



Parent teacher meetings

CFL has always perceived itself as a cooperative venture between adults (parents and teachers) with common questions and concerns, looking at the problems of life in an investigative and skeptical spirit. All the participants in this process create and maintain the ethos and ambience of the school. We are, therefore, very far from being a service provided by professionals to a group of consumers who can take what they like and lobby to change the rest. Since we are all in the same boat, it is incumbent on us, parents and teachers alike, to take as much care and responsibility as possible in order to make this venture a meaningful one.

One of the important vehicles for a fresh, imaginative and (importantly) ongoing recreation and revision of the community is the monthly meeting with parents and teachers. We meet on the last Sunday of the month, about nine times a year for a morning, in order to bring up questions that concern us, sometimes obsess us. We enjoy bouncing these questions

off other concerned and interested individuals, to see different viewpoints, observe our own reactions and emotions and find out whether we can ultimately think together regarding the pressing problems facing us and our children today.

The themes we consider are broad ones. Our own lifestyles and life choices is a theme that has often cropped up. Given the atmosphere of unbridled consumption that reigns, what is a responsible lifestyle, one that is compatible with caring for the earth and its resources? Children watch us and learn their codes of material life from us. What are responsible messages to be giving them?

Another important preoccupation is the media and its ability to suck up all our energy and attention. The media—tv, computers, games, a whole spectrum of virtual reality competing for our attention—provides both adults and children with powerful social messages. How can we process these, critique these, in meaningful ways? Are children losing their ability to connect with the “real” world in the face of conveniently packaged

virtual ones? Are we as adults complicit in this process?

Adolescent sexuality and its expression in the context of a semi-residential campus is a major question we discuss frequently. Given the fact that this is such a new and strong force in the lives of young adults, what are responsible and creative responses to it? How can we effectively engage our children in dialogue on this most private yet significant force in their lives?

Perhaps the broadest (and, in the context of the intent of the school, the most important) set of questions we engage with have to do, of course, with learning about ourselves, our emotional imperatives and conditioning, and whether an approach to living is possible that does not succumb to the restless itch of our consciousnesses. What do emotional balance and stability mean? Various contemplative traditions and individuals, including Krishnamurti, have pointed to the possibility of going beyond the conflicts and privations of individual selfhood to a more holistic understanding of our private emotional life on the one hand and the relationship between self and society on the other. A lot of our questioning involves bringing this perspective to bear on the contours of everyday life.

One major aim of the Sunday meetings is to encourage a sense of communication at the same time as fostering an atmosphere of creation. To this end we employ variety of formats:

large group meetings, small group meetings, presentations by parents and teachers on a wide variety of themes. We have also thought of having multi-lingual meetings to facilitate participation. Hopefully all our tinkering with formats does indeed bring about a greater sense of cohesion within a larger group. However, it is our firm conviction that it is only a burning sense of interest in these large questions that can bring a group like this together in meaningful ways.

Our greatest challenges have been those of any group attempting to think together: to maintain threads of meaning, to pursue questions doggedly without getting sidetracked by anecdotal “evidence,” to be detached and critical about ourselves and the worlds we participate in. Obviously there is no final destination of clarity that we hope to reach once and for all. At the same time, we hope, the journey itself has been infused with enough meaning, energy and sparkle to make it an ongoing and very real process for each and every one of us.



Music in our lives

Musicophilia, says psychologist Oliver Sacks, is a human propensity to music that “shows itself in infancy, is manifest and central in every culture, and probably goes back to the very beginnings of our species.” In addition to our ability to appreciate or understand structures in music, we all have strong emotional responses to some forms of music. At CFL we recognise that both these capacities of

the brain are almost universal, and thus our approach to music is very inclusive: the choir is the whole school.

One regular musical experience is the Assembly, a thirty minute start to each day. We sing together from a collection of folk songs and chants in several Indian languages including English. Our pitch is held in place by a snappy electronic tanpura. The singing has been usually energetic (more so this past year), and even on Monday mornings we can sound fairly cheerful, if not actually joyful. Everyone plays a role: older students sing with brilliance and gusto, middle schoolers decorously move their lips, and the youngest ones yell enthusiastically. There are some lovely melodies, but many of our songs also have beautiful and profound lyrics, written by poet-philosophers of centuries ago. For example, we sing a composition of Basava’s, *kalla naagara kandare*, which questions the futility of rituals (in this case snake idol worship) when there is no

corresponding compassion in everyday life (killing snakes as a matter of course). We sing our songs and chants in a decidedly secular spirit, even though many of the same pieces may be sung with great devotional fervour by others around the world. For us, the energy and beauty of the singing comes from somewhere else more basic: perhaps it is simply a celebration of our musicophilia.

