

## PREM DAN

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### NEWSLETTER - SEPTEMBER 1998

Dear Friends,

I know all of you are waiting for this news-letter, to hear about the long-awaited event of the year - "The Inauguration of our Home" - but before I give you a detailed report of this event, I would like to give you some news.

School reopened on the 15th of June. We had the usual crowd for admission into our three schools. All the parents want their children to learn English. This year, we were able to admit 62 children into Recognised English Medium Schools.

The results of the SSC Board exams were not so good. 7 Students appeared. The names of those students who appeared for the SSC Board exam are:

Jennifer Francis  
Satya Ramaiah  
Caroline Arul  
Reshma Jadhav  
Balakrishna Ramaswami  
Vizi Naik  
Ganesh Gangadhir

Vizi Naik was not successful, while the other six students have joined College.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome our new sponsors from Mumbai, Italy, England and Japan.

The Fund Raising Campaign went on to the very end as we had to find 8 lakhs to get an electrical connection - a sub-station had to be erected on the site. Thanks to the generosity of our caring sponsors Anjali and Arjun Mathrani and Magda Himschoot, this was accomplished. Another miracle took place through the intervention of Richard Allsopp, Lisa Wade and their dedicated team. They raised 9 and a half lakhs through a sponsored Bicycle Ride - The Team comprised of Richard Allsopp, Jonny Kendall, Arnand Renard & Marcus Wraight. This contribution took care of the furnishing of the Building. Thanks and may God reward you for your generosity.

Coming to the Inauguration of my Dream Project - It was indeed a spectacular and memorable event for Prem Dan. The Governor of the State was our Chief Guest and the Cardinal of Bombay Simon Cardinal Pimenta was the Chief Celebrant for the Blessing. What made this event very special was the presence of Representatives of our Sponsorship Programme from each country. Besides our local sponsors, we had representatives from Australia, Belgium, Germany, England and Italy. Each of them gave the history of the involvement of their country in this project in chronological order.

#### Speakers:

Australia	Philippa Merchant from 1979
Germany	Otto and Jurgen Feix from 1980
Belgium	Magda Himschoot from 1981
England	Heather Charradeau, a member of the Elizabethian Club
Local	Havovi Medora
Japanese & French	Kiran Grave
Prem Dan Belgium	Capt. Michael Baltus
	and
Italy	Giovanna Berti



Philippa Merchant was the first speaker. She visited us when the Garden School was being conducted under a tree in June 1979. Her speech was touching. As the pioneer of the sponsorship programme, she spoke about what she saw - the beautiful flowers of the garden - boys and girls mainly from the streets. She began with the sponsorship Programme. Today there are 60 Australians who have had the joy of helping many of these children to complete their education.

Most of the 60 boys and girls she sponsored, are now completely transformed into young ladies and gentlemen either students in College or are employed. Philippa had the joy of visiting our 3 schools and meeting the children and teachers. She also had first hand information on the life in the slums.

Magda Himschoot - our First Belgian Sponsor told the touching story of the adoption of her daughter. She expressed -

"Sr. Felicity made me pregnant". As soon as I met Angelina it was love at first sight. Two years later I adopted her. Today she is a very efficient nurse on the verge of marrying a physiotherapist. Prem Dan has rescued many children and I still continue to work for them".

Jurgen Feix popularly known as Prem Dan's Uncle J came to us in 1984 through his father Otto Feix who became part of Prem Dan in 1980. He fell in love with a street urchin named Mahindra. When Otto Feix died in an accident, his famous son Uncle J took over and believe me, his dreams for Prem Dan changed the face of this little Project. Together with his faithful friend Dr. Rudolf Lang (who passed away in June 1996) he started the German Sponsorship. Dr. Lang was succeeded by Mr. Helmut Ofner. Today we have 85 German Sponsors. But Uncle J's greatest gifts to Prem Dan has been his visits at least twice a year - and meeting the needs of this project. He realised that our slum children would never be able to get to any school without transport so he donated a bus. This bus still carries children to and fro. Many have read this familiar inscription - "Presented to Prem Dan by Jurgen Feix of Germany". Here is a song that we composed for the inauguration of the Bus Service and in the bus there is a recording of the same.

*This song is to the tune of "Edelweis"*

*Uncle J, Uncle J*

*Every morning we're greeted*

*With a Bus that's clean and bright*

*Our travelling burden's so light.*

*Bouncing along on our way to school*

*We are all so happy*

*Uncle J, Uncle J*

*May you be blessed forever.*

*Just think of the trips that we can do*

*to the beach or the zoo*

*Uncle J, Uncle J*

*We wish you would join us some day*

*Coming to school has taught us to care*

*our parents are able to save the fare*

*It's quite a bit, it's a quite a bit*

*And all this does add to our grit.*

*For one day we hope that we'll do well*

*The joy in your heart with pride will swell*

*Uncle J, Uncle J*

*We pray for you everyday.*

Uncle J - may you live to see your great grandchildren of Prem Dan.



ENGLAND - Mrs. Heather Charradeau represented the English sponsors. Most of them came to us through the Elizabethian Club. The first great lady was Sarah Howard - a powerful large hearted person. She not only brought in many Elizabethians but also involved her husband Gerald Howard and consequently Prem Dan became an A N Z Grindlays Project. They got many Banks and Business Establishments to become sponsors. His good work was continued by another two outstanding lovers of the down trodden - Jenny Cooke and Julia Mc Cance. With their departure, we lost touch with Grindlays. However, 47 of the Elizabethians who became sponsors, still continue their sponsorship from England and Australia. Thanks Sarah, Jenny and Julia. We still miss you.

