



Auroville International
UNITED KINGDOM



Kriya youth on land bought with A4A funds

Land Purchase in Auroville

& Acres for Auroville

The Lands for Auroville are to be bought and can be bought. The money is needed now, will you help?

The Mother, 1970

Her message

There are many challenges and difficulties in buying land in the Master Plan for Auroville.

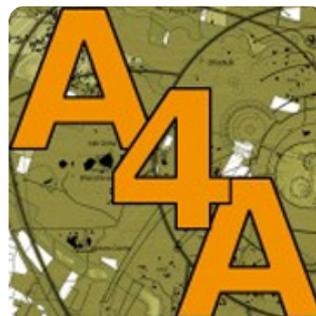
But Her message is very simple and positive 'The Lands can be bought'. She leaves no doubt about the situation, it is possible to buy the Land.

Her message is also very direct, almost in your face – Will you help?

A reply

In early 2014, Mandakini, an American now living in France, after receiving an inner aspiration for an action called "Acres for Auroville", decided to answer Her call to help. With the AVI France Board, she explored ways to raise funds to buy the missing plots of Land to realise Mother's dream. She then proposed the fruits of their brainstorming to

Aryadeep of Lands for Auroville Unified to create a collaborative action.



Acres for Auroville (A4A) then became the official land fundraiser of the worldwide centres of Auroville International and on 15th August 2014 Acres for Auroville was launched.

Recently I asked her about her life, (see the article later in this newsletter), and about her work with A4A, (see pages 2-4) ...



Jothi, Mandakini, Anjali (Land Board Secretary),
Maurice (Mandakini's husband), Aryadeep at the Town Hall in Auroville

Firstly, can you summarise the achievements of A4A?

Dynamic Unity

Auroville's land purchases are funded by solidarity, so our major achievement has been waking people up to an awareness of this vital need with the creation of a sense of dynamic unity for the goal. Before we started A4A, many people wanted to help, but didn't really know how. The Mother said "A harmonious collective aspiration can change the course of circumstances" and that is what we're doing!

Transparency and accountability

Also, one of the pledges we made at the very start – and we have kept at every step – is complete transparency and accountability through detailed monthly reports on donations received and land purchases made. These reports are sent to the AVI Board and the Land Board with this information

available to the FAMC and Working Committee for land consolidation planning.

Funds are only used for land purchase

The other major pledge we've made and kept is that the funds are used only for land purchase. These two promises have led to donor trust and well over 2000 donations have been received, many of which have come from repeat

"A harmonious collective aspiration can change the course of circumstances" and that is what we're doing!

donors. As one of our goals was for A4A to be a unity action, it always makes us feel very good when we receive donations from Ashramites, including yearly sponsorship from the Ashram School's alumni association, the Golden Chain.

Over 80 plots since our first purchase in 2015 – all funded by land donations

Each time we announce new land that was purchased with donations, people see we are getting concrete results, and they donate again. So, this unity and support has led to the purchase of over 80 plots since our first purchase in 2015 – all funded by land donations.

City area – A4A-funded plots are located near the Matrimandir, near the Solar Kitchen, Shradhanjali, near Surrender and Arka, in the International Zone, next to the Visitors Centre, at Réve leading to the creation of the Kriya Youth community. Additionally, a waste water treatment center was built on A4A-funded land for communities at the center of AV.

Greenbelt – purchases have been made in many Greenbelt farming and forest communities bringing consolidation, water resources, and vital road access at: Fertile Windmill, Kalpavruksha, Irumbai Lake, Pitchandikulam, Meadow, Newlands, Siddhartha Farm, Udavi School, Revelation, Northern Forests of Auroville, and many others.

These new plots also strengthen these communities' greenwork, help bio-diversity protection, and bio-regional outreach.



Art for Land exhibition 2021

Achievements with a small team

We are a small team with Aryadeep representing LFAU, me, and with the indispensable Jothi, LFAU's secretary, who has been a co-architect every step of the way. Happily, Aurovilian Joël has joined us for special actions, and just recently Chloé, a newcomer, works part-time on the website.

How has A4A changed or developed since it started?