From time to time, we are fortunate to have visits from senior and accomplished musicians, classically trained, who hold workshops or give performances at school. The entire school basks in the glow of their superb music. This year, for example, Sri Pushparaj Koshti and Sri Bahauddin Dagar played a Dhrupad *jugalbandi* of *surbahar* and *rudraveena*, accompanied by Sanjay Agle on the *pakhawaj*. Later in the year, Carnatic vocalist T M Krishna and his wife Sangeetha Shrivakumar held a day and a half workshop at CFL. Along with accompanists Am-



Dance

Dance has become, over the past year, a continuous and energetic aspect of our lives at CFL, after a gap of some years.

Traditionally, dance is taught “seriously,” in a top down kind of approach, the intent being to transmit a particular aesthetic with all its rigour. However, Shabari, who is teaching dance for the juniors and middle schoolers, has a different approach, which is to engage all the learners and encourage them to interpret movement, rhythm and narrative in their own way. While a more serious training is appropriate for talented and motivated children, a more interpretive approach has the appeal that it attracts each child at her own level—and his own level as well!

Dance will continue next year too, but more closely tied in with social science and science curricula. Anything is possible!

ritha Murali on the violin and Manoj Siva on the *mridangam*, they interacted with all the age groups in school, discussing and demonstrating various concepts in Indian classical music. Their inexhaustible energy had to be seen to be believed! Not surprisingly, students respond well to such passion, generosity and humility. Time and again, we have found that young people can and do appreciate excellence and virtuosity in classical music, in spite of the fact that their private favourites range from Bollywood to heavy metal.

And this is in fact the third strand of music that is a part of our lives at school, the so-called ‘popular’ genre. This is played (sometimes blasted) from small music systems in our senior hostels at certain agreed upon times during the day. Students tell us that they have an intense and special relationship with these songs, and this is apparent in the way they respond to the music. It seems to energise them, wipe out their cares, blot out their

anxieties...meanwhile in many of the adults who share the same living space, the same music can evoke quite different emotions. We may feel like tearing our hair out, or throwing things around (remember, this is siesta time for teachers!). Naturally, this situation has the potential to bring the two generations in conflict with each other, so we often talk about it together. CFL is all about questioning strong positions, and here is an area that offers great potential for learning and insight. Many questions arise in our discussions, none of them with easy answers. For example, is ‘quality’ in music an objective standard? When we understand the lyrics of a song that we love to listen to over and over again, do those lyrics condition us and convince us of certain world views? How do adults enter into the musical world of the adolescent to challenge and be challenged, not merely expressing dismay or disapproval?

It is interesting that music spon-

taneously becomes an integral part of every CFL excursion, no matter the age of the group travelling. Nowadays, of course, music is a part of almost everyone’s daily life, through wires and tiny earphones straight into the ear. On our trips, however, we do not carry electronic music systems, and this can represent serious deprivation for a young person these days! However, the rule is adhered to with admirable good humour and acceptance...and in any case, within a few hours, the singing begins. We burst forth into Assembly songs and other favourites as well. Since we know many songs in local languages, we can often pull out an appropriate one, much to the appreciation of our hosts (who are too kind to correct our pronunciation).

