

# CFL Newsletter

Issue 4

Winter '97-'98



*Just outside school, about a five minute walk from the gate, you will find what we at CFL fondly call The Stream. It's really a stream for only about three months in a year; the rest of the time it ranges from slushy-muddy-sticky to dry-and-cracked stream bed. You hop from rock to rock, following the meandering stream, and suddenly you're at Turtle Pond, small and enclosed by trees. A brief waterfall rushes past a fig tree whose roots hold tenaciously onto vertical ground. Look up, and you'll see light from the pond reflected on the leaves above. Nearby is Sliding Rock, a huge smooth boulder perfect for sliding down, hands in the air, screaming till you land bottom-first into the mud at its base. Look for lizards sunbathing on the hot stone! From here, any CFL child can point you in the direction of Bat Cave, a twenty-minute trudge for grown-ups, a ten minute dash for the children. And there are many other places to climb, trek, slip, jump, wade, get lost around CFL.*

## The new campus

As we mentioned in our last newsletter, we finally acquired a 12-acre piece of land about 40 km outside Bangalore, for our new campus. Soon after, we discovered that the ground water is minimal in this area. It raised questions of whether we would be able to build a viable community of adults and children on such dry land. But the beauty of the land itself and the surrounding hills was so appealing, that we decided to stay with it and learn about dry land management, water conservation, rain water harvesting.... A few months ago, we discovered a little tract of land adjoining ours which is able to yield sufficient water for our basic requirements. The source is not abundant, and we will still need to conserve rain water to cover all our needs (especially if we want to plant trees, and have vegetable and flower gardens on the land).

The land is triangular in shape, strewn with huge rocks, boulders and trees growing out of the spaces in between. It has over a dozen different levels or terraces, making for a total height difference of about 80 feet from one end of the land to the other. Our architects tell us, and it is plain to see, that the lay of the land is perfect for nestling structures between rocks, and having structures close together yet hidden from each other. Almost every spot on the

land has a unique and beautiful view. To the students who have visited the place, the possibilities of adventure and mischief seem endless! And to the teachers, the thought of creating a community of people, relating with and caring for the land, and experimenting with alternative energy sources, is exciting. We look forward to this phase in CFL's life with great joy.

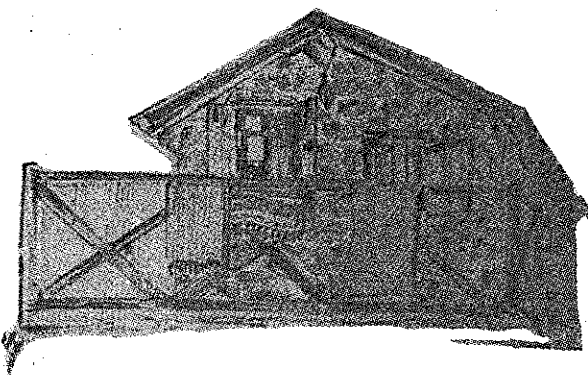
## Students on the new land

The students are already quite involved with the land. The older ones (12 of them) had a one week workshop with the architects. They studied the land in great detail and constructed a contour model of it. They shared their vision of the new campus - to keep built-up space to a minimum, with most of the area left as it is. In September, two of our new post-school students began a detailed study of the naturally occurring plants on the land. Their plan is to create a document that will describe the land from historical and geographical points of view. They have built a thatched hut on the land and are staying there four days a week, speaking with local farmers, visiting the nearby forest, and getting a feel for the place.



### Retreat and Curriculum meetings

In early April, the teachers were invited to hold their annual retreat at the Gurukula Botanical Sanctuary in Wynad. The three-day retreat has been a regular feature of every year at CFL. This time, sitting in a room with large windows overlooking the



rainforested hills, we asked ourselves (again!) why we have come together as a group. Is it to run a very special school? Is it to discover, along with children, whether we can live intelligent and beautiful lives? Is it to bring about a new rhythm, a new kind of day for ourselves and the students?

These and other questions inevitably spilled over into the ten-day curriculum meetings which followed. Here we would like to share with you the gist of two of our more substantial discussions, as well as what we have done during the year to follow through with them.

### The senior students

For over a year, we had wanted to create a special program for the 15-18 year olds. Their academic programme culminates in the very challenging A-level examinations. Society at large is putting pressure on them to 'choose', to decide 'what they want to do' for the rest of their lives. But they're only just beginning to find out what subjects or activities fire their imaginations the most, and to discover the joy of delving deep into something

and understanding it well. The rigour required in their work, the structure needed in their day to help bring this about, can sometimes seem restrictive. They need not to lose that sense of space that one so carefully provides students in the younger classes; now more than ever, they need to have the leisure to think things through, examine themselves, learn about the world they are about to step into. Providing for more unstructured time in their day is only a part of the solution, so we decided to put down, each of us, a wish list of all that we want for our senior students. In

doing so, we were each answering the questions, What is our greatest responsibility to these students? What challenges are they ready to meet and should we, therefore, offer them?