Enlargement of our fundraising focus

The start – When we first started, we didn't really know the results we would get. This was a new action, and it was the first land action since the Million Dollar campaign about 10 years earlier. So, we started with what people could agree on – fundraising for land to protect the Matrimandir area and also for developing the International Zone, the special focus of AVI.

Now – After our first year's encouraging results, the Land Board asked us to expand to include the

complete 4 zones of the City area. With continuing excellent results, they then asked us to expand again to include plots in the entire Master Plan as our fundraising goal.

Strengthening of our communication

Newsletter – we have enriched and expanded the contents of our quarterly newsletter which is published in French in Les Nouvelles d'Auroville, with many articles in Tamil in Tamil News.

Website and Videos – our land Auroville website now has 24 pages of news articles in addition to land information. Also, our video sections are quite full with many dedicated films and video clips. Particularly notable are "Landing Auroville" (in 4 languages) and "The Mother – An Artist" (in English and French) and many more, which are the rich fruit of the work of Aurovilian Rakhal of Aurolmage and the collaboration between him and myself.

Other developments

New Year's Card -Since the start we have created and published an annual New Year's card, which is a collaboration of Aryadeep and myself with Aravinda and Jasmin. It sits on every AV office desk as an inspiration.

Art for Land (AFL) In A4A's second year, Jasmin, Aravinda and I started Art for Land on the suggestion of Sunayana Panda and Dilip Patel of the Ashram. It now operates as a collaboration of the Unity Pavilion, AV Art Service and A4A. A great number of artists donate their works which are then sold to raise funds for A4A.

This year AFL reached a very high and inspiring level of professionalism and beauty and the many associated fundraisers were truly excellent. AFL has brought in significant material support for A4A and has also showcased Auroville as a hub of artistic creativity!

AV Marathon – Finally we have added the possibility of people sponsoring runners in the AV Marathon which go to A4A as donations. This came as an inspiration from a donor.

There are separate pots of money for different areas in Auroville. Could you explain this?

The 3 pots correspond to our 3 steps of the expansion of our outreach – Phase 1 (Matrimandir and IZ area), Phase 2 (the complete City area), and Year 3 and since then (the complete Master

Plan). We keep Phases 1 and 2 as specific earmarks for people who wish their donations to go to protect the Matrimandir or to specifically fund land to be purchased in the City area.

Can you tell us about other and future fundraising actions and events?

Every year people come up with inspiring new ways to bring in land donations and here are some examples:

In Auroville:

Maroma Candles created a special Auroville's 50th candle whose proceeds went to A4A and various AV units have donated proceeds from the Marathon Market.

Upasana has held special sales which specifically benefitted A4A, and after the Joy Healing Festival, all of the healing arts participants gave the entirety of their proceeds to A4A. Several Aurovilians, such as Jyothi Khare and Loretta Shartsis, have contributed their books and films for us to send as donor gifts.

Outside Auroville:

Alan Vickers of AVI UK created 2 books "50 Poems from Auroville" and "50 More Poems from Auroville."

Nadia Loury of AVI France created a photo testimonial called "Auroville 80" whose proceeds go to A4A – a wonderful album that has received terrific feedback.

Also, countries like Germany and France have held local fundraising events, which were encouraging successes.

Plus, this year has led to the possibility of national and international events on Zoom. We're working on themes for upcoming events and we welcome people's good ideas and collaboration.

Do you feel buying Land has become more of a priority in Auroville now that the water situation has become so important?

In the years since we started, the water issue has of course become more pressing as a concern. It has not

changed our focus nor actions but has logically become a bigger concern and priority factor in land purchase decisions.

We were all greatly appreciative of the Land Board's recent purchase of over 13 acres along the Irumbai Lake which also included an important borewell for water resources. This important purchase was possible thanks to the land donations to A4A and to the goodwill of the landowners who chose to sell to help build Auroville instead of selling to speculators.

What else would you like to say?

Acres for Auroville is a true collaboration of goodwill that has contributed vital achievements for the present and future of the City of Dawn. I sincerely thank the AVIs, and very especially, every single donor. Together we are changing "the course of circumstances"!

How to Donate?

**If you wish to answer Mother's question – will you help?
To donate money to Acres for Auroville, please see below.**

1. Debit/Credit card & Paypal via the AVI UK website

Please go to aviuk.org/fundraising/donate and choose "Acres for Auroville".

