came to Auroville two years ago, while pursuing doctoral research at the ETH Zürich, Switzerland. I came to research vaulted masonry built with stabilized earth at the Auroville Earth Institute,



Remembering Molly Kurtz

Molly Kurtz was born in Des Moines, Iowa. She attended St. Mary-of-the-Woods College in Terra Haute, Indiana. Her sophomore year of college, she decided to enter the community of the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. During her 17 years as a nun she accumulated a vast amount of teaching experience and worked as a religious education consultant. In 1971 she left the convent and in 1972 moved from Iowa City to Minneapolis where she worked for Hennepin County for 17 years in the division of Organizational Development. She retired from Hennepin County in 1987 and started her own business "Perspectives 21" that emphasized collaboration. Molly spent the last twenty years actively engaged in issues devoted to peace, social justice, and progressive human unity. Molly visited Auroville and was inspired by the work of Village Action and Bhavana Dee. She attended an AUM in South Carolina, the AVIUSA Meeting in Ben Lomond, CA and the New Momentum conference in Chicago where the documentary about Auroville "City of the Dawn" was premiered. Her legacy gift to Auroville meant so very much to us all.

- edited from The Des Moines Register

Make A Tribute Gift

AVI-USA accepts gifts in memory of someone who has died. Donors may also give a gift just to remember those who have made contributions to Auroville through their work/financial contribution/dedication to the Auroville community. AVI-USA remembers with gratitude the following who have contributed to our community.

Ron Anastasia
Ariel Browne
Auroarindam (Russell Douglas)
Cassia Berman
Haridas Chaudhuri
Bob Dane
Bhavana (Dee Decew)
Rosine Debode
Lois Duncan
Mary Helen Eggenberger
Lalit Fullman
Kenneth Fator
Myrtle Fator
Alan Gray
Dick Hawk

Barbara Heimlich
John Kelly
Trudy King
Alan Klaas
Mary Clara (Molly) Kurtz
Eleanor Lovett
June Maher
Albert M. Maher
Gene Maslow
Eleanor Montgomery
George Nakashima
Namas (Dennis)
William Netter
Liam O'Gallagher
Steven Orton

Ida Patterson
Seyril Schochen
Marjorie Spalding
Joe Spanier
Muriel Spanier
Sam Spanier
Elizabeth Stiller
Alice Thomas
Adm. Rutledge Tompkins
Judith Tyberg
Ruth Villalobos
Dimitri Von Mohrenschildt
John Walker
Deidre (Claire) Worden

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