

CFL Newsletter

Issue 7

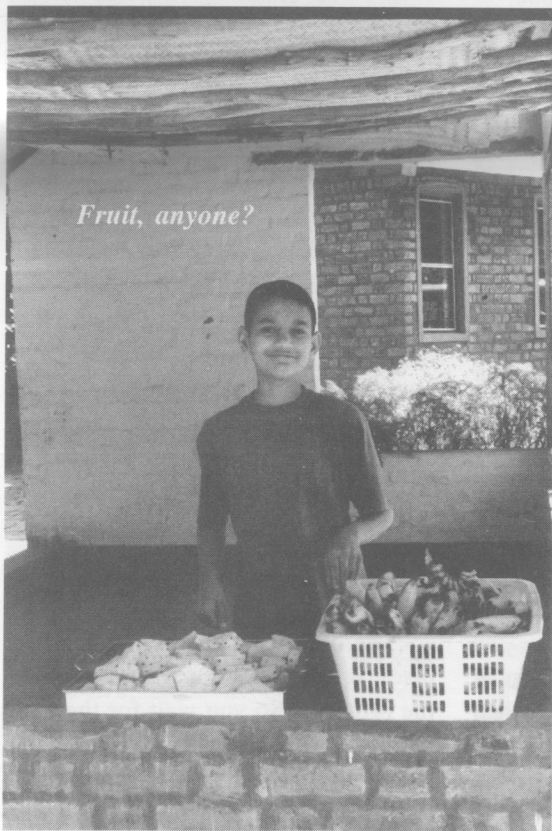
Winter '00 – '01

Two thousand bully ants, two thousand falling leaves, two thousand stars at night, two thousand marigolds, two thousand croaking frogs, two thousand steps from here to there, two thousand tiles on the roof, two thousand bricks in the wall, two thousand meals every two weeks. What a year it's been!

In this newsletter, many of the CFL teachers share stories about the past year in our new home. We hope you enjoy reading it.

First Term at Varadenahalli

And then there was one. One hostel, that is. So we all trooped in.



The Palashas were off in Wynad, so the juniors and the rest of us slept wherever we could, common room, terrace, junior school, dining area. The kitchen had to fine-tune its calculations. Sometimes there was too much and sometimes too little. Then there was a scramble to make more. But the library – ah, the library, where has there been such a library. Everyone religiously went up to the tower and queued up to ring the bell. If it pealed too frequently we just ignored it and went on with the schedule. There were vast amounts of leisure to climb trees and rocks. And then there were two. Two

hostels, that is. The

Palashas returned and moved into the junior school. Now we also slept in the common room of the second hostel. Great agitation about the names of the hostels. Finally we agreed on Aria and Kriti. Suddenly there was much more place. Adults began to get places to keep their things and had mattresses to themselves. The kitchen gauged our hunger much better, and we settled down to study and play endless games of cricket and tops. There was no games field. And then there were three. You should know what I mean. What did it matter that we moved in before the floors were quite ready? What did it matter that we had to wade



through pools of water meant to set the floor? The adults had entire rooms to themselves. And the bell had become sober.

Kabir

The story of our first term here would be incomplete if we did not mention the presence of three energetic young people, our very own old students, who had watched our preparations for moving with much trepidation. "However will these teachers of ours manage? Do they realise the enormity of the task they've taken on?! We'd better spend the first term in Varadenahalli helping them..." So that's how Amol, Sandy and Venkatesh came to be here for three months, helping out in the kitchen, land work, library, taking games, exercise and assemblies. When they were confident we could handle the idlies and dosas by ourselves, they left.



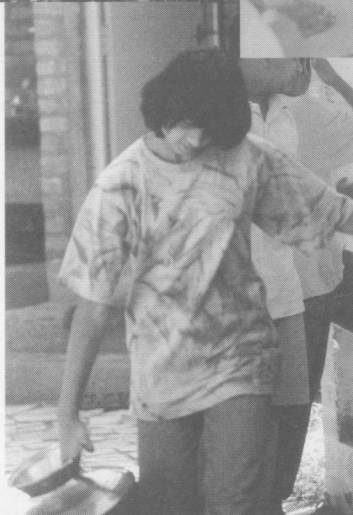
Memories of our first year on campus will always include bricks, tiles, cement, carpenters, painters, welders and red oxide stains...as one person whose every waking (and dreaming!) moment has been filled with these and related crucial matters will tell us.