2. Online banking

Lloyds Bank
Account name – Auroville International UK
Sort Code: 30-90-86,
Account No: 00110988
IBAN: GB74 LOYD 3090 8600 1109 88
SWIFT CODE or BIC LOYDGB21530

3. Cheque donations

Please make any cheques payable to "**Auroville international UK**" and send them to - **c/o John Mulrey, 7 Cubb Field, Aylesbury, Bucks HP19 7SJ**. Include a reference to "Acres for Auroville".

Gift Aid – extra money from your donation

If you are a UK taxpayer then for every pound you generously give, we will receive an extra 25p from the Inland Revenue. Please go to aviuk.org/fundraising/ to download a Gift Aid form and send to john@aviuk.org.





Mandakini and her husband Maurice at home

Mandakini

The initiator and co-organizer of Acres for Auroville (A4A)

Experiences

I am 73 now, a New York girl who was fully integrated into Ashram life, and now to life in the Mother's birth country, France, where I've been for the past 37 years. My path has been filled with rich experiences along the way, with the richest always coming from my service to The Mother. Unbelievably, it's been almost 40 years now since I lived at the Ashram, and as for everyone who has had that privilege, it feels like just yesterday.

So, I remember with immediate clarity the night-time experiences I had in my room at Golconde (a residence for disciples at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram). One experience was seeing a ball of light come hurtling through the concrete shutters until it hit me hard in the heart chakra with a shock of bliss.

A person of modest usefulness

Another was a very precise dream of a circle dance around Shiva with the mantric song « The Presence and The Power » repeated on and on. But another dream was of a different order – I very clearly swallowed a frog ! What was that about I wondered, until I found a reference in Sri Aurobindo's letters about it meaning « modest usefulness ».

The words « modest usefulness » are what I try to live by. I have been guided every step of the way by the quiet inner voice that I aim to always respect. It seems that each time I was inwardly "called" to do something, it led to a rich harvest... but also, a lot of work!!

At the request of John at AVI UK, I am writing about my life as it relates to how Acres for Auroville got started.

Early Life in New York

Family and work

Among the rich fortunate elements of my life were the influences I had about work and possibility. My parents were both children of immigrants to America who had fled poverty and pogroms, for whom the American work ethic was something they lived. When I was a kid, I always marveled at how my Mom would go to work in a blizzard, taking the subway from deepest Brooklyn to mid-Manhattan, not sure of getting a train there and back. Why did she do that, when it was a perfect opportunity to take a break and stay home? I understood when a bit older, and I found myself doing exactly the same thing – it was the value of work!



Mandakini, 1980

The power of possibility

But my generation, born in post-war USA, had the happy, not compelled, sense that dreams were possible and life was full of opportunity if you tried. So that is how, at age 21 and with no experience or skills, or appointment, I went to the Office of the Mayor of New York to propose my « services ».

One of his aides met me and accepted ! I made good on the opportunity by organizing a program to combat lead poisoning in children who lived in impoverished housing, a health issue and political hotcake at that time.

The next year, after camping with some friends in the Catskill Mountains, we made our way to what was planned to be a small nearby music event - that just happened to be called « Woodstock » – which was an unforgettably great experience of the transformative power of possibility.

But all of my being was profoundly touched when Jyotipriya said with great spiritual force and upraised hands “Friends, we are at the dawn of a New Age for humanity!”

On to Los Angeles

Film producer

That same « why not try !? » attitude led me, again without experience or an appointment, to seek a position in a Los Angeles film company (in a city where there are many hundreds of film school graduates each year). Bingo again, and over the next seven years I co-produced a hundred educational films, some of which were honored as award-winners in their fields

Dr Judith Tyberg (Jyotipriya)

I had heard about Sri Aurobindo and The Mother years back on an island in Spain just after I had had the incredible experience of my mind opening into a vast realm of pale blue light (the color associated with Sri Aurobindo’s consciousness).

Then one day I wandered into the East-West Cultural Center (now the Sri Aurobindo Center of Los Angeles) and met its founder, Dr. Judith Tyberg, who had received the name Jyotipriya (“The Lover of Light”) from Sri Aurobindo. She became a great influence on my life, as for so many others.