Our school magazine

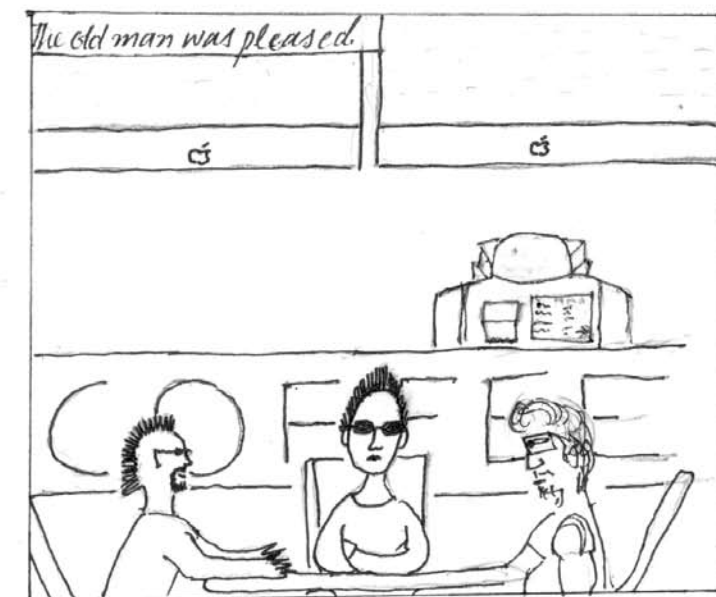
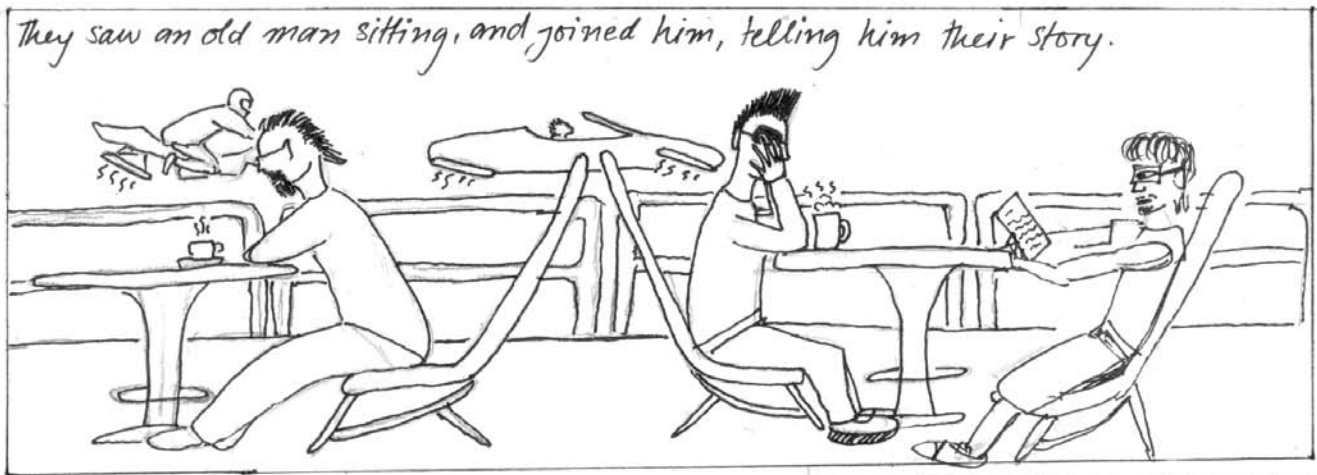
The school magazine comes out once every two years, and is taken on by a senior group each time. Our policy is that everyone—everyone—must contribute to it! This policy can quickly turn the joys of article writing, submission and collection into nightmares. But the end product is usually worth it. So we generously forgive and forget the hard times, plunging into magazine work once again. As we did this year. The group in charge decided to make the theme of the magazine 'graphic novels'. We have some very beautiful graphic novels in our library. Students have enjoyed and appreciated these, in quite a different way than they enjoy their comic books. So we set out to understand the distinction between comics, cartoons and graphic novels, and then set about creating our own 'graphic magazine'. It contains short graphic tales, illustrated songs, graphic messages on environmental awareness, and photographic journals.

The Ketakis (13 to 14 years old) worked together on a futuristic story of two young men in the (treeless) hi-tech

year 2200 AD, who stumble upon a digital camera from our times. The pictures reveal a world they no longer recognise, but fortuitously, the camera pouch contains some strange small objects—seeds! The rest of the tale, we think, you can guess. Here are two panels from their story.

The Magadi project

"Look what I've found!" exclaims Shifa. The rest of us have been exploring various nooks, corners and bas relief sculptures (*uppa chitragalus*) in Kallur temple, a much frequented site for all CFL folk. We come running to the lower outer panel of a wall where Shifa is crouched. To our surprise and excitement, we gaze at inscriptions. "Old Kannada (*Hale Kannada*)," announces Kavya. The next week we return equipped with brushes to wipe off dust from the inscriptions and newsprint to try and make some rubbings. An elder in the village informs us that the inscriptions contain Veera Ballala's name, a Hoysala king. What does this mean, we ask ourselves. That the temple



Our times were very different. At our time the world was facing problems. Global warming was on its way! My grandfather was a famous politician named Anirudh Kaja - He's in your history textbooks right? Ya . . . He must have been your age in 2008.



was built in his time? That the temple was built after his reign and he is mentioned in some context? That he made a donation to the temple? The inscription project could take us through much of the term!