Construction Update

Finally we seem to have reached the end of major construction activity at CFL. It has taken us two and a half years to reach this stage, with plenty of ups and downs and learning along the way. We've tried innovative ideas and experimented with different materials, and can now say that our twenty acre campus has the following completed buildings being occupied and utilised: kitchen and dining areas, library, junior school, laboratories (computer, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology), three hostels (Aria, Kriti, Tarana), staff quarters and a pottery and craft complex. The work under progress, hopefully completed by the time you are reading this, is the Assembly hall, fourth hostel, and a sports storage and table tennis room. Near the entrance to the land, we have purchased one acre made into a games field, where the students have a large space to play and exercise.

We would like to say again how grateful we are to our many donors, thanks to whom we have raised all the money required to complete construction. We acknowledge here a substantial contribution from Mr. Berjis Desai. It has been very encouraging to have the support of so many people around the world.

Ashok



Right from the start, the CFL kitchen has been something unique and different. Run by Kanti, a parent volunteer who joined the staff in January, it's one of the happenin' places on campus. Sruti, a post school student at CFL, worked alongside Kanti and Kamala Subramaniam during the first term, making the place vibrant, exciting – and most important, the source of all good food. Since then, many volunteers have contributed their valuable time to help keep the unique atmosphere of our kitchen alive. Anju, Arati, Sumithra, Krupa, Krishnamurthy, Ranjana, Kavya, Lalita and many others...from the bottom of our grateful stomachs, thank you!

Recipe for a CFL Kitchen

You first get Jeeth and his team of architects to finalise the blueprint, then Venu and Ashok get the building started on the ground. Next British Aerospace gets things going, and the



gleaming steam cooking steel vessels are in place. Then you extrapolate from your home kitchen meant to cook for four, to a CFL family of 80. You don't need to be a good cook to dish out good food...you only need ensure that the kids' parents are! So you find a number of cooks to spoil the broth, and you find that cooking, like any other activity, is about relating. Relating to people, relating to the place, relating to the salt and spices, and relating to the subtle and not-so-subtle hints if either of them ain't right!

The only item at this point not in place, is a bunch of guinea pigs to taste the broth. So you wait for the CFL van every Monday to off-load it's cargo of spoilt kids from downtown. If they don't like the broth, you can



always fire *ragi* balls at 'em with a fiery sauce to ease those cannon balls down their gullets! To ensure you don't have a revolt on your campus, you slip in a *payasam* or a custard once in a while.

Somewhere along the way, you learn that 'the thinker is the thought' translates in the kitchen to 'the eater is the eaten'. So if you find the food nice, that's because you are so, and if you find it isn't nice....well, you know why. And while learning all this and more, one also learns how to cook!

Kanti

Part of the reason the kitchen has been so successful is that the work is done by students and teachers – cleaning, peeling, cutting, grating, blending, and washing up. Even guests are roped in. In other areas around the campus as well, we are sharing the work among ourselves. It takes about an hour each morning, and

every room is dusted, swept, mopped, bathrooms cleaned by children and adults from 6 to 60 years. Care of the land and growing things on a modest scale are also taking place.

Working on the Land

In our first term, Sandy spearheaded several land-based projects, some of which continued through the year. With staff, children and other helpers working together, bunds were built to help recharge groundwater. Areas near the kitchen and library were landscaped beautifully. Many trees have been planted including small orchards of mango, guava, papaya, coconut, drumstick, etc. Kitchen gardens are being developed, providing us with some organically grown vegetables. There is scope for research and experimentation in the area of organic pest and disease control. Further tree planting will proceed slowly, as we try to understand the subtleties of the land.

