

Jack Slattery's Message, FOI President

Remembrances

I just returned from India and Nepal organized through Michigan State University (MSU) by Mary and Harry Andrews, former India III Volunteers. There were 24 of us including 3 other India III RPCVs and one RPCV from Nepal. The remaining were part of MSU faculty interested in keeping ties with India.

For several of us this was a trip bringing back memories while visiting Agra, Jaipur and Delhi. It was here Peace Corps staff called Volunteers together to check up on how we were adjusting to very different cultures and climates and to learn about possible future Peace Corps programs that would work in India. Of course we had no objections. We stayed in fine hotels such as the Rambagh Palace Hotel and Udaipur Lake Palace Hotel. We were addressed by the sister of Prime Minister Nehru, Shri Vijaya Lakshmi Nehru Pandit, an active political force at that time, and her niece Indira Gandhi a future Prime Minister.

REMINICING and STORIES: Fifty years later, this visit was an opportunity to remember what, why and with whom we worked. We reminisced, sharing what we did in our lives. We shared stories of those who were with us in training and in India and those who are no longer with us. We are rich with stories about what we did in India and throughout our lives. We need only look at the stories imbedded in FOI obituaries that are posted on the FOI website. Please keep sending them. And keep your own PC India stories going within your families and beyond. FOI is another circle to share your stories. We have a place on the website or within your group sites.

On a lighter side, send your own stories and pictures. and suggestions to improve the website, Maureen, our webmaster, and I will be happy to work with you on any of these.

GIFT GIVING

2013 has been a wonderful year for contributions to FOI charities. Please contribute what you can AND know that your gifts reach those in need very quickly. Please see George Nepert's charity update.

Also, need your thoughts about a possible FOI endowment mechanism to fund charities into the future after the FOI RPCVs are no longer around. Would children be willing to take it on? Any thoughts? PLEASE send.

We are always open to suggestions and comments on website and FOI activities.

Namaste and Yours Truly in India and the USA,

Jack Slattery
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Robert taught courses relating to the histories of India and South Asia at West Chester University (WCU) for 35 years before his retirement in 2002. He passed away in 2010. He was affiliated with the South Asia Regional Studies Program at the University of Pennsylvania, and numerous trips to India including a term in the Peace Corps from 1962-64 and as a Senior Fulbright Researcher in 1986.

Last year, the Young family established the Dr. Robert J. Young Memorial Scholarship at the West Chester University Foundation with a \$10,000 gift in honor of their late father. The family needs to raise at least another \$1,200 to officially endow the scholarship so that it will last into perpetuity. However, they are hoping to surpass the endowment minimum to raise as much as possible so that the annual scholarship distribution is meaningful – at least \$1,000 annually to a deserving student. The endowment is intended to support a junior or senior student at West Chester University who has completed several courses in Asian history or philosophy and how they plan to apply their education after graduation. Priority will be given to candidates who demonstrate financial need.

This scholarship is being administered through the West Chester University Foundation. For more information, please contact Kathleen Sanger, Director of Development for the College of Arts and Sciences at 610-430-4154 or via email at ksanger@wcufoundation.org. Your contribution is fully tax deductible and can be made payable to the *WCU Foundation* and mailed to: West Chester University Foundation, P. O. Box 541, West Chester, PA 19381. Be sure to add “For Bob Young Scholarship” in the memo portion of the check.

The Young family appreciates your consideration.

Andy Young

FOI charity #2 “Forgotten Children” run by Francoise Remington



FORGOTTEN CHILDREN 2013 WISHES :

to adopt this little tribal school, the Gvt. Middle School at Kuthirayar Dam!

This project is done in collaboration with Palni Hills Conservation Council. These students have only one meal a day and one set of clothes. Their parents live in the surrounding forests in the hills surrounding the Khudirayar dam, near Palani. The tribal people live from hunting and occasional agriculture work. They also make honey from wild bees under the supervision of Mr. Kannan. This is an existing new project which matches the mission of FORGOTTEN CHILDREN.

