



NewDawn India Newsletter

September 2009

The main focus of this issue is to bring you news from the recent trip to Vidiyal. However there are also one or two other bits of information.

NEWS FROM VIDİYAL

It has now been confirmed that the school, a seminary, a government college and other buildings in the designated educational zone are to be demolished to make way for the expansion of the airport. The compensation is greater than anticipated and Jim and Sharmila are now on the lookout for a new site for the school.

CURRY EVENING

Our annual curry evening takes place on Saturday 10th October. To reserve your place telephone Enid and Neville on 01473310574. There will be options for non-curry eaters.

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTIONS FROM THE VISIT

Marion, on her first visit, writes:

My trip to India was incredible. Being able to experience the sights, sounds and smells is so different from just looking at pictures - it just isn't possible to really understand what it is like until you go there. It was a very emotional journey, with extreme excitement, lots of happiness, and of course deep sadness when visiting the slums and seeing how these people, who are just like us have to live.

I loved being able to meet my sponsor girl, Loganayaki, we got on so well! I miss her so much already, and would love to go back and visit her again!



The trip showed me how important our sponsorship really is, and how much it is helping. I also realised how much the children value us and our letters; it is so exciting for them to receive things from their sponsors.

It was great to meet Jim, Sharmila and their family, they are such wonderful people, and words cannot describe how grateful I am to them for the huge amount that they do.

The conditions that our sponsor children have to live in is heartbreaking, but I was so glad to see their happiness despite everything, and I have been spurred on to do as much as I can to help them. I thoroughly recommend a visit to everyone!!



Jean, on her first visit writes:

Some of the India tourists do not see

Being met at the airport by Jim and his party, my most vivid memory is of Abdul's (my sponsor boy) shining smile! This was the thread that ran through our visit, the warm friendliness and acceptance we met from all at Vidiyal and those connected with it. We visited the children's drop-in centres in the slums, had a privileged morning in one slum seeing families at home, saw the work at the Tailoring Centre with treadle sewing machines presented to young women who had completed their training and went to a gathering of older people. This last shadowed our own church lunch club but these women sat on the floor and ate off banana leaf plates. With the children and with the old people they sang and danced for us and we tried to sing for them!

My admiration and respect for Jim and his team are boundless as they teach the children art, craft, gym, judo and how to play. More importantly, but less tangibly, they learn self-respect, respect and caring for others and to approach their lives positively. The hot, busy and happy week in Madurai was followed by a magical two days with 100 children at the seaside! We played in the ocean waves and on the sand and had an afternoon at the zoo. To do that with so many children and have no behavioural or other problems speaks volumes for Vidiyal's achievements.

Maureen's reflections:

What spoke to me about my fourth visit to Vidiyal? Was it the overwhelming joy of meeting again with our Vidiyal Family? Was it the exuberance, tenacity, resilience and creativity of the children, or the small hand slipped into mine and on looking down seeing the big brown eyes, wide smile and the whispered word "Granny". Yes, it was all of these things and more.

Meeting with the two girls I sponsor, Maha and Vaitheeswari, was a special moment. In the two years since I last saw them they have moved on significantly, especially Maha. Maha has no family and lives at the Vidiyal centre. She came with a lot of problems after being found living on the streets of Madurai. Now all her needs are taken care of, she has stability, security and love; settling at school, gaining confidence, able to take an active part in life of Vidiyal, she is developing into a caring and responsible young woman.

The way the children of Vidiyal are encouraged, given opportunities, freedom and space to reach their full potential is shown in many ways. Against all odds they have the ability to create through drama, music, dance and art. They develop the capability of decision making through forums, having a high profile in the participation of the Child Rights Movement which reaches far beyond Madurai and much more; the list is endless. All these things are enabled by a man of vision C. Jim Jesudoss. This man with the support of his wife Sharmila and his right hand man Arokiam, inspires, motivates and galvanizes a team of loyal staff, volunteers (young men and women who have grown up under the Vidiyal umbrella) and the children themselves, into action giving them the courage and faith to make a stand for the Rights of the Child and for the underprivileged families of the slums in Madurai.



I was asked if I am still affected in the same way as the first time I visited Madurai. Of course the answer is "Yes". To face even for a short time the harsh realities of the degradation, deprivation, starvation as they cling on to their fragile thread of life and to witness the quiet dignity of the families in the slum as they invite you into their homes is a humbling experience. Yet God has shown me that He is in these places through people like Jim Jesudoss. Coming home part of me stays. My love and prayers can overcome distance and time; may God continue to bless the work undertaken in His name at Vidiyal .