Our approach of interacting with places and people to learn about the life of a time and of the present ran through the “Magadi” project. Magadi is a prominent town ten kilometres from the school. The wider region harbours numerous villages, a sprinkling of temples, mosques and two churches, elephantine Savandurga which has been the outpost of more than one army and home to a few shrines. In the space of our twelve weeks we visited and engaged with people at Kallur, Ranganathswamy and Someshwara temples and Agalakote village which has a two hundred year-old mosque that dates to Tipu Sultan’s time. Children wandered, sketched, discussed, wrote. We did some adapted readings on the connections between the temple and the village and two readings in South Indian history. We learned about prominent kingdoms and made a timeline that extended

from the Chola presence to Tipu Sultan’s time. During the last two weeks of the course, we worked on a presentation. This involved revising material that the children had encountered and organising it into a lively dialogue-like format.

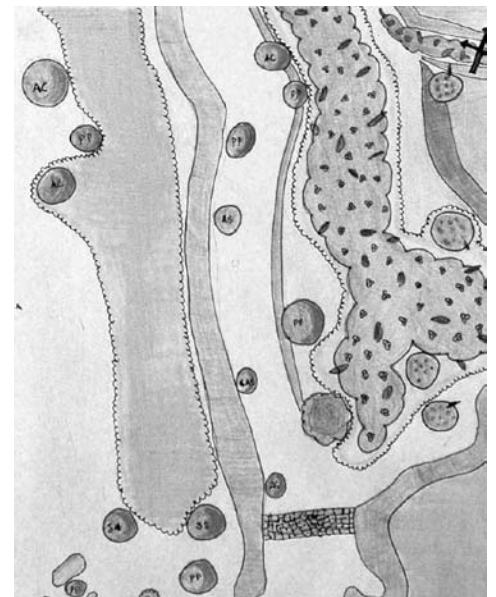
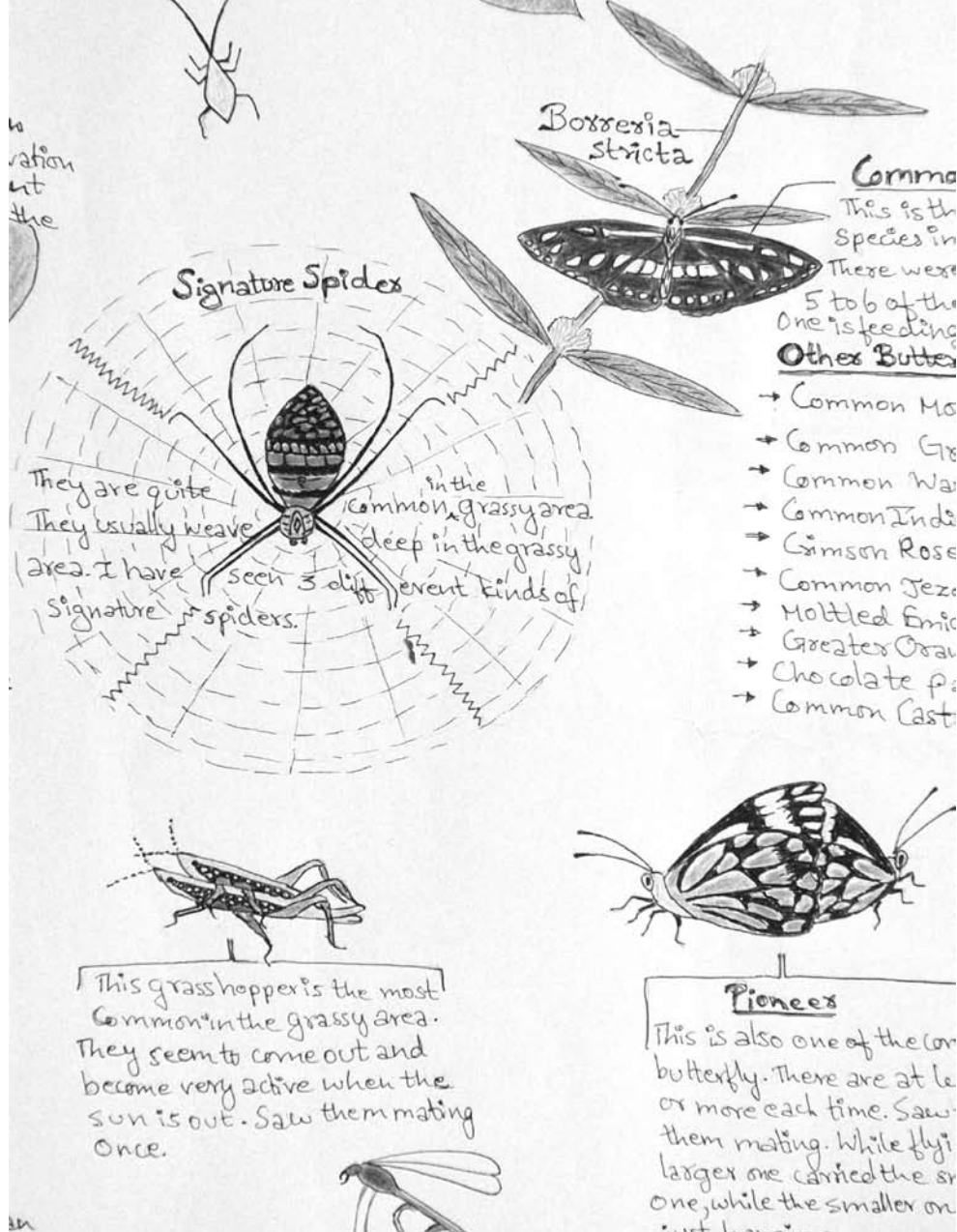