A considerable portion of the land is being put aside as a 'sanctuary', for flora and fauna indigenous to this area. This idea has been with us for a long time. We have left about four acres at the northern end of the land untouched, to provide a refuge for the birds, reptiles and small mammals displaced by our building activities. A group of us started ambitiously and enthusiastically digging a bund for a huge water body. The rains were copious this year, and regularly washed away our carefully constructed bunds. After a few weeks of this Sisyphean task, we realised that the pond would be no more than a centimetre deep given our Bangalore rains! So we contented ourselves with digging a much smaller pond. After the rains have ended, we have a pond full of little fish, water insects and algae – a tiny, thriving ecosystem.

Attempts to grow vegetables on the new campus have produced rather limited results so far. There are many reasons - pests and diseases, severe soil infertility, and even theft of some crops. However, apart from these more or less natural disasters, there are the frustrations of hose pipes with more leaks than pipes, and frequent unavailability of tools and materials, which indicate that cultivation of the land needs more care and attention than it receives now. There is a lot for all of us to learn in this area, and we see it happening gradually over the next few years.

Clive and Yasmin

The Junior School

We wanted an open yet private space for the groups, and we got two of these. The library with the grilled glass door is at a lower level. Above that, we now have a thatch. Most refreshing place for meetings with the children. The squirrels find it refreshing too. Around the junior school there are nooks where there is potential for interesting things. The rocks around have become regular 'hangouts' for the little ones who play. Outside the back door there are ropes and tires to swing on that keep the little muscles working. The entrance now has flowers growing in profusion.

There is no dearth of places for the children to explore. Rocks and trees and walls to climb. Streams swollen after the monsoon to swim and play in. The slide to slide down and climb up (that causes minor accidents sometimes). The courtyard that was cleaned up, filled with small stones and later cleaned up again. Running round and chasing one another, up the steps, run, down the slide, run, escape outside. Climb up the wall and enter the school from the roof. Swing and slide. Dance, sing, cry, laugh, hide....

Radhika

To minimise commuting pressures, our younger students who are not fully residential, have been staying on campus two nights a week. For the most part this has worked well. They are a precious part of the residential community at Varadenahalli, and despite the grey hairs this poem mentions, we wouldn't have had it any other way.

Poem: To the Little Ones

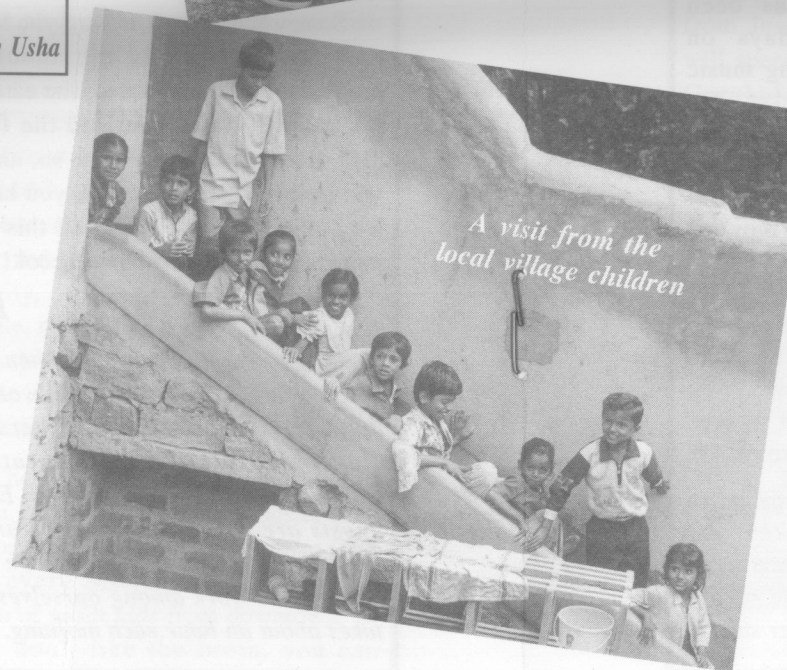
Two nights a week the Saralas stay
Each week our hair turns deeper gray.
Evenings at 5 they come for a bath
And make us follow their zig-zag path.
"Aunty, I can't find my shirt.
Aunty, look! I have a hurt.
I can't find my soap box, Aunty.
My mother hasn't packed my panty."
Water is not so hot today
So hurry in and out, we say.
Splish splash – fresh but wet
Now off to the kitchen their milk to get.
Seven thirty is their time for bed
You find them rolling and jumping instead.
Brishti has her pills to take
Aman and Avani their bed to make.
Into her bed Siri crawls
But the whispering continues under her shawls.
Shruthi is yet to sleep over
But around the group she likes to hover.
Anirudh still misses his home
And Narahari continues to roam.
Next to the wall is Abhimanyu's bed
Now everyone wants a story read.
Usha has really spoilt them rotten
So Karuna has to remember stories forgotten.
One by one they cease their mirth
And drop into sleep like stars on the earth.
Our tale is only half done
For the night chorus is still to come –
Day break. Children wake.
No more fears, no more tears
It's a new day. They are ready for play.

