

PREM DAN

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Dear Friends,

Easter is fast approaching and its time for another newsletter from Prem Dan. Although most of our children are non-Christian we always celebrate Christmas with them. We had parties sponsored by our Friends and Benefactors. Mrs Neelambari Rao took them to Buddies club and they had a marvelous time with games, snacks and gifts. Thank you Neelambari.

January 2001 will always be a memorable year in the history of Prem Dan. On the 7th of January our Second Project - "The Satyavaty Gopalan Hostel and Vocational Training Centre" was blessed by His Eminence Simon Cardinal Pimenta. The blessing was followed by the Inauguration of the Centre. After Our Chief Guest Arjun Mathrani formally cut the ribbon to the entrance all the guests assembled in the hall for an Inaugural Programme.

Although I did give you a brief account about the new project - I feel the need to repeat some parts of the last circular to link it with the inaugural function.

The name "The Satyavaty Gopalan Hostel and Vocational Training Centre" was chosen in memory of our ex-dance teacher who dedicated almost 25 years to train our students in classical Indian Dancing. Her son Arjun Mathrani donated a large amount of money towards the construction of this building. All her movable assets are in this building. Arjun Mathrani spoke eloquently about his mother's achievements as an International Figure in the world of Classical Indian Dancing. Her last years were however spent in teaching this art to the under-privileged children of Prem Dan. Her last public performance was on this very stage. At the Inaugural Function her ex-students performed 2 dances and exhibited their skill in this Art. The audience was really thrilled to see such an excellent performance.

Arjun and Anjali had great pleasure in meeting the 5 children their sponsor. Two of them are now young men - one completed a course in Hotel Management and is currently working in a 5 star Hotel - the second young man did a course in Travel and Tourism and has his own taxi service. The other 3 are girls in school. One is a prefect and says she will be the head-girl and one day a successful doctor of medicines. It's rewarding for sponsors like Arjun and Anjali to meet and follow the progress of their children. Thanks a million Arjun and Anjali for presiding at the Inauguration and also for giving us that lovely banquet at the end of the Programme.

At this function we had the honour of the presence of Mr and Mrs Sinatara - the parents of the Late Alessandro Sinatara, a pilot on Alitalia and one of our sponsor who died in a motorcycle accident. Mr Sinatara amid tears gave us a loving account of his son. He broke down several times during his speech. Our Tailoring class "The Alessandro Sinatara Tailoring & Handicraft Classroom" is dedicated to his memory. Alessandro's picture will be a reminder of his love for the children of Prem Dan.

During the function we also dedicated our Home Science Class to the memory of our Ex-Provincial Sr. Sacred Heart McGettrick. Sr. Sacred Heart was a very zealous missionary who worked in India for many years. She was a great lover of the downtrodden and always found ways and means to reach out to the under-privileged. When she retired she went back to Ireland but continued to help the needy in India. Prem Dan was one of her favourite charities. We were therefore very happy to name the Home Science - "The Sacred Heart McGettrick Home Science Classroom". Her picture in this room will be a reminder of her loving service to Prem Dan.

Our Computer Laboratory is called the "The JRD Thelma Tata Trust Computer Training Centre". The Tatas donated the entire cost of setting up this work centre. It has all the latest equipment and also a separate room for Theory. Mrs Bapsy Chubb enumerated the achievements of the Tata Trust and its preference for projects for the underprivileged.

Last but not the least on this occasion we paid tribute to the Late Msgr. Theodore Anthony Pereira - founder member of the Prem Dan Trust and also our guide in the management of our society. The Library and Study Hall was named after him and his photograph is a daily reminder of his love and service to Prem Dan. Cardinal Simon Pimenta gave us a very beautiful account of his life and work in the Archdiocese. His two sisters Lavinia and Mavis were present at the function. Fr Theo we know you will always be an unforgotten part of Prem Dan.

It was my privilege to thank all our friends and benefactors who were present at this function. The vote of thanks included - The Project Manager Mr Julius Pereira and his dedicated Team. I also thanked all those who had helped me to raise the funds for this construction.