Congratulations Manager of "Lucky Dozen", Sr. Mary Therese !

On 17th Sept. she reached her 58th birthday which is retirement age in India. Sr. Mary has been instrumental for "Lucky Dozen" to function. Her services are free, providing further education opportunities for the poorest of the poor through our sponsorship supporters here. She gives her time and energy to make sure the support you give goes to the most needy persons. She will continue to manage "Lucky Dozen" in Theni, Tamil Nadu.

Below are reflections at her retirement celebration.

May God Be Glorified

Gratitude from the heart: At the close of my regular education Ministry in school, my heart is filled with gratitude to God and to all those who have enabled me to engage myself in this valuable ministry.

Cause of my mission: Having been born in the family of teachers, I found the education ministry a joyous one. Jesus my Supreme Guru had blessed me abundantly throughout my service. I found Nano as a guide and a model to me. As Nano encountered children in the streets of Cork and began her ministry of education, I too found many under privileged children in my ministry. I would like to name a few: Garfield, Celestine, Menaka, Ammu, Sheela, Meena, Jeevitha, Lakshmi and many others whom I met at odd situation such as road side, looking for alms, gathering firewood, at shop and at fields.

God's Instrument: God has used me as an instrument to brighten the life of many students. Walking the streets and hillside, I found the under privileged students and with God's grace, many well wishers extended their helping hands. I am so proud to say that my first donors were my students Mary Rodrigo and Golda from Church Park Teachers' Training institute. Mr. Riccardo and Tina Scotti from Italy touched the life of some of the students in Chennai. To reach out and care for the dropout students and child laborers, Mrs. Françoise Remington and Mrs. Marie Ange Harris from USA, have extended their support and together we were able to touch the lives of nearly 200 students. Mr. George and Brenda Nepert together with members of "Friends of India Organization", USA has come forward to support up to now 74 students for after school studies so that these students are a backbone to support their families. Fr. Francis D'Sa S.J. through his friend Prof. Josef Heinz with kindness and love, made it possible for the less fortunate tribal children of Kodaikanal to have a chance of school education as they stayed in PCK hostel. I am so grateful for all the kind hearted persons, who have touched the lives of many needy students. Through these students, many families have been lifted for a better life.

Supported in Love: I am also grateful for the many sisters who have been a source of inspiration to me. As a teacher, I received guidance from Srs. Consilia, Pamela, Maria Zinha, Joan, Lilly, Agnelo and Rose. As head of the schools, I experienced the support of Srs. Clare, Thainese, Pius, Severina, Victoria Joseph, Jeyanthi, Stella Packiam, Victoria Devasahayam, Vanitha, Amalajothi, Carolin and Arockiamary.

May God be Praised: All through my 29 years of life in schools, I have experienced the love of our God, the guidance and many blessings. I often recall the words of our Nano: My children will never take me to heaven for I experience the heaven among them. When I was a student in Church Park Training College, the motto of our batch was: **Let my life lightly dance!** I keep taking part in the dance of my loving God in and through my ministry of education. St. Paul has said: It is not I who live, but Christ my Lord lives in me. If I was able to reach out to the least of my sisters and brothers, it is because of Christ, who leads me and guides me. With St. Francis of Assisi, I keep repeating: Make me an instrument of your peace. And like the Little Flower, I would want to praise God in and through all my experiences. I believe in doing small things with great love. May God be praised! Glory be to God, in whom I live, move and have my being.

Mary Therese Raphael

News from Michael Lipman & Kathy Forsberg from South Asia Pure Water Initiative (SAPWII) in Kolar, Karnataka. FOI charity #4.

Dear Friends,

It has been quite some time since we have sent you an update about our clean water efforts in India. A lot has changed in our lives recently, the most important being that we merged our accounting practice with a larger firm in January. Mike's goal is to ease into retirement and have more time for our bio-sand water filter project. Cathy will continue to work, partially for the new firm and also on her own doing some consulting work from an office we created at home.