Karuna. Translated from Hindi by Usha

Our annual curriculum meetings this year focussed on the academic programme at CFL right from 6 to 18 year olds. As a result of our discussions, this year our energies are being given to working specifically on the academic curricula at all ages, as described in the following section.

Curriculum Review

Any school that is seriously concerned with a totally different education faces the challenge of creating an appropriate academic



curriculum. The questions that confront its educators are:

- given the fact that students need to acquire competence in various fields of knowledge to function in the present day world, what is the intelligent way of imparting this knowledge?
- if students need certification to earn a livelihood, what is the most appropriate exam?
- how does one ensure that children perform to their potential in the exam without resorting to frequent tests, comparison and competition?
- how much time in a day should a child spend on academics?

Faced with the fact that we did not have satisfactory answers to the above questions, we at CFL are overhauling our academic curriculum. In all areas of academics we are beginning by clearly defining the minimal core skills that we feel that each child should achieve. After that we will look for suitable material that imparts not only the minimal skills but also gives a flavor of the various disciplines, and a feel of why some people spend all their lives studying these. Drill work to reinforce concepts will be prepared and where necessary remedial work carried out. For the capable child we will provide exposure to material that will challenge and push. We hope at the end of this exercise to be able to assure parents that each child has achieved academic competence, and if not, explain why.

Moreover, we are hoping after this to get on with the most important work of the school – discover if the self can come to an end. Wish us all the best!

Shashidhar



Devoting the year to academic issues like this doesn't mean the students are doing any more of it than usual! In fact, the day at Varadenahalli has been planned to allow us to complete all academic contact hours by lunchtime, leaving the rest of the day for leisure, various activities, games, and homework. So this year we have also been learning tie-and-dye with Ranjana, art with Mei Lang, 'cubbing' with Lincoln, carpentry, embroidery, dress-making, drama, dog-care, folk dancing, laboratory activities, a little cooking, and pottery.



Celebrations

This has been the tenth anniversary of CFL's existence, and boy, have we celebrated. Plays, concerts, feasts...

The big hit of the season was a play put up by the teachers, an adaptation of a Leacock story set in Victorian England. It had everything – helpless heroine, stern lawyer, dashing but depraved villain, handsome hero, masked men with pistols, even a landlady...and plenty of action. Surely, Leacock would have loved our version. And we only rehearsed three days. A few weeks later, CFL put up Shaw's *Androcles and the Lion* with a vertical group of students. This was rehearsed

for three months! The stage, setting, costumes and of course the children's wholehearted performance made it an evening to remember.

Also in August was an extremely moving Dhrupad rudraveena performance by Bahauddin Dagar. For the past two years, Bahauddin has been teaching several of our teachers vocal Dhrupad music, visiting Bangalore and CFL for this purpose every month. In October, CFL collaborated with the Ustad Ziauddin Dagar Memorial Trust to organise a two-day Dhrupad festival in Bangalore.

Our winter term ended with an energetic performance of song, dance and kalaripayattu by children from Kanavu, a tribal school in Wynad, Kerala. We felt fortunate to have them here with us, and wait to host them again some day.