Can they discover in themselves a seriousness, a sensitivity to the sorrow around them...

become vulnerable, open and willing to share of themselves with others... think for themselves, accepting no authority without question...

recognise activities born of the self and experiment with dropping them...

realise that no career, if attached to identity, can be the path to a deeper relationship with the world around... partake of the joy of discovery in a discipline, and develop the stamina to grapple with a difficult subject?

Since early this year, the students have been exposed to what one might call 'non-classroom-based reality'. They have had glimpses of lives in the inner city and surrounding rural areas – interacting with children and adults in inner city schools, orphanages, women's homes, homes for the physically handicapped. The intent of

these interactions was to come in direct contact with situations without the agenda of analysing and reaching for solutions – and, which is sometimes more difficult, without slipping into explanations, excuses or guilt. The interactions raised many questions which were explored in subsequent reflective sessions. When school reopened, some students had a once-weekly class in a nearby government school, others met with women in the village, and two others met and worked with a local farmer.

### The Arts

Also during the curriculum meetings, several questions regarding the importance of art at CFL were raised. In our junior school, art integrates well with other activities, but in the middle school years it often recedes into the background. There is no sustained curriculum for it, and this is generally true in schools these days. But does art represent our only opportunity to be creative? One can be creative in other academic subjects, and also in the art of living itself. It is something rarely recognised in society today, and we would like to explore creativity in relationship, in living, with our students. Nevertheless, art, music and dance offer different modes of functioning of body and brain, and are valuable in themselves. All our groups of students, therefore, have participated in various art forms during



the year. Lalita from the junior school took a year off to devote time to doing and teaching pottery. Our pottery shed has moved to a larger thatch and is bursting at the seams with beautifully crafted pieces. We invited professionals to teach 6-week workshops on painting, batik cloth dyeing, and dance. The seniors presented Tom Stoppard's "If You're Glad, I'll be Frank" at the KFI Drama Festival at Madras. Singing in many languages is, as always, taught at the beginning of each day to the whole school. For a month, we practised Christmas songs for the season. We formed a unique choir indeed - 75 singers aged 5 to 60 - soprano, alto, tenor, bass and off-key all in one!

#### Excursion month

October was spent travelling and exploring different parts of India. The youngest went to Goa and Karwar, and more than anything else perhaps, learned about roughing it away from home, and being independent! One group went to Rajasthan, another to a beautiful part of coastal Karnataka. The middle school trekked in the foothills of the Himalayas, as did the seniors. Both groups prepared intensively for their treks for a month - exercising daily, carrying heavy backpacks and walking 15 km. They faced some challenging moments during their treks - mountain sickness, snow blindness and extreme cold. Another group spent time in Anandwan and Hemalkasa, visiting a leprosy centre, a rural hospital and a shelter for orphaned wild animals. They spent a week in the Narmada Valley staying with the Bhilala people. What strikes us the most is the way many students 'grow up' so suddenly on these trips, feeling responsible for themselves and each other, showing tremendous physical and psychological fitness in the face of



considerable hardship. For many, relationships with peers and adults deepen and change completely. These are only some of the reasons we place such importance on these trips.