Nature Study and Land Work

CFL has been a residential school for just over half its life now. In the years before we moved to the Varadenahalli campus, we were a day school in the city, moving from site to site, adapting to our surroundings and using them as educational resources as far as possible.

Yet through all our perambulations, we have kept a keen eye on our natural surroundings. Our environment has played a big role in our educational vision, and children have gladly jumped into projects and activities built around the natural world—drawing, observing life cycles, gardening or just spending large chunks of time out in the open. Once we moved into our semi-residential campus, this environmental aspect took on many very rich and vibrant dimensions.

Over the past year, our mela theme was built around land work. This included both physical work on the land (in terms of growing crops and maintaining plots) as well as detailed observations and studies on the natural world around us: trees, insects, birds and even mini-ecosystems. Typically, each age group spent



at least a couple of hours a week on land work, getting their hands dirty, digging vegetable beds, crawling through lantana bushes and making detailed observations of the abundant life forms around us.

In the first term (from June to August), we had our first taste of growing vegetables. We cleared several plots below the kitchen area which were overgrown with weeds and invasives (such as lantana and eupatorium). The whole area was then ploughed over, with the help of some of our farming neighbours from Varadenahalli village. Preparing the beds, sowing the seeds of various crops—corn, bhindi, cabbages, tomatoes, beans, dal, chillies—this was an exciting time as we

could see the plants growing before our eyes and taste the fruits (vegetables?) of our labour in the kitchen! Lettuce and basil were tricky as they could not be planted directly into the ground but had to be grown first under protected conditions and then transplanted. We also had a greens bed where we grew palak, methi and amaranth.

A senior group worked on preparing a banana patch, which involved digging deep pits and enclosing the entire area with granite stones. Many of us were involved with preparing compost and the infamous trimurti tonic, an exhilarating blend of cowdung and cow urine. With weeding, complex watering rotas

(the rain gods were fickle during the first term) and lots of other maintenance work, we had our hands full!

Also in the first term, we were all involved in observational work of some kind. Groups spent time in particular spots or wandering through the campus, observing lizards, beetles, spiders, trees and the inexhaustible variety of creatures all around. We noted these observations meticulously, adding to our existing records of our campus over the years.

In the second term, we continued to grow and harvest all the crops we had sown earlier in the year. Many of these required intensive maintenance: weeding, watering and pest control. A lot of time



and effort went into these rather mundane activities, teaching us the hard way that the life of the land is not a romantic conception but a sweaty, back breaking reality!

In the second term, we also seriously took up the study of different habitats in school: our ravine and water flow system, grasslands and rocky outcrops on campus. In the process, we discovered that we could ask deep and significant questions about ecosystems that did not have clear cut and simple answers; we actually had to do the detective work ourselves and there was the added thrill that we might come up with answers that were new and original! For example, the seniors spent

the term mapping the *nala* system on campus. This involved tracing the flow of the *nala*, observing patterns of vegetation and animal life in the ravine and on its banks, observing the way its depth changed and also trying to form some correlations between all the data.

In the final term (most of our crops having been harvested and consumed!), we focused on specific land maintenance projects, such as clearing particular areas of invasives, helping to maintain the fences, watering and tending young saplings, rejuvenating the coconut grove, conducting feasibility studies of grey water and waste management systems on campus, and creating a nursery of native

trees to use later for afforestation.