Kamala



October brought us the excitement of trips all over India. From the youngest to the oldest, from two days to three weeks, from beaches to rainforests, from bus drivers to basket weavers, travelling by road, rail and boat, we enjoyed October.

The Tamalas, a group of six of our 10 to 12 year olds, had a bonus trip in December. They went on a coastal trek along with seven children from Vikasana, a rural school in Bangalore that CFL has been associated with for several years. The thirteen children were kind enough to take four adults along with them to carry all the stuff.

December is usually the month for visitors from the West. We were happy to receive all of them and show them around the new campus. Of course, we've had a steady stream of visitors all year, adding as always to the flavour of life at CFL.

Comings and Goings

One of the pleasantest things that has happened with the move in January 2000 is the hospitality and accomodation (still somewhat bare and minimal) we can offer several friends. Arun Kumar, the librarian at Sahyadri School in Pune, spent a month at CFL observing how the library functions. Bahauddin Dagar, who saw that half his students moved to Varadenahalli, followed happily. He has been spending two to three days on campus every month teaching music and occasionally playing cricket. Dr. Bagchi, a parent and mathematician, helped us run a post school mathematics seminar. Diba Siddiqi moved to Wynad for a few months. Later in the year she was back in Bangalore and CFL. She continues her interaction with both places. And of course, our last guest at Shibumi was Devi Roebers from Holland, who came in November 1999 and worked with the juniors on art and expression.

New staff – Kanti Jain, a parent of the school who has always been very involved and supportive, joined us in January and is the backbone of our kitchen. K. Srinivasan, a former student

A view of the campus



of The Valley School, has joined as Physics and Math teacher after a Ph.D. in Physics. Sangeetha Raj is teaching English and Social Studies in the middle school. Clive Elwell works primarily in the junior school, along with working on the land. Ashok Biradar took time off from a hectic schedule of supervising construction work to get married in April. His wife, Kavya helps in the kitchen and in the junior school teaching Kannada. She is hoping to brush up her English watching Jeremy Brett play Sherlock Holmes! Shashi Rao continues to teach the economics course for senior A-level students. Finally, what is one to say about Lorenzo Castellari, friend, well-wisher, our very own rolling stone who 'cannot', 'will not', 'perhaps', 'maybe' – stay with us? He was here from June to October (a record) and will spend the next few months at the Gurukula Botanical Sanctuary in Wynad.

Viju



A Post School Update

Among the many dreams that turned into reality with our move was that of a post school presence at Varadenahalli. We have always valued and welcomed the contributions made by these young adults who form a vital link in the chain of teacher-student relationships. To catch you up with their programmes: Sruti and Minti are pursuing an undergraduate degree in Geography as external candidates from the London University. Anu won a prestigious national fellowship awarded by the Govt. of India attracting students to research in science. He is doing his degree in Physics from the Indira Gandhi National Open University. Aditi's degree in Mathematics from the same institution is nearing completion, and Swati continues her programme in English Literature from there as well. Nandini spent some months in Europe thanks to Maryan's hospitality, as so many others have before her.

When Aditi and Minti offered to teach folk dancing to the students, no one imagined what a big success it would be. Girls and boys who heretofore had been wooden and stilted, blossomed overnight into polished dancers. Taps to mend? Doorstoppers, nails on walls, racks to make you happy? Just ask and you