It was August 15th, 1977 and I had absolutely no idea of the significance of the date nor of the Integral Yoga. But all of my being was profoundly touched when Jyotipriya said with great spiritual force and upraised hands « Friends, we are at the dawn of a New Age for humanity! »

Jyotipriya was the pioneer who had brought Sri Aurobindo and The Mother to America and had created so much. I later learned about her life in detail and the vast network of contacts with whom she corresponded about the Yoga. Sometimes I feel that I have become an inheritor of her way of sharing The Mother’s action.

The film company I worked for was eventually sold and with the layoff compensation I received, I was finally able to fulfill my dream of going to the Ashram.

On to the Ashram

I stayed for three years in the Ashram and worked in the Dining Room, as a teacher in the school, and in the Archives where I launched the concept of a new flower book: “The Spiritual Significance of Flowers” (that was fully developed and finished by Ashramite Lilo).

After many bouts with illness, Jyotipriya succumbed and passed away during my first year at the Ashram. The Ashramite who had introduced her to Sri Aurobindo back in 1947 (Arabinda Basu) asked me to write her biography for the Ashram magazine “Mother India”. Later, the Los Angeles center requested me to write an updated piece for Wikipedia.

Then to France, The Mother’s Birthplace

Then came the last step – my new life in Paris with Maurice, the Frenchman I met in the Ashram dining room.

Again, I was guided – I was drawn to what became our second apartment, just two doors away from where The Mother came several times a week to visit a painter friend, and also one street away in a direct beeline from where She lived for several years.

And again, I got launched in a job that I had no preparation for – teaching English to French corporate executives, and in the latter 15 years, they were real estate and financial professionals. I worked 50-hour workweeks for 3 decades, and every day thanked my mother in my heart for her example.

Fundraising in retirement

The start of fundraising

When I retired, I turned my energy to fundraising for Auroville with the AVI France team. I made the first fundraising calls in News & Notes for the Farewell Facilities, and in France for the new ambulance. Also, with Julian and AVI USA, launched « Build It Now » to successfully fundraise for finishing the Santé building. After that, when Acres for Auroville came to me as an inner inspiration, I was able to recognize it as a true impetus to be followed.

A4A (Acres for Auroville)

In fact, the A4A campaign is the only work I have ever done that I was prepared for ! I came to it knowing the power of possibility, with organizing skills and experience in writing, film, translations and communication. Also, I had been trained by my student-clients in the elementals of real estate and an understanding of the need for and how to keep, clear, accurate and transparent accounts. All that I had lived before came together with deep meaning for me, to do this work for The Mother.

Art for Land came as a natural outgrowth and coordinated action in A4A's second year.

We are now in the 8th year of A4A's successful fundraising action which has created energy, trust, and concrete results. I continue to concentrate with sincerity on hearing and following the true inner voice.

Support

I am grateful to my comrades on the AVI France Board who agreed to support the inspiration I received, to my A4A partners Aryadeep and Jothi at Lands for Auroville Unified who

have made everything possible, to the AVI Board who gave us their green light for collaboration, to Sigrid, and to Jaya, Claudine and the Art for Land team. I am grateful to all the donors who have contributed to purchase the new City of Dawn land that Acres for Auroville has funded. But mostly I am grateful to the inspiration of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, and for this growth-filled and satisfying opportunity to serve.

Mandakini

For more information about Dr Judith Tyberg:

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judith_Tyberg

sriaurobindocenterla.wordpress.com/jyoti

Some of Mandakini & Rakhal's co-produced films:

A4A: "Landing Auroville"
youtube.com/watch?v=Bk5h3NqD-Ak

Art for Land: "The Mother, an Artist"
youtube.com/watch?v=EZv4T0rJkw4

Helping the Auroville Forest with Carbon Offsetting

There is now a web application that lets individuals calculate their travel related carbon emissions and how to offset these by giving a donation towards planting trees in the Auroville Forest.

It is hoped that this tool will, over time, provide a substantial contribution to the Auroville Forest group and

support its future reforestation efforts.