It has been almost two years since we have traveled to India and we have certainly missed being here. Normally we travel to India during the month of November and sometimes in May or June as well, but we have come here in August to attend the wedding of our Kolar project director's son, Soma.

We spent our first two days in the city of Bangalore. We reconnected with our dear friend and project director, RamaChandra. He was very busy with plans for the upcoming wedding but still managed to spend an entire afternoon with us. Along with RamaChandra, another dear friend Rajendra Rai and our Indian accountant met to create a charitable trust here in India. By creating an Indian trust we will have more project funding options available for accomplishing our clean water mission.

On Monday we traveled to the city of Mysore, which takes four and one half hours by car, two of which were necessary just to get through the bumper to bumper traffic in Bangalore. We are working in Mysore with an NGO (Indian not-for-profit Corporation) called the Pragathi Organization to provide bio-sand water filters to tribal areas outside of the city. The director of this organization, Sharanappa, attended a training session we sponsored in Kolar two years ago and has started to manufacture and distribute the water filters from an orphanage he runs in Mysore. His goal is to distribute 15,000 filters to the poorest of the villagers in this area who do not have access to clean drinking water. That is a herculean task because the villages are remote, have poor roads and a population who need to be educated about the effects of drinking contaminated water. Fortunately he has a dedicated staff that are up to the task.

On Tuesday Sharanappa met us at the hotel at nine o'clock for the 2 1/2 hour drive to the villages. The first half an hour was over good roads with very little traffic. The next two hours was an adventure not easy to forget. If you can imagine potholes big enough for a cow to lay down in you begin to get the picture of a drive that churns your bones into powder. Most of the drive was made not on the road but partly on the road and partly on the side of the road to avoid the potholes. Sometimes we had to leave the road entirely because it was such poor condition. We arrived at the first village still shaking from the trip and glad to get our feet on solid ground.

Along the way the countryside was gorgeous, with farmland beautifully laid out in the wet areas. There were terraces of rice paddy, sugarcane and coconut groves. There were patches of vegetables like tomatoes and beans along with ginger, tapioca and banana groves and mango orchards. In the dryer areas and near the villages the crops were mainly cotton and tobacco. There were also fields of millet and sorghum which are staples grain in this area.

Entering the village was quite an experience. There was a banner that was printed with a greeting personalized with photographs of ourselves and the filters. The protocol is to stop the vehicle just outside the village where we are met by villagers who places garlands of flowers around our necks. The next custom begins with a tray of colored water with flower petals floating in the solution. There is a prayer of greeting and some of the solution is daubed on our foreheads with a fingertip. The water and flowers are then poured out in a line in front of us. We cross the line with our right foot first and officially enter the village in a blessed state.

Then wax lamps are lit on a tray and more prayers are spoken while we gather the smoke with our hands towards our head and heart. We followed a loud procession into the village lead by musicians with horns and drums, followed by dancers and then by young girls in bright saris and sashes carrying silver vessels with coconuts and flowers on their heads. Finally, a long string of firecrackers was lit, the noise deafening and the smoke billowing into the air. Before the required speeches and remarks we were treated to singing and dancing by the young people in the village. What a welcome!

This area of Mysore is primarily forest and jungle, what is known as a tribal area where some of the poorest people in the country can be found. These people originally lived in the forest isolated from the mainstream of Indian society. They lived off the land by picking fruit and hunting for their meals. Their life was very harsh and dangerous since the forest has panthers and tigers as well as bears and wild buffalo, boar and elephants. We passed miles of electrified fence on our way to the villages, meant to keep the elephants in a restricted forest preserve. Life expectancy was very low for these people and contact with more settled Indians was extremely limited.

Thirty years ago Sharanappa began to work with these people to bring a better quality of life to them. After living among them he gained their trust and he coaxed them out of the forest to settle in villages where they could take advantage of a more modern lifestyle. He attended to their medical needs as well as their education. He provided shelter and food to sustain them and built an orphanage in Mysore for the many children who had lost their parents to the disease and accidents in the forest.