The children concluded the programme with my favourite hymn. It only takes a spark....

*It only takes a spark to get a firing going
And soon all those around
Can warm up in his glowing;
That's how it is with God's love
Once you've experienced it
You spread His love, to everyone,
You want to pass it on.*

*What a wondrous time is spring
When all the trees are budding
The birds begin to sing
The flowers start their blooming
That how it is with God's love
Once you've experienced it
You want to sing, It's fresh like spring
You want to pass it on.*

*I wish for you my friend
This happiness that I've found
You can depend on Him
It matters not where you're bound
I'll shout it from the mountaintop
I want my world to know
The Lord of Love has come to me
I want to pass it on.*

The visitors to this Inaugural Function included Captain Mauro Mingrone and his father. Mauro is the president of Prem Dan Italy. Thanks Mauro it was kind of you to be with us.

Our faithful Fairy God Ma Havovi Medora was also present. We were happy to have her with us again.

We were delighted to meet our dear Uncle John Edmundson (Egg Uncle) and Aunty Margo. Do come again.

After many years we were honoured by the visit of Uncle Anthony Bicknell. I think they were surprised at the growth of the Prem Dan Family.

We were happy to welcome the President of Prem Dan France Mr Phillippe Baudin and his son Cedrick. They enjoyed their visit to Prem Dan and were delighted to see the Prem Dan projects in New Bombay.

We also thank all our Italian and Belgian sponsors who have been visiting Prem Dan to meet their children. The children enjoy their visits because it always includes shopping and gifts. Thank you dear friends for your generosity.

On the 12th of January I left for Australia. I cannot express in words my experience of this holiday organized by our Australian sponsors. I was overwhelmed by the hospitality of our sponsors. I spoke about Prem Dan in three churches and one school. It was wonderful experience to meet the sponsors personally. I could not help noticing the empty streets compared with Bombay. The gardens parks and playground were innumerable and the cleanliness I wish Prem Dan had a corner in this beautiful country. My thanks to all of you dear friends but especially to Philippa Merchant and Peter Clements who organized this trip. In the history of Prem Dan Australia was the first country, which started the sponsorship programme, and Philippa Merchant was the first organizer. Thanks a million Philippa for your love dedication and perseverance. The Australian sponsors gave me another big surprise. They made it possible for me to spend 10 days with my three sisters who had settled in Perth forty years ago. It was wonderful to meet them and their families and to see their beautiful home.

On the 26th of January our children celebrated Republic Day with the children of the Cumballa Hill High School. Thanks Bapsy for making this possible. They really enjoyed this celebration.

During the first week of March the children of our three schools enjoyed their class picnics to various picnic sites in the city. On March 24, the staff of Prem Dan had a very enjoyable picnic at the Birds Sanctuary in New Bombay.

Next week the final examination will commence. All the children are very busy getting ready for this unhappy event. All the schools will close by the middle of April.

I take this opportunity to send you my Easter Greeting and my Easter Message:

T.S. Eliot, in "Dry Salvages," characterizes the modern world as one where we have "the experiences but nit the meaning." As I reflect on this, I wonder if Easter is not a time when we have a meaning but not experience. Most of us know what Easter means because the meaning has been part of the culture for centuries, but have we truly experienced Resurrection and New Life?

It is easy to attend Easter services. They are comfortable and familiar, and I understand what is happening. What is harder is to experience the Easter event as 'right-here-now' rather than as something that happened 'back-there-then.' But if Easter is to have a living meaning, not just a remembered meaning, it must find a home in our experience. Where is Jesus right now?

Jesus is present in those who need us when we would like to let go. Jesus is present in the dignity of each person, even in those who wound our dignity. Jesus is present providing an inner strength to live when it seems easier to give up or move on. Jesus is present wherever we are, whoever we are, inviting us to become what we might be. These experiences are the beginning of Resurrection-right now. Today is the day to experience the Resurrection.

I wish each one of you A Very Happy Easter with God's choicest blessing and graces.

Yours gratefully in Jesus and Mary,

(SISTER FELICITY MORRIS)