The web application is very user friendly and the link is: carbonconverter.io



A meeting inside the forest

Jojhar Dhillon

(1948 to 2021)

***“A voyager upon uncharted routes
Fronting the viewless danger of the Unknown
Adventuring across enormous realms,
He broke into another Space and Time.”***

Sri Aurobindo, Savitri, Page 91, Book 1 Canto V



Jojhar Dhillon

Jojhar was a long-time friend of Auroville and a friend of many others. He recently passed away after a brief illness. He is survived by his wife Gurjeet, four children and six grandchildren. He was a softly spoken man who led a simple life while pursuing his inner journey and carrying out his householder duties. I knew him over the last four decades, since I came to the UK. His was the name given to me by the late Dick Batsone, as the man of Sri Aurobindo in the Midlands !

Jojhar had an adventurous and intriguing life journey. In 1971, he travelled overland on a motorbike with a couple of German friends from Europe to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, in Pondicherry, where he heard of Auroville. The foundation of Matrimandir had begun to be dug. He, with others, used to cycle every day from Pandy to Auroville on the barren red soil roads, in those days,

to work on the foundation site.

In the process, he had embarked on the adventure of Consciousness with Sri Aurobindo and The Mother as his guides. This was to become his life mission; to explore the inner worlds, while working on his nature and bringing up his very dear family. He lived in Birmingham, and later, in Renishaw, on the outskirts of Sheffield. Over the years, he worked in various capacities as a Librarian, County Council Housing Officer and later ran a Newsagents shop. This is the time when he also took over the responsibility from Dick Batsone of sales and distribution of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother's and related books, in the UK. He had very appropriately named his home and the house as "Savitri House".

While reflecting on his life and friendship, another story comes to mind. On 15th August 1995,

after many years of dreaming and planning, he embarked on another overland trip, this time to get to Auroville, and hopefully, live there for a longer period. He bought an old bus, converted it into a motorhome to accommodate his wife Gurjeet, their four children-Aravinder, Rupinder, Sukhvinder and Paraminder- and was accompanied by other family members and the family's three-legged dog, Barney

They travelled through various countries on the way, sharing and displaying the message of Auroville on their bus to reach, after months, the Pakistan - Indian border. Unbelievably, they were to be frustrated by the border Indian bureaucracy that declared they could not proceed further without a specific piece of paperwork for their converted motorhome ! He had to abandon his vehicle on the border due to the ridiculous costs associated with the paperwork. He continued his journey using other means, ultimately reaching Auroville in Spring 1996. They stayed in Fraternity Youth Camp for a while, but their plans to stay for longer period in Auroville did not materialise.

On his return, Jojhar quietly continued his life journey in the UK, participating in Sri Aurobindo and The Mother's work through different centres and AVI UK. He continued to explore the inner worlds in his own way and share his experiences with friends and family. He often spoke of an unfulfilled wish of his for Auroville to have a physical centre in UK in some form, some day. He was given his final farewell on 15-16th August 2021 by his family members and close friends as per his wish.

I am sure he would prefer to call himself and be remembered as the Mother's child, who did his own sadhana his way, while trying to live Her Dream.

Dr Thakor Mistry

Time in Auroville With COVID-19

Being pregnant, having a baby, working and running a guest house

The first lockdown

I am Suvedha and I work at the Auroville Entry Service and also manage The Goodness Guest House.

I am sure the terms 'Covid-19', 'Lockdown' and 'Curfew' bring lots of memories to us all.

Well, I would like to share with you my experiences during Covid-19 and how it affected my work, my family and the guest house.

We had our first lockdown in the middle of March 2020, it was a trial on a Sunday to see how people reacted to the new regulation telling people to stay at home.

In the beginning it was a nice experience being at home, not hearing cars and buses on the road. Everything was quiet and peaceful.

Being pregnant

However, during the full lockdown I was pregnant and I was unable to go to the local government hospital. The hospital was full with Covid patients and was not accepting any other patients.

So, I was forced to go to a private hospital in Pondicherry for my routine checkups.

After travelling to the edge of Pondicherry I was stopped by the police as they were not allowing people from another state to enter Pondicherry because the infection rate there was so high.



Suvedha

I could not use the Auroville medical care system or any other nearby hospital as all my records were with the private hospital in Pondicherry.

