

Jacob's Newsletter January 2010

Larry and I were unable to make our usual visit to India this winter so this newsletter is a joint effort with contributions from Jenny McCombe who has been at the project for a month, from Viji the Manager, and from me.

Jenny is a trustee of Jacob's, and as many of you will remember she spent several weeks at Jacob's two years ago when she had to dismiss a wayward manager, (who had a dalliance with the Jacob's doctor at that time) and find an emergency replacement! She found Viji for us, who has been everything we could wish for. It seems poor Jenny is always landed with a crisis when she visits – and this time was no exception. More of that later!

Jacob's recently lost three real characters within a few weeks; all died peacefully at the Home, surrounded by friends. The first was Madavi, who had been with us for about a year. She was aged 93, and was deaf, blind and very disabled. She had been living in a house with a relative who worked full time, so had to spend many hours alone, lying on a concrete floor, only able to shuffle and unable to get to the bathroom. She was in a pitiful state when she came to Jacob's, covered in deep infected sores. However a little TLC restored her very quickly, and she became known as the Queen Mother of Jacob's, berating everyone who came near! She had a wonderful knack of knowing just what went on and who was who, although how she knew was a mystery to me. Madavi became ill one morning and slipped away after just a few hours.



Rahman with the red turban

Very shortly after Madavi's death we lost Rahman too. Rahman was such a dignified man, always helpful, always serene, respectful and polite. He was ninety years old, and had not been ill, but became unconscious during the night. He died without regaining consciousness the following afternoon. This was Viji's report on the day he died. *'Rahman used to water the plants, take all the rubbish and go to the public dustbin and throw it, clean the outside of the compound wall, pull all the weeds from the garden, he was very helpful to us. In his early days he was working in a house taking care of the garden, looked after the cows and goats which the owners had. Till he was quite old he stayed in the owner's house but when he was too old he could not stay in their house and he left and stayed in the temple yard. When he came to know about Jacob's he came to our home. All of a sudden I could see a man standing in front of our home with a shabby bag and clothes, on 6th June 2009. He had nobody and today was the end of his life.'*



Govindan was the third of our residents to die recently. He was brought to us almost two years ago after being found unconscious at the side of the road in a really critical condition. Govindan always liked to wear the towelling turban worn by country folk but he never said much that we could understand and we didn't discover much about his past life. However he made his wishes, likes and dislikes abundantly clear, and became much loved at Jacob's. Viji's mail to me

said *'Govindan is not speaking but when we call him he turns to our side and just looks at us. When we poured some tea he drank, he lies still'*. Later that day Viji wrote *'All of us sat near him, sometimes talking to him, giving water and tea and he passed away peacefully. Suppose we had taken him to Government Hospital he would have been all alone suffering and wouldn't have received care given to him by his friends.'*

Whenever any of the Jacob's residents die it is the custom for everything in the Home to be thoroughly cleaned and washed and for everyone to have a bath. *'Last night most of our residents did not eat so we gave coffee and biscuits only, morning everything was cleaned and washed and all had their bath and came to normal life.'*

Jacob's must indeed be squeaky clean at the moment!

Jenny McCombe's newsletter

Jenny and Viji on a trip to the park



From deep in the heart of Tamil Nadu I am here to tell you that Jacobs is very much alive and thriving and there are currently a large number of very happy old people living in Chettipalayam. The Home nestles in among small houses where families have welcomed the newcomers.

The small walled approach to Jacobs is all you could imagine in India - banana trees, palm trees, flowering hibiscus and a welcome concrete drive to provide a firm footing for residents and space for the elderly Ambassador car and the volunteer's bicycle. More of the latter later!

The first large room contains the television and had some of the beds until the cold weather (28 degrees!) set in, and they were moved to a warmer, second inner room. There is a pleasant open courtyard containing a wash-hand basin for cleaning their plates and hands after eating meals, (no cutlery needed - saves washing up!) and seating for when it isn't too hot. Considering these folk have not recently lived as a family there is much laughter and comfortable conversation and a lot of helping each other while tolerating irritating habits - bit like home really!

The Outreach programme continues to expand; we provide more than 2,000 meals each week, cooked in Jacobs's kitchen, including a very welcome offering at a leprosy centre. The children hold hands with us or dance ahead down the lanes as we leave big cauldrons of rice and dhal and vegetable biriani.

The next stop was to people waiting for their supper, near a flower seller who asked me to rebuke her 'friends' who had said how black she was! I expanded on one of my frequent sermons about how we would love to be brown like them and left her well pleased. She gave me a garland of jasmine which the girls at Jacobs insisted on pinning in my sparse hair. Didn't have the same effect as in their beautiful brown/black plaits and made me look rather like a decidedly drunken bridesmaid....

I am pleased to have a new **bike!** It changes my life as it is just too far to walk in the heat, from my guest house/flat to Jacobs. I fly about now, and there is fortunately not the traffic to worry about on most of the roads. I did have a bit of a quandary the other day - do you pass oncoming cows on the right or left? This is more of a problem here because I don't think Indians have made up their minds whether to drive on the left or the right anyway! They undertake just as happily as overtake. I was ever so glad to be biking again but on the maiden voyage a pedal fell off and after repair (initially by a schoolboy, with a twig) the air kept coming out of the front tyre. The office people said it was because I was so big..... but they got the whole wheel exchanged at the shop and it is going like a bomb now - all the children shriek and run out of their houses to wave at me and shout hellogoodbyehellomadamgoodmorning...."



Jenny in Christmas mode!