Even with all that he has done, these are still poorest people we have come across in India. Even now most of them will have only some black tea in the morning and one small meal of millet in the evening. Some of the villagers had uncombed hair and well-worn clothes and their daily struggle to survive was evident to us in the looks on their faces. I was taken back when Sharanappa said "these people are very nice to talk to, they are very innocent and sweet, they are like God". Suddenly I knew the reason for all of his effort; he has a deep love and respect for these simple people.

After the ceremonial part of the day was over, we walked through the village inspecting the filters and heard the stories of the people's lives. Simple clothes were distributed to the elderly women and widows. One widow we met seemed very young with four children to care for. Sad stories in these villages are common. We visited in the home of a man whose child was attending school in Mysore with Sharanappa. He recently returned to the village for a holiday and the next day he was bitten by a cobra and died. Medical emergencies cannot be attended to promptly in these remote areas and usually result in death.

In one elderly woman's home, as soon as we walked through the door, she spread a mat on the floor and Sharanappa sat down. The woman and a couple of her friends sat and began a conversation. Sharanappa said every time he has come to this village in the past thirty years, he sits with this woman and chats; she expects it and so does he. He is very comfortable and at peace in these very poor villages.

Altogether we visited six villages over the two days in the field. The last village we visited was shocking. People were depressed from a recent death of a child and they had no food for the meal that typically follows an eleven day period of mourning. Pragathi Organization donated a bag of rice, coconuts, garlic and lentils so they could eat during that sad day. Some villagers live in mud huts so small, the water filters had to be placed outside the homes. The roofs are made from sticks and plastic sheeting. A few of the adults and many of the children seemed sick with respiratory infections. It's the rainy season and the huts offer little protection from the elements. There are no sleeping mats, just the hard ground and a wood fire for warmth. Evidence of malnutrition can be seen by the small stature of the people, their thinness and lack of energy in both adults and children.

Our shock and dismay has turned into motivation and determination to help bring clean water to this area of India. Hours of discussion with the staff of Pragathi Organization followed our visit to the villages. We have identified a few critical areas that we will focus on to help improve their bio-sand water filter program. One need is a shelter for the workshop. The filters are made outside in the open air in front of the orphanage. Because of the intense heat in the summer and rain during the monsoon, production stops for three months out of the year.

Another need is transportation for the filters. Trucking companies refuse to take a load of filters to these remote areas because of the distance and terrible roads. Hauling them in the Pragathi SUV a few at a time is very costly and causing the vehicle to sustain unusual wear and tear. We will try to get them a truck to haul forty-five filters along with the filter media at one time.

We have been fortunate for the opportunity to visit this area of India and have been the recipients of the most generous hospitality. When leaving one of the villages we were saying our goodbyes from the open windows of the SUV when an old farmer came to Mike and wanted to hold his hand. They held hands for some time with the farmer's eyes watering with grateful tears. Mike described the farmer as having a hand that was a slab of callous, worn with years of hard labor, but with a heart as tender as a child's.

Cathy & Mike

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FOI proudly helps support the following 6 charities: please check your preference

1. *Sanjeevini Trust in Karnataka... provides medical care, ambulance service, AIDS care, self help*
2. *Forgotten Children in Tamil Nadu... keeping child laborers in school*
3. *Father Fleming Foundation in Orrissa... assistance to leper colonies*
4. *Pure Water Initiative in Karnataka... make & supply house water filter units for the poor*
5. *George's "Lucky Dozen" in Tamil Nadu... sponsorships for college for bright but very poor girls*
6. *Hassan Home of Hope in Karnataka... supports poor orphan girls at boarding school, ages 6-16*

Make check payable to: Friends of India. Mail to George Nepert, FOI treasurer, 34915 Gordy Rd., Laurel, DE 19956. Thank you.

Please fill in: name _____ email address _____

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Comments:

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