Sandra's reflections:

I think if I had to single out one occasion that had the biggest impact on me in this my fourth trip, I would have to say that it was the visit we made to Avaniapuram slum. I had visited the Melavasal slum on previous occasions and had always felt that, although welcomed by the women and children, the men remained slightly hostile towards us. Although Avaniapuram slum is the re-settlement for those whose homes in Melavasal have been demolished, this visit was completely different. We were not only welcomed into the slum by whole families but they were keen to take us into their homes and offer us hospitality. Just imagine standing inside a 10 foot by 10 foot room which is a complete home for a family and seeing the pride on the faces of these lovely children and their parents. It was a truly moving and humbling experience.



It was a fantastic trip, rounded off with a wonderful time on a beach camp with the children. Watching the face of young Sakthi, as he saw the sea for the first time and felt the wet sand beneath his feet, is something I will always remember. The visit only emphasised what an amazing couple Vidiyal has in Jim and Sharmila. We all felt like one big family and I can't wait for the opportunity to be back with that family again.



Sophie, also a first-time visitor writes:

The thing that has stayed with me the most from visiting the children in Vidiyal is the look of their beautiful smiling faces, they were always so happy and so excited to be with us and show us their way of life. This has made me feel extremely humble and I am honoured that I was able to go out there and experience their lives with them. It was hard to see the children and the lack of home comforts and rights that they have and it has therefore made me appreciative of my own life, but it has also made me extremely happy that there are people out there, like Jim and Sharmila, who dedicate their lives to making those children's lives better. The smiles on their faces show that these two are doing a fantastic job.

Don's reflections on his first trip to India:

I must say how very lucky Lynn and I were to spend our honeymoon with friends like Jim and Sharmila and with special Vidiyal children. Vidiyal children were so unique. They are so determined to learn and achieve things in order to have a better life. I really like their warmth, love, support and care for us and they were so disciplined. As a Sri Lankan I had a similar childhood and upbringing. I too was always so keen to do things in order to have better life, which was hard to achieve due to lack of facilities in my early days. As I have a sense of what their goals were I felt I am so much in tune with their culture and society. I love and adore all the kids I met, but I have special memories of Nandhini, Tamilarasi and Arafat.

I remembered once Jim was saying what we are doing for their benefit (sponsoring a child) it was just putting a water drop into the ocean. In India, especially in Tamil Nadu, the caste system has divided the nation. I did see people who, living in slums, had been neglected and abandoned due to their caste and corrupted politics. It was so sad to see how much they lack facilities of even basic living things. But I did see a difference which is they are happy - most of the time they were smiling. They did not show any sign of stress at their way of life. Their homes were so small, not even enough for one person, but it was their home for more than four or five people. What amazed me was how they kept their premises clean, tidy and welcoming for guests despite such lack of facilities. They even spent their little money on gifts for us.

Personally I believe what I did and achieved meeting those kids and their people was an amazing honeymoon experience. Something a newly wed couple would not dream about on their first honeymoon. Jim and Sharmila were very special people to meet. They organised a second wedding reception for Lynn and me, which I will never forget. It is very hard to find a person like Jim. He is a very charming cool person and full of a sense of humour. I called him my brother. He touched my heart. Finally I must say a very special thank to my lovely wife Lynn and my mother in law Sandra who organised the trip and provided all the information which helped me during the visit and for their love and care.

Lynn writes:

Having been to India three times before, it was exciting to be going with my new husband on our 'honeymoon'. Seeing my sponsor daughter, Nandhini, again was amazing and my first thought, when she met us at the airport, was how much she'd grown! She is now a young lady with beauty, confidence and determination. On our first night, the children, led by Nandhini, had organised a wedding reception for my husband and me. Sharmila arrived at our hotel and dressed me in a sari and Indian wedding jewellery. The children had built a stage, created a backdrop, organised games and I felt like royalty. We even had a wedding feast served traditionally on banana leaves! It was a very special evening and one I will treasure for the rest of my life.

Whilst in India, I also had the special opportunity to visit Nandhini's home in the Avaniapuram slum. It was fascinating, as well as heart-wrenching, to see where this beautiful, intelligent girl was growing up. I thank Jim and Sharmila for providing Nandhini with opportunities to get an education (she finished the GCSE equivalent with outstanding results) and to rise up out of her impoverished background.