Yesterday I went shopping with Surya, the daughter of the wonderful Manager/Matron here called Viji. Surya is a beautiful 22 year old with the longest most luxuriant plait ever, who helped me find 'jewels' for my grand-daughters for their Christmas presents. Today she has come in to Jacobs and has given such a pile of presents! There was pink nail polish, earrings (6 pairs), white balloon trousers with gold edges, pink salwar top with sparkly doings all over and another pair of ear-rings that are mini chandeliers!!!! She and her lovely college friend insisted that I wear them today so I am sitting here like an Indian bride and the residents are coming to peer in to admire me! I get the strongest feeling they all feel that *someone* had better get me toggged out decently as even the poorest Indian woman wears colourful saris and masses of jewellery and us foreigners look decidedly boring.

We have had a big disappointment over the Yuveraj Centre for paraplegics and amputees which I was hoping to finalise and open. The owner had agreed to rent the beautiful house to us, but he has proved unreliable and somewhat eccentric. He didn't think it amiss to tell us we couldn't help anyone mentally defective, couldn't use two of the rooms we had designated for a doctor and a physiotherapist, and must allow him and his elderly relatives to stay in some of the rooms in the house!

Note from me – the agreement was signed in August and the work has been going on to install toilets and bathrooms. However the owner decided to ignore the legal agreement and refused to vacate the premises. It sounds clear cut doesn't it – if only Indian life were that simple! In spite of repeated attempts to negotiate we have had to call time on the agreement and go to Plan B.

This is what Viji wrote about the negotiations ‘*Suddenly the house owner became agitated and angry and started blabbering, pushing his wife and the chairs, throwing the tumblers as if he is in a state of delirium, seeing this to avoid further untoward incidents doctor suggested that we should leave at that, so that the house owner could relax and decide. Visu (one of the Indian board members) told the land lady that she should decide and let us know. The land lord was in such a confused state that he could not think rationally and understand what we were saying and did not allow us to talk. Yesterday if the land lord had listened calmly everything would have solved yesterday but being a bp patient he could not behave properly and patiently. This is what happened yesterday.*’ I’m not sure we can entirely put the situation down to the landlord’s blood pressure problems, but enough was enough and that’s when we made the decision to call it a day!

We have been arguing and pleading for weeks but now have had to give up on it. Though we are sad about having to postpone the project we are planning now to buy land and build a purpose built centre. Some local people are keen for this project, and will possibly help us by locating, and hopefully contributing towards the land, so fund-raising is again our main objective alongside continuing the work here at Jacobs which is so needed.

My New Year started at 4.30a.m. – don’t know where the fireworks were, but there were pretty lights everywhere and the milk churns from the dairy across the road merrily crashing, then an ominous crunching noise from the main road which turned out to be a lorry upside down right in the shop at the crossroads! Happy New Year to you all, I wish you health, happiness and prosperity.

Jenny McCombe

Jacob’s at Christmas



There have been yet more changes since the last newsletter; firstly Jacob’s no longer needs to keep our full time workers at Government Hospital. It was excellent news to hear that the Indian government have introduced a policy whereby there is an allowance of one lakh (Rs 100,000/-) per person for destitute people to have operations and treatment in private hospitals rather than using the free Government Hospital. Hence we are not now needed to take care of and pay for facilities and care for such cases. This is a real advance and will make a big difference to those who have suffered so much in this situation in the past. We do however still have contacts at the hospital who will tell us of anyone who needs our help for any reason.

The other thing that has changed recently is that the police are gathering up children and frail elderly people who live on the streets and finding them somewhere safe to stay. This has been supposed to happen for quite some time, but up until now there hasn't been much sign of it. We have heard some cynics say that it is happening in Coimbatore at the moment as there is an international conference being held in the city in the near future, but time will tell! What *is* certain is that whether it continues or not there will still be a great number of elderly destitute frail and lonely people who will need our care. Lately we have had several new admissions; I just hope that we never become so full that we have to turn people away.

Jacob's has also adopted a small home we discovered nearby where there are ten old people looked after and cared for by just one lady. There is no electricity or water connection to the premises, and the poor lady has struggled manfully on next to nothing to care for these people. It started apparently when her own elderly mother became ill, and she has just somehow accumulated the other nine people! We are taking meals in twice a day, and providing medical help – it has become known by us as the Jacob's Annexe. Viji takes some of the Jacob's residents there to visit sometimes if they become discontented about anything – Jacob's isn't luxury by any means but it is a comfortable home, and a visit to the Annexe is a salutary lesson for a whinger!

Helping each other



Previous fund-raising events





The Friends of Jacob's have their first meeting next week. The Friends are a small committee who are charged with coming up with ideas for raising funds, and they will plan and organise one big event every year – watch this space to learn what the big event will be this year! Please do contact us if you would like to be involved in any way.

Now that we have a target to build our own Home we have to have a really big push to start the ball rolling, so please support us in whatever way you can and let us have any ideas you have for fundraising.

The Jacob's 100 Club is still recruiting members – just £25 for twelve chances to win the monthly prize of £100 – please contact me if you would like to join.

Sponsorship is vital and is our 'bread and butter money' for the monthly expenses. Anything you can afford on a monthly basis would be so welcome.

This year there will be more Jacob's Lunches, but we are presently considering new ways to make these more interesting and appealing. Any ideas?

There will be a Quiz Night later in the year, start recruiting your team!

One of the Friends is planning a fabulous Art Exhibition and Sale followed by an evening meal. Do you know anyone who might be kind enough to contribute a picture or piece of artwork? Further details in the near future.

Any other (polite) suggestions gratefully received!

Please do contact me – Jen Risdale - for a chat, suggestions for fund raising, for support or any questions you have about Jacob's.

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