From the beginning, campus habitat studies and work on the land have been a part of every student's life here. These have been at the level of activities, sometimes optional. But after this year, we feel confident that we can make nature study and land work a part of our core curriculum. Our hope for the coming year is to build up a very comprehensive land curriculum that all children will go through in their years at CFL, in exactly the same way that they study English or math, and with the same rigour.

Wednesday meetings

A compulsive need to dialogue characterizes our life at CFL! This applies particularly to the realm of the relationship between adults and students. On the one hand, the students (I am thinking mainly of the seniors, though this applies across all age groups) live in an intense world of their own, with many concerns. Questions of identity, peer interaction, self esteem and self image, sexuality and the role of the media all play a deep role in their lives. On the other hand, adults have their own conceptions of what the children's world is and (perhaps) what it ought to be! Often these two worlds, two sets of expectations, don't really meet. There can be friction, misunderstanding, strong reactions on both sides of the age divide. Together, we decided that we needed a forum where adults and senior students could really communicate regarding the basics of our lives together, and we have been meeting once a week on Wednesdays (hence the name!) for more than a year.

We already have a forum for intense discussion: dialogue or "culture" classes. In these, we discuss questions that can appear quite abstract: questions regarding selfhood, our emotions and thought patterns, conditioning and the whole map of our inner lives. While these go on with a lot of intensity, since they are in

a sense more impersonal discussions, a lot of the emotions associated with the practical details of life together, the norms and values that inform our campus lives, might get brushed under the carpet. Hence the need we felt for a forum where we can discuss these more practical issues that are nevertheless closely woven into our lives.

The basic question we have asked in these meetings is: can a group of adults and young people come together to create the norms of a community? Create them not in the sense of rules to be obeyed, but in the spirit of understanding the reasons behind the norms as well as our (frequent!) emotional urges to break them!

At a simple level, norms we wanted to come up together with included listening to music on campus, campus safety, dress codes, our conditioning to food and all our particular likes and dislikes. We were able to explore these questions collectively and to see each others' point of view.

A more serious question we spent a lot of energy on was regarding relationships between young adults, potentially physical relationships. In an open campus like ours, this question becomes particularly relevant. While we can't (of course) say that we reached any final conclusion, it has been very interest-



ing to watch the interplay of ideas and assumptions across the generation gaps, with many different and unexpected perspectives emerging. It has also been a challenging question for us as adults: can we claim that any learning has taken place during such dialogues? Is it all merely at a verbal level? Can dialogues go beyond the verbal to strike us at the very emotional core of our being? And can adolescents grasp the 'big picture', the connections between their everyday issues and the larger ones of living in this world?

Of course, even seemingly simple or practical questions lead us into the tangled thickets of the mind. Frequently we would hear a reproach from the students: "Hey, this has become a culture class!!" (Culture class is an in-house name for the weekly dialogue classes, in which students and adults together address more fundamental and general aspects of being in the world). As we went on, it became increasingly clear to all of us that we cannot draw the line between the abstract and the concrete very easily! These two categories blended into each other, often in bewildering yet also curiously revealing ways.

There was some frustration among the seniors that we were not "getting anywhere" with our discussions. However, we were able to get to the point where we could see that "getting some-

where" was not really the goal; it was more valuable to see ourselves as we are and the emotional knots we bring to a situation than to improve a situation in any way. It also became slowly and painfully evident that, given the complexity and strength of our emotional lives, it would be naïve to imagine that we could "get anywhere" in order to fix the problem!

One very definite outcome of these meetings has been to bridge, to some extent, the "divide" between the groups. The students are remarkably frank and open. There is definitely a greater sense of patience and understanding with each others' worldviews and emotional patterns than before. However, it would be wrong to load too many expectations on the meetings, for that might spoil a light-heartedness that is at their core. Perhaps continuing to call them "Wednesday meetings," rather than any more elevated title, is just fine!