Thankfully one policeman took pity on me and let me into Pondicherry just for one visit.

My doctor then wrote a letter giving me permission to travel to Pondicherry and later I was allowed into Pondicherry with my family and I gave birth to a baby girl.

Obviously, the birth of my daughter was a happy experience but the circumstances at the time will always be remembered by my family and me.

Goodness Guest House

The inquiry and booking rates drastically decreased due to the lockdown. I had quite a few guests during the month of March who had booked for a long stay, but as the

lockdown was put in place, they had no choice but to cancel their reservations and then to depart with the restorative flights.

Most of the guests flew back to their country but I had one guest who stayed with us for a year and another for a few months. They both were US citizens and had plans to go to Europe but since the international borders were closed, they decided to stay here. They were happy as it was really safe in Auroville and they were surrounded by nature.

Even though our income went down, the maintenance of the Guest House increased as we had to clean the kitchen and the common spaces quite often.

We also had extra work trying to understand the ever-changing quarantine rules and regulations, imposed by the government for all international guests.

Entry Service

The Entry Service team decided to close the office and we all worked from home where we had our meetings via Zoom.

My team started to go to the office once there was some relaxation in

the rules. The interest in becoming a newcomer was the same but we didn't have the physical contact with the people who wanted to join Auroville, which we usually had before the lockdown. If it was really necessary, we made all the precautionary measures and met the people when needed. We did our routine work as usual in our office.

Bakery

Venkatesh, my husband, was running a small bakery called 'Royalty Bakery' near the beach. Like all businesses his business was badly affected by the lockdown.

I thank the Divine for providing me with good and bad memories. Also, I pray that we all come together to overcome the virus to bring life back to normal and we stay together in the future.

He was unable to deliver orders due to the travel restrictions and also because many shops were closed.

The stocks such as flour, butter and other ingredients which cannot be kept long were wasted and had to be thrown away.

He had to pay for his workers even when there was no work and no income.

After certain relaxations of the rules, he opened his bakery again and started to supply. Many shops were still closed in certain areas and there was a lack of transport and manpower as well. So, demand for his biscuits and cakes was now much lower.

Reflection

Dear All, I know my experiences during Covid are much smaller than the many difficulties other people have suffered. But I thank the Divine for providing me with good and bad memories. Also, I pray that we all come together to overcome the virus to bring life back to normal and we stay together in the future.

Suvedha, Auroville

Journey to Auroville & Back

Derek Parker

Interest in spirituality

I had a general interest in 'spiritual things' in the late 1960s. The Beatles had gone to India following Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, there were 'sit ins' in many universities and a general thirst for spiritual awareness and the Flower Power movement.

I was at the University of London studying a science degree. At a local pub my friends and I would meet regularly and listen to a variety of speakers on Indian spirituality and meditation.

This led me to meditate at a Thai Buddhist Temple in with a group

of monks, to go to a retreat to the Samye Ling Tibetan Monastery in Scotland and have a short visit to the Findhorn community in Scotland, where I heard about Auroville.

Around 1970, I discovered a centre at 82 Bell Street, Edgware Road, London. The centre was run by Dick Batstone, and I learnt about Sri Aurobindo, the Mother and people who had been to Auroville.

By then, I had completed my degree and had intended to search for work in the field of artificial limbs, probably at Queen Mary's Hospital, Roehampton. But Dick had awakened my thirst for adventure and I then

decided to save enough money for me to visit Auroville.

After a long journey to India, I spent a few days at the Ashram and for the first time visited the Samadhi of Sri Aurobindo. During my brief stay in Pondicherry, I went to the Playground for the collective meditation and also saw the older Ashramites completing their gymnastics.

Arrival in Auroville

Soon I was to visit Aspiration, in Auroville. There were not many communities at that time and the Matrimandir was at the first stages of construction. In Aspiration I met a



Derek in Auroville in the 1970s

lady called Shantiben who suggested that I could assist with the teaching of science in the community. I was provided with a beautiful thatched hut to live and that was where I started my classes. Much of the time I had a group of Tibetan children who came down from Dharamsala and I can still remember some of their names.