We thank all our Ex-Elizabethians and English sponsors who are still faithfully carrying on the noble task of sponsoring our Prem Dan children. Ms. Heather Charradeau, spoke to the audience present - She said-

*"The members of the Elizabethian Club got involved in the PREM DAN Sponsorship Programme in 1986. When these sponsors were transferred back to the United Kingdom, they in turn involved their relatives and friends in this programme. Today Prem Dan has 47 English sponsors. We are extremely happy with this programme because it reaches out to the most needy children of Bombay. This programme gives us the opportunity to meet the children and to keep in touch with them through correspondence. Many of us have had the pleasure of seeing our children complete their education in schools and enter the best colleges in the city. We wish Prem Dan the very best in their new Project."*

PREM DAN BELGIUM - was represented by Capt. Michael Baltus and his wife Monique. Michael and his team were responsible for raising Rs.14 lakhs for the Building. He related the story of the involvement of Prem Dan Belgium. The Story of Prem Dan Belgium is indeed the story of a very compassionate pilot in Sabena Airlines - Christian Boussmanne. While strolling outside the Taj Mahal Hotel, he came across a family of 5 - a young couple with three children. They were obviously drug addicts. He was determined to save the children aged 7, 5 and 2 and so he brought the entire family to Prem Dan.

The father committed suicide 2 years later - the mother, an alcoholic is still with Prem Dan. But Christian's Dream has come true as all the children are doing well, with the eldest in college and the other two are still in our boarding, continuing their education. Christian and his colleagues had the foresight to register Prem Dan in Belguim. Today we have over 200 Belgian sponsors and those who work ceaselessly for us throughout the year- Peter Van Wijk - administrator, Ms. Arlette Van Gansberghe who runs the office efficiently. Peter and Arlette have visited us at least twice a year and organised Christmas and Easter parties for our Children.

There were no representatives from France and Japan. Mrs. Kiran Grave spoke on their behalf. I am sure they were with us in spirit.

Here is the gist of Ms. Grave's speech -

*"It is indeed a great honour to be present for this very special occasion. All of you must have heard of Sr. Felicity. A few years ago, when I visited Prem Dan, there were just a few children sitting on those benches with pen and paper in their hands. Believe me, they had very little. Prem Dan has opened two or three organisations and I must say this is all due to the efforts of all you people present here. Sr. Felicity is giving succour to the poorest of the poor. I, for one, am very proud of being a member of the Prem Dan Family. Today in India, we have 44 sponsors. We have 22 sponsors in France and they are helping us very much. She has worked persistently and her dedicated service to the poor is astounding. On behalf of everyone present here, those not present here, and on behalf of myself, I bow to Sr. Felicity for influencing our lives, emotionally and motherly, specially mine."*



Our Local sponsors were represented by none other than our Fairy God-mother Havovi Medora. Indeed many of our local benefactors and sponsors under the able guidance of Mrs. Medora not only raised lakhs of rupees for the building, but also organised the whole inaugural function. In this newsletter we would like to take the opportunity of thanking a very special friend of Prem Dan, Mrs. Bapsy Chubb and her devoted staff and students. Over the years, the children of the Cumballa Hill High School have rendered valuable service to our school and they are also involved in the maintenance of our new Home, through their gifts towards the Feeding programme and the toilet requisites of the children. At the Inaugural function, it was Mrs. Chubb who welcomed His Excellency Dr. P C Alexander, on behalf of Prem Dan. Havovi Medora spoke to the audience present. She said-

*"The Great Sai Baba of Shirdi said- 'If you can do anything, do good. First give bread to the hungry and then eat yourself' But he chose to beg for bread. When asked why he needed to beg, he said that God was never for the rich. The Lord was humble. Humility and selflessness is the need of the hour. Looking around I can see how many people have been moved by this project. This building is not just a building, but a monument that will stand always on the sands of time. It is a symbol of truth, Peace and understanding. People from all walks of life have come together to collect this money. Funds were slowly moving in, but nobody demanded or ever asked what went on unabated. When I said I'll come forward to help, Prem Dan, I was very feeble but the day I stepped into the little place in Colaba my whole world changed. I decided to support them from the outside. Today we have achieved so much and are looking forward to much more. Education and literacy is our birthright. All of us here stand witness to the fact that we have to give our just that little bit, to achieve just that so much more. This beautiful shelter will be a home to our little girls, who are very poorly off on the main streets of Bombay. This happiness and laughter will fill these walls and they will go into this world as young women and citizens of tomorrow. Ladies and Gentlemen, do spread the word- PREM DAN. It is just not enough to put a smile on their faces- we have to see that, that smile continues."*

ALITALIA- Our street children who sell flowers outside the Taj Mahal Hotel were also successful in finding Uncles and Aunties among the Alitalia Crew members. Today we have 30 pilots and Airhostesses who visit us frequently with gifts for their children. At the inaugural function, 12 were present. Their Captain spoke about their commitment to the programme and the great satisfaction they got in reaching out to the underprivileged children of Bombay.

Our Last Speaker was none other than Aunt Giovanna Berti- Italian by birth but truly Indian in heart and mind. She is totally dedicated to looking after the homeless boys we have. In her speech, she emphasised what Prem Dan is doing to rescue, educate and provide for the essential needs of these children and also their families.

I then thanked all the speakers and sponsors, benefactors and friends who helped us to realise my Dream Project. This was followed by a song by Sr. Sylvia- "I had a Dream".

*I HAD A DREAM, SOME YEARS AGO  
IT BROUGHT ME TO, REALITY  
IT UPLIFTED MY THOUGHTS  
FAR BEYOND ALL MEASURE  
HELPED ME SEE THE FUTURE  
TO BRING ABOUT A CHANGE  
I WONDERED HOW IT COULD BE  
TO SEE IT IN FULL MEASURE  
THEN THE LORD HEARD ME  
HELPED ME TRACE THE TREASURE*