Campus news

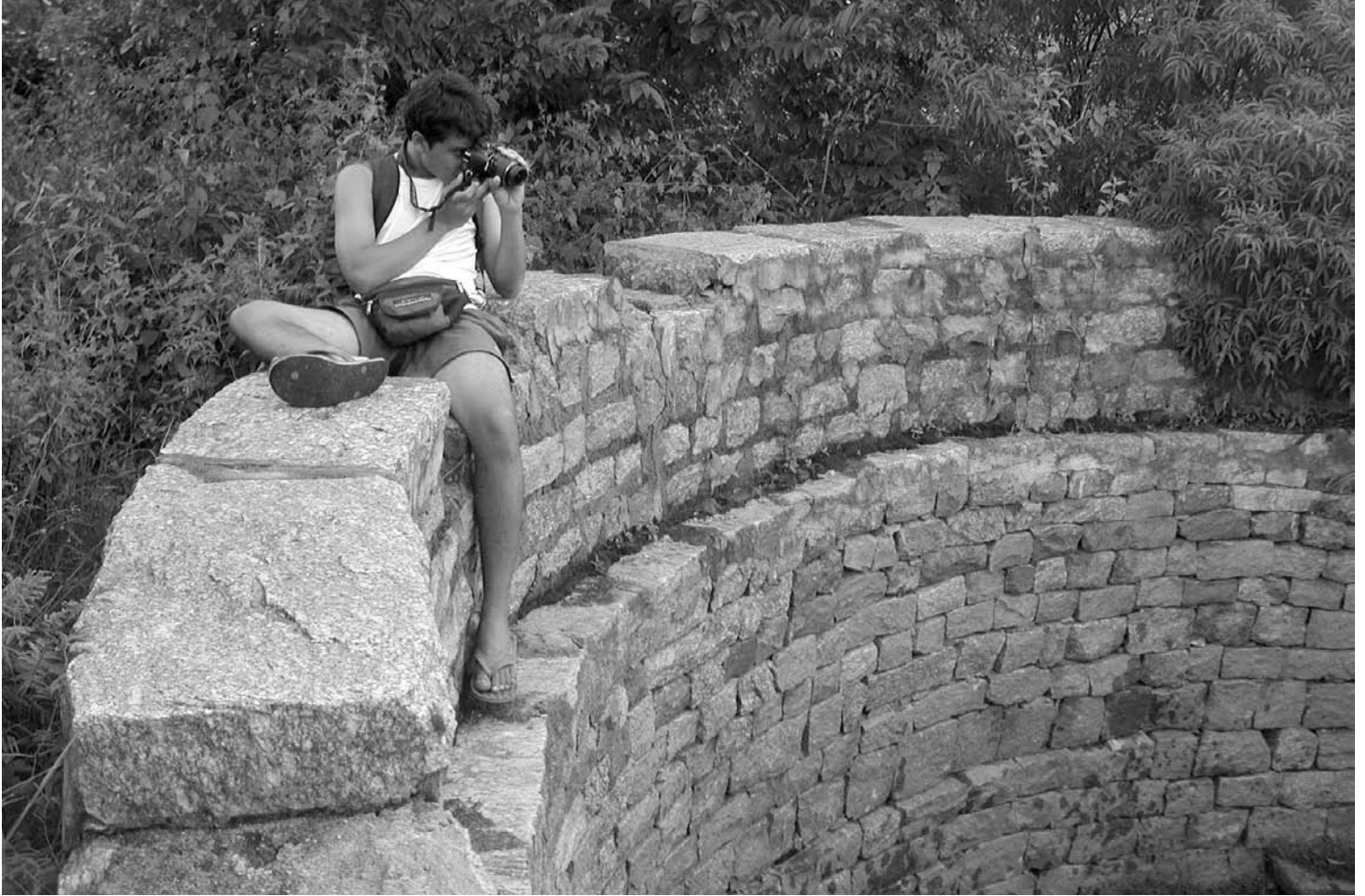
The Meera Memorial Frontier Lecture Series took place once again on campus in the December holidays. Our school was suddenly transformed into a place for physicists whose minds and hearts were filled with 'Topics in Optics'. The Meera Trust has been a supporter of CFL since the early 1990s, helping with the acquisition of science books, materials and the building of a mathematics and computer laboratory on campus. For some years now, we have been able to host one of their activities for a few days in the winter: a lecture series in an area of physics bringing together a select group of physics students and researchers. A small group of teachers from CFL help keep this event running smoothly in terms of food, hospitality and all arrangements, but our interactions with the visitors frequently extend to sunset walks, singing around a bonfire and an early morning climb up Savandurga. Even though school is not on, much of CFL's

ambience is communicated, and every year the participants are invariably drawn to the ideas and intentions of the school. This year, they actually 'passed the hat around' and made a contribution to CFL for which we are very grateful.

