

## JACOBS NEWSLETTER SPRING 2011

Jacob's has unfortunately lost a couple of the lovely people who have made the Home so special for the last few years. Sivan Pillai died after a short illness – below reproduced the lovely picture of him with Nurse Vasanthi's baby. Fortunately we traced his family three years ago, so he was able to be reunited with them. Although by that time they had been separated too long for them to resume a close relationship they did keep in touch and visit him regularly, which pleased him a great deal.



Earlier this year Saraswathy – ‘the face of Jacob's’ – also died after a very short illness. Viji contacted her daughters but they came to Jacob's only after her death. They were apparently distraught at the loss of their mother but if only they had taken the time to see her just once when she was alive it would have made Saraswathy so happy. However she was a very much loved and cherished part of Jacob's and she always appreciated her unconventional surrogate family.

There are, however, always another bunch of characters waiting in the wings, and Jacob's now has a new coterie of stars!

Suban is a loyal Jacob's resident. He came to Jacob's over a year ago, for just a week or two whilst his son who he lived with, moved house. The family are almost destitute, but obviously very fond of their Dad, and Son duly came to fetch him once they were settled. Suban went with them, but was back within a few days – he missed his friends at Jacob's! This little saga has now been repeated numerous times, poor Son is beside himself as he really wants Suban to live with them but Suban is quite determined he won't leave Jacob's. He graciously agrees to going with him for just a

few days, but only on condition he can come back. Many of our residents would love to be able to live with family, but not Suban – he just won't leave!

Suban second from left



Palaniappan on the left

Palaniappan is a Jacob's star; he has made himself indispensable! He takes the food to the school, runs errands, and helps with anything that's needed. He's always there and always willing; such a lovely man.

Kaliammal, the lady in the picture, came to Jacob's in August 2009 on the last day of one of our visits to India. She never said much about her past or why she was at Jacob's until relatively recently when she told Viji her story. Her son had died and she lived with her daughter-in-law and grandsons. Kaliammal felt she was a nuisance and a burden to her daughter-in-law, who wasn't as kind to her as she might have been. This culminated with Kali being 'scolded' one day because she had made her bedclothes wet. She went to the river and tried to drown herself, but was saved by a passing stranger, who put her in an auto and sent her to Jacob's. She told us nothing of her family so we weren't able to notify them that she was with us.



Kaliammal recently told Viji about her background and it transpired that her family live near Viji's cousin. Viji went to see the daughter-in-law and grandsons and they came immediately and took her home. Her grandsons especially were thrilled to see their Grandma again and she was centre of attention in the community. We

thought Kaliammal probably wouldn't be back. She is! When you see the residents together and realise the companionship and support they all give each other I suppose it's not surprising they want to stay together.

Kaliammal the day she arrived.

Thirumatha is our resident bag lady! Last October when the rainy season set in we were contacted by a couple of people about this lady who lived in a doorway. Apparently she had lived there for several years, spending her days begging scavenging and swearing at passers by. No-one knew where she came from but she had been there for a few years and was part of the scenery. However her neighbours became concerned about her weakened state and the onset of the cold wet weather so asked us to take her in for a while. She agreed to come on condition she could return to her doorway when the rain stopped. Well guess what – now that the rain has stopped she wants to stay at Jacob's! Viji had a real tussle with her for a while trying to get her to moderate her behaviour and her language to be more suitable for her new environment, and she has now become – almost – a model of propriety.



Thirumatha used to receive a few rupees pension every month from somewhere, which the postman delivered to her doorway, but once she moved to Jacob's he obviously no longer brought it. She insisted on visiting the local post office to see what was happening to it, and Viji told me that it was interesting to see that she hadn't completely forgotten her old behaviour!

We don't know her past, she has told many conflicting stories of her life. She's been an orphan, a film star, not married and had three husbands and six children amongst various other lives. In spite of her occasional 'daft as a brush' behaviour she is very canny, and doesn't suffer fools gladly. She is in fact quite frail and has told Viji that although she has lived in other houses before she didn't like them and never stayed but she is going to spend her last days at Jacob's and be looked after by her daughter Viji!

The lease on the Jacob's Care Centre in Chettipalayam expires in October and we are keeping our fingers and toes crossed that it will be renewed. The house belongs to several people of one family, as do most of the large village properties in the area. They are handed down from generation to generation, and as most families try to arrange childrens' marriages to cousins or second cousins so the money stays within the family, the ownership of properties can become very complicated. We have to hope that all the members of our house's family will agree to let us stay.

Viji is desperate for us to start saving to buy land or a place of our own, and nothing I can say will convince her that there's no magic pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. She firmly believes that one day something will turn up and Jacob's will be able to build – I hope she's right and to this end we are starting a 'Jacob's Building Fund'. Unfortunately land in India is almost as expensive as buying a plot in Westminster - crazy but true. The Global Pathways School with whom we are associated, have a very generous Canadian donor who is buying land and building a school near the settlements some distance from Chettipalayam. It is really in the middle of nowhere, but since most of the school children come from the settlements it will suit their needs.

When slum areas and makeshift houses were bulldozed in the city of Coimbatore, 25 miles from Chettipalayam, the displaced occupants were moved a number of miles away from the city, to isolated scrub land, and given a few square feet of land each. There was no power and no running water. The disabled amongst them were provided with a small block built room, but the rest had to make their shelters and homes as best they could with any old bits of wood or corrugated iron they could find. There are two such areas on the Chettipalayam side of Coimbatore which have been there five years or more, so have become communities in their own right. Jacob's have helped a number of the residents to start small shops or businesses, and now that the school is available to them there is a good future for the children. However the area really wouldn't be suitable for us to build for Jacob's, so we shall – if we ever raise enough money – have to look elsewhere to build or buy.

One of the settlements



Once the Global Pathways School move to their new quarters, probably next year, we shall lose some of the close ties we have with them at present. Their lunch is cooked by Ruckmani at Jacob's so the children see the residents regularly and both sides enjoy the contact. However a meeting I had recently with Barbara Galbraith and Barbara Zeibots, who founded the school, concluded that we must definitely continue the visits, and perhaps occasionally the Jacob's residents could visit the new school. Knowing how difficult it is to actually get the residents to go anywhere further than the tea shop it seems rather like getting the mountain to go to Mohammed but we shall

see, perhaps curiosity and the wish to see the children will encourage them.

I cannot end this newsletter without saying a very big thank you to all the people who have given so generously of their money and of their time to help Jacob's this past year. I have been really touched and extremely grateful for all the help, and when I explain to the Jacob's residents and staff all the hard work that goes in to raising the funds at this end each and every one of them ask me to thank you very sincerely for helping them. I wish you could see how much difference your sponsorship and your donations and fundraising make. Don't forget if ever you get the opportunity to visit Jacob's you will be made very welcome.

Thank you  
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#### Scenes from the Jacob's Christmas Show