#### Comings and Goings

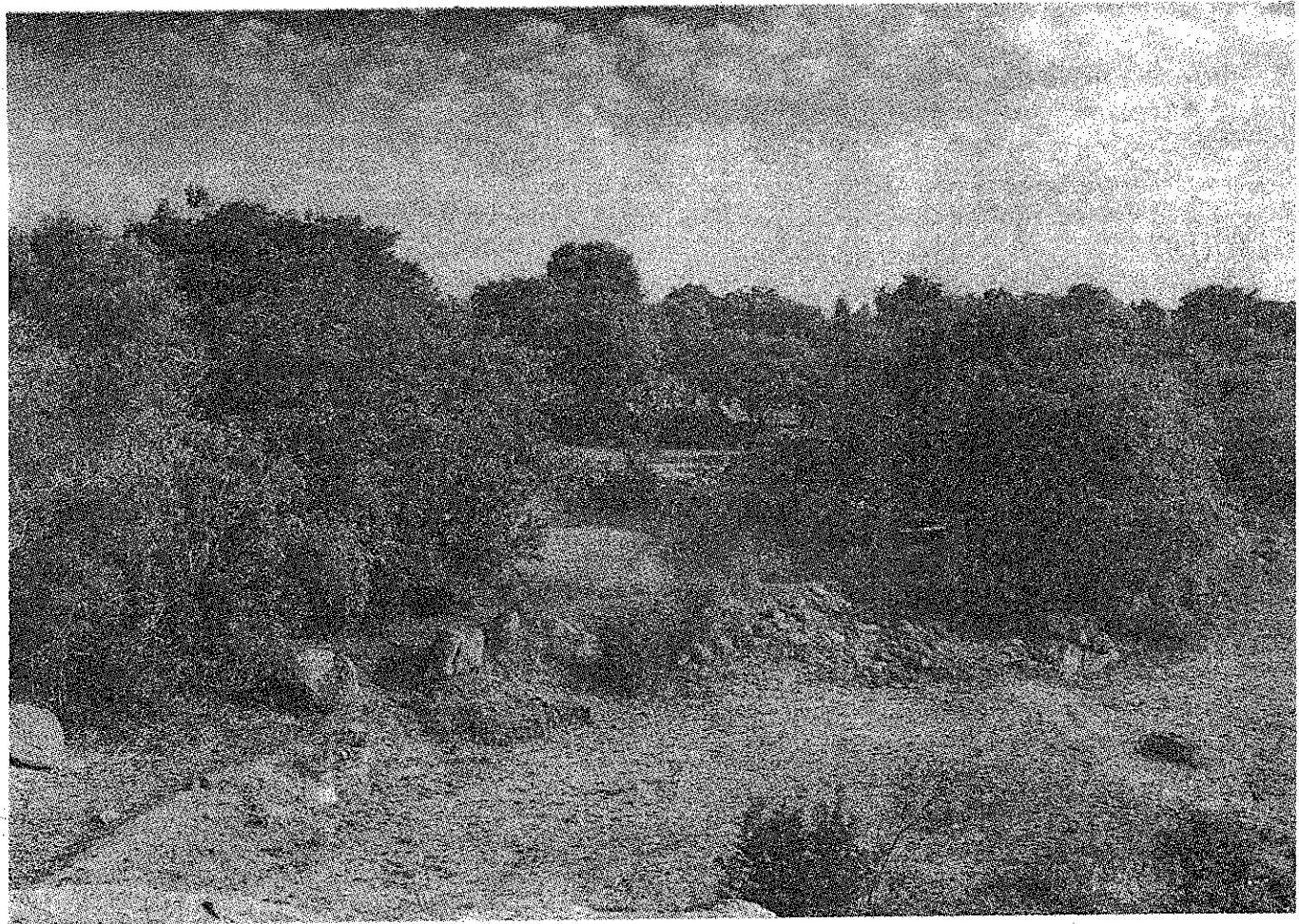
Seven of our senior students completed their A-level examinations by June this year - three have left to join colleges, and four have joined the CFL Post School Programme. Sandy has an abiding interest in land issues, agriculture, gardening, and conservation - besides art and pottery. He is working on creating a document on the new land, a case study of sorts, and is learning about botanical sketching. York, with similar interests, is also working on the land document. He spends the rest of his time learning the art of cookery, with the third student Nikhil. Both are taking lessons in traditional South Indian cuisine, as well as gourmet North Indian food. Nikhil is also doing an in-depth project on ants under the guidance of faculty from the Indian Institute of Science. The latest entrant into the programme is Swati, who is learning dance, music, languages, and will register for a degree in English Literature from the Open University in India. Venkatesh

spent a few months in Europe this year. He especially treasured the time spent in Holland with our good friend Maryan Klomp, who visited CFL this November with her friend Agna.

We have five new children this year in the younger classes. A few new faces among the adults, too: Malathi, from Vikasana in Bangalore, comes in once a week to teach Kannada. Karuna has joined us as a member of the staff. She is a great Hindi teacher, and directs the younger students in Hindi plays. And Kirby Humunuik from Canada wrote to us this year, expressing a deep interest in education and the fundamental issues of life - she will spend the next three months at CFL sharing in the dialogue.

*December 22nd, a starry sky and a bonfire. Students, teachers, parents and friends are singing Silent Night, at the end of another cultural programme at CFL. We are lighting each other's candles, and the children look like angels in the candlelight! Will this be our last Christmas at Shibumi, this beautiful farm? It will depend on how work progresses over the next few months on the new campus. Our hope is that many of us can move there by June '99 at the latest. Meanwhile, we hope you will visit us in the coming year - you can check out Sliding Rock, if you like!*





Sketches are from the October trips and of the new land, by the students and teachers.

Page 1: Bastar art from Madhya Pradesh  
Trees and rocks on the new land

Page 2: House in Munsiri, Himalayas  
A mule in Rairgadi

Page 3: Deserted cottages in Burfu, Himalayas  
On the banks of the Narmada

Photograph of the new land – by Jeeth Iype.

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