It did not take me long to get to know the surroundings and be inspired by the horticultural work that was being undertaken there: the planting of trees, bunding areas against the monsoon rains and the general greening of the deep red iron oxide soils.

An Englishman, named Shraddhalu, was doing much of the horticultural work (a new word for me) in Aspiration aided by a number of local villagers. I was able to

spend time working with him and began to learn the fundamentals of horticultural practice. As time went by, I became absorbed by this work and gradually spent all of my time assisting him. When funds arrived, work started at the Matrimandir for a short time until the money ran out. I made the acquaintance of Richard Eggenberger (Narad) and began

It was obviously my experience in Auroville that lead to this dramatic change in my life and I would spend the next 40 years doing what I would call a vocation.

to learn a few plant names when I visited the Matrimandir nursery.

Mother leaving her body

Time was flowing for me, but on Saturday 17th November 1972 Mother

left her body. Everyone knew her physical body was failing as the 95 years took their toll. But it was still a shock for many of us. At that time, I do not remember making a decision to leave and I have no idea if that was the trigger for me to do so. But in April 1974 it was quite clear to me that I had to make a change in my destiny, if you can call it that. I became very ill with Hepatitis and spent a week in bed but then recovered quickly and knew that it was the time to leave.

My time in Auroville amounted to nearly two years between 1972 and 1974.

Going home

I had decided that a change was required and the path of electronics and physics was not one for me. I needed to go back to England and look for another path and that path was one of horticulture. After travelling overland back to England via the Khyber Pass, Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey and finally to Richmond, Surrey I arrived at my parent's house sometime in May 1974.

They lived not far from the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and that is where I knew I had to start work, which I did as a labourer that autumn. A year later I had been accepted on the Kew Diploma course with 19 other students from over 200 applicants. As a more mature student, with virtually no knowledge of horticulture, I was accepted because of my degree and three years later qualified with honours.

It was obviously my experience in Auroville that lead to this dramatic change in my life and I would spend the next 40 years doing what I would call a vocation. I maintain close links with the Auromira centre in Greenford. Also, I have had some contacts with AVI UK.

Derek



Bobby, Judith and Lisbeth

Online Events in Auroville

AVI USA have started organising online events in Auroville. I attended an online 'Awareness of the Body' course which was an informative and interesting experience and at the same time I heard many birds singing in Auroville.

The idea is that attendees of these events give a small donation to AVI USA and then these donations are passed on to Auroville to pay for the community's basic requirements like education, health care and shared infrastructure.

Recently AVI USA organised another event called 'Kottakarai: Then and Now with Bobby, Judith and Lisbeth'

Bobby, Judith and Lisbeth arrived in Auroville in the early 1970's and raised their families and built their lives together in the Kottakarai community. Recently they decided to make a conscious effort to meet at least three times a year.

They invited participants to join them as they went back and they revisited their old haunts and saw what had happened to this Auroville community over the last 50 years

The organisers also wondered whether people wanted to know what Auroville was like in the 1970's or wondered perhaps if some people would like a trip down memory lane ?

Aurama, one of the daughters of Judith attended this event and I asked her what were her impressions and experiences of the event.

It was wonderful to see the three friends remember the past and take us on their journey with them. The event was divided into two parts. It started with a video with Judith, Lisbeth and Bobbi going back to key places in Kottakarai, such as the Kali temple and Angiras's Garden just to name a couple. It brought back vivid memories of some places that have now been transformed. I remember the Kali temple as a dark forbidding place and now it looks like a beautiful, light and welcoming space. It was wonderful to see Auroville looking so green and beautiful.

When the video finished a Zoom meeting was opened up for all the attendees to discuss what they had seen and ask questions. One of the reoccurring memories and mentions was Larry's bakery and bread. It

also forms part of one of my earliest memories. I remember going there with my father, feeling the heat of the oven, smelling the delicious baking smells, and tasting the divine warm bread straight from the oven. It was great to see Larry on the call and he was able to contribute with his own memories.

The event was well attended with many people asking questions and contributing to the discussion with memories of their own. I would encourage others to go have a look at the video to get a great insider's view of Auroville.

By using this link: aviusa.org/auroville-live you can find this video, past events, upcoming events, and the actual live events while they are happening,