We are happy to re-welcome Clive Elwell into the CFL community after a gap of several years! Clive has been involved with the Middle School and with land work the past year. We also welcome Ram and Nagini into the teacher body. Nagini will be involved mainly with the Junior School, and has already been a part of more meetings than can be counted on all fingers and toes. Ram will be teaching mathematics and environmental management to older students, and has also joined the kitchen committee (brave man). Therlingappa, who joined us over a year ago, has become an integral part of CFL. While he spends a lot of time at the office computer, you are equally likely to see him, sleeves rolled up, digging at the hard soil (he has a deep interest in agricul-

ture). Pooja, a parent of the school, will be working for this year (on a part time basis) with a wide range of age groups on craft and art skills. Lalitha, who took a much-needed break from the hurly burly of school life last year, will be with us part-time in the first term to teach craft. Keerthi and Arthi will be part-time teachers in the coming year, working mainly in the middle school on English and mathematics. Aparna, Sunila and Sangeetha will no longer be a part of the staff from the coming year. We wish them all the best with their future endeavours, educational or otherwise.

Many visitors and friends came by. The Symonds family spent a whirlwind term with us. Matt and Maria were soon drawn into various activities from sports to drama to kitchen work, while their sons Max and Theo became full-fledged Tamalas. Sandy came several times during the year as consultant, and was of immense help in formulating and carrying out both the growing phase as well as the



habitat studies for the 'care of the land' programme. His presence and support are always treasured. Gary Primrose stayed with us for an intense and unforgettable two weeks of habitat study. He staggered home to the UK when we were done squeezing him dry, but we hope he will come again in spite of that! Michael Little also helped a great deal during the last two weeks of the habitat study term, pulling all-nighters. Sora Tsukamoto spent several months here working hard in the vegetable garden. His gentle, friendly nature brought him many fans among the students who were so sorry to see him go. Siddharth, an old student, spent a term reviving our pottery programme. He worked quietly and efficiently and slipped into life here so smoothly that we soon began relying on him for many, many things. Sunanda Bagchi, a parent volunteer, worked with a senior statistics class. Gerard Bayle was here again working with many groups on theatre. Keshav, Kirby and little Roshan came in

the last term. Keshav worked with senior mathematics groups, Kirby worked with Saralas to Palashas on a dance drama, and Roshi worked on charming young and old.

Others made briefer visits, and we enjoyed every interaction. Some of the guests were: Gopal, Susan and others from the Oak Grove School, Merran and friends from Argentina, Arun from The School, KFI and friends, Bill, Laila and Kari from Brockwood Park School, and Maggie and Andrew from the U.K. Mark Edwards, extraordinary photographer and speaker for our earth, interacted with students and staff one morning. Several of us had already watched 'Hard Rain', his powerful show on the urgency of environmental awareness. And Derek Hook came and entertained us with his stories, an almost-annual event that we hope will continue for many years to come. Several alumni visited during the year too, and many were requested to speak to our oldest students about how

and why they made the choices and decisions they did in life!

Workers from Dharmapuri spent the summer on campus remaking the pottery shed roof. No more tension over leaky roofs!

Many parents have volunteered in crucial areas in the school. We would like to thank them for their energy and support.

Last and tiniest, we welcome a new baby in our midst: Diya Biradar, born to Ashok and Kavya!

We are sad to report that Satsuki, who has been with us since the past thirteen years, died earlier this year. She has accompanied us on all our walks and hikes outside the campus and has been a quiet and dignified presence in school. We will miss her.



Many individuals—parents, friends, well wishers—have helped in innumerable ways to make our excursions meaningful and comfortable. Our thanks to all of them.

We are looking for committed individuals who would enjoy working in a school like CFL. Our areas of need are:

Junior School: We need an energetic individual who enjoys working with children aged 6-9.

Senior School: We need individuals competent in teaching Chemistry and Economics at this level.

Kitchen: Our vegetarian kitchen is unusual because it is run by teachers, parent volunteers, students and a minimal staff. We need a person who has a flair for managing such a kitchen and looking after its overall needs.

Library: The CFL library is an open library, with an emphasis on users being responsible for resources. We are looking for a librarian who will foster this spirit and carry it forward.

Sports: At CFL, all children play sports irrespective of their ability levels. We need a person to run a sports and fitness programme.

Contact details:

Please send a brief résumé and a detailed statement of purpose describing why you would like to work with us to our mailing address or as an e-mail attachment to: info@cfl.in (sub: Teacher Application).

Donor information: Centre For Learning is a registered charitable society. Donations to the society are exempt from Income Tax to the extent provided for under section 80G of the Income Tax Act, 1961. If you wish to avail tax exemption in the USA, please email us for details.

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