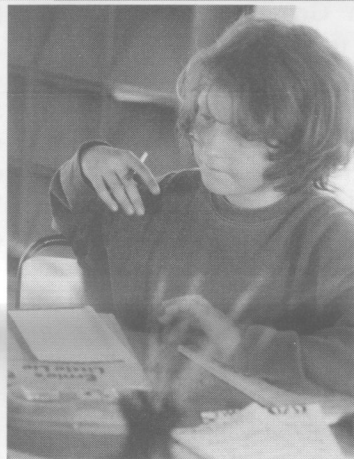
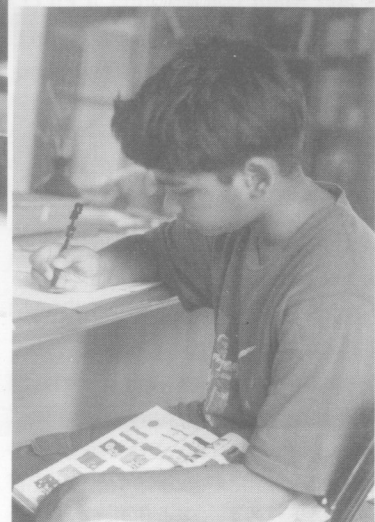
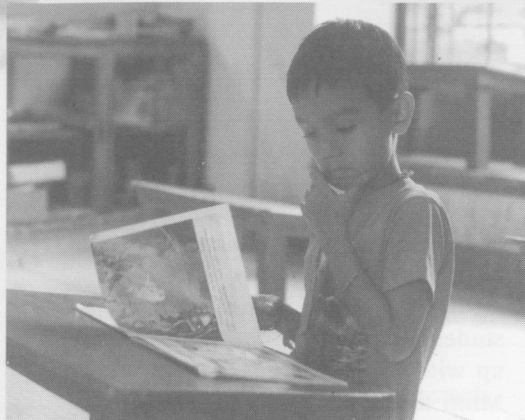
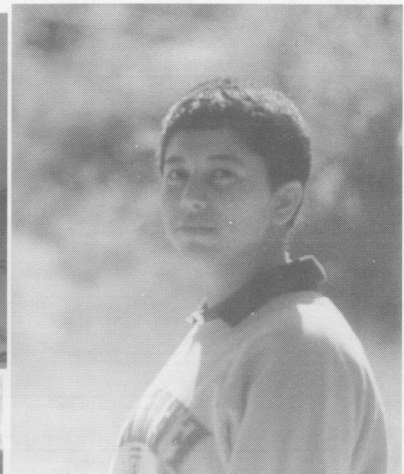
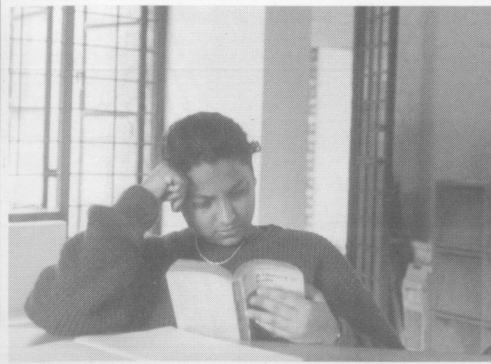
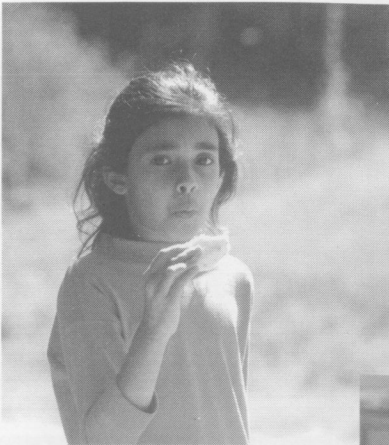
could get it done by the fix-it-up-chappies. Anu and Arun Inc. always left behind satisfied clients, and also a few tools! Anu took on carpentry with great gusto, and students were sawing and planing and whittling away. Gaining strength from Sruti's cool competence, the Post Schoolies took on breakfasts, baking and once a week made *chapatis* for dinner.

Next term, each will be off to seek his or her fortune in a different way. Aditi will apprentice in the editing section of Tulika Publishers in Chennai. Sruti and Minti have been taken on as research assistants with Suprabha at GBS, Wynad. Anu too will be at Wynad for a similar programme to the one conducted last year. Swati is getting in step for a solo dance performance. Arun is apprenticing in his father's factory.

Usha

"Even though the village had awakened there was still the stillness of the night. It was a peculiar stillness. It was not the absence of noise. It was not that the mind brought about the stillness or conceived it out of its own endless chattering. It was a stillness that came without asking, without any cause. And the hills, the trees, the people, the monkeys, the crows which were calling, were all in it. And it would go on untill the evening. Only man was not aware of it. It would be there again when the night came, and the rocks would know it... and the lizard between the rocks."

J. Krishnamurti



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newsletter

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