



a new home in the world for young adults

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I realize now that it is six months since I last wrote an update on what has been happening at shuktara. I knew that it had been a long time, but didn't know that six months had passed - and so quickly. So much has been happening that I really have not had the time to sit down and actually put 'pen to paper' so to speak.



LULA GIBSON 1952-2012

Mike and Lula Gibson walked into the shuktara house in Calcutta way back at the beginning when we had a small flat, a few boys and very little money. From then on Mike and Lula encouraged and supported us and introduced new friends not only to me, but to shuktara. Before going to the UK in October last year I had already been informed by Mike that Lula had become very ill and I was lucky enough to go and visit them and spend some time alone with Lula. Lula died on Monday 19th November suddenly and without pain. Below is the birthday appeal she wrote three weeks before she died....

"I had intended to have a really spectacular 60th Birthday Party. Then this ghastly brain tumour made its presence known and my party went out of the window. The last 3 months have been a very negative and depressing experience so let's make something positive out of all this and make something good happen!!"

Before Lula died Mike was able to tell her that the home for girls that we are in the process of buying will be known as Lula's House (in Bengali "Lula Bari") - keeping the memory of her love and compassion alive in the country that she loved so much. If you want to support Lula's dream please go to www.justgiving.com/Lula-Gibson

So now, just over one year after moving in to the Boys House we are still searching for the elusive home for girls. Every weekend Pappu visits at least two or three different places in the hope that one of them will be right. So far, we have come across devious landlords and money grabbing brokers - but we all have great hope that it will come very soon, just as the home for boys did. The home for girls - Lula Bari, will always be small as we do not expect to take many more girls, but for Lali, Tamina and Prity it will be their home for life, as they are unable to care for themselves and this is, in my mind, what shuktara has always been about. It reminds me of Ratan, coming to us just over one year ago. This is why I started shuktara - to care for children with disabilities who have no family to care for them. Look at Ratan now - one year on.



We were able to welcome Christy Smith back in December 2012 for a two month visit to concentrate working mainly with the girls. Christy is our shuktara volunteer coordinator, seeking out the perfect interns to work with us. We only take deaf volunteers (or people with knowledge of sign language) at shuktara, so that the young people here can gain more experience and knowledge in communication. It is always such a delight to see them all communicating together in their own language and I still wish I was more proficient in sign.



DAVID & CHRISTY

About two years ago Alain Cojean first came to Calcutta and spent some very special days with the shuktara boys and Pappu. He was so touched by what he saw here and so inspired by Pappu's work with them that he decided to start a bakery/patisserie training centre to help with their employment and training. Alain has a chain of restaurants in Paris called Cojean and a Foundation aptly named "nourrir, aimer, donner " – (EAT LOVE GIVE) which has already supported other projects around the world.

So Shuktara Cakes was born. Seven of the older boys have been training and working in the factory since Alain came with a team including Fabien Rouillard, Head Executive Pastry Chef from Fauchon, Paris and on 8th March, Shuktara Cakes was officially launched at The French Consulate by the Consul General of France in Kolkata. Production will start on 1st May, and a client group has been sourced by Alain and his contacts. Before then, Alain, Fabien and Florence will return for another session and oversee the initial production. Then the boys will be on their own, with Somnath and Pappu managing them. We hope that once the centre comes to profit that the boys will be able to take this over as their own business.



SHUKTARA CAKES TEAM

Obviously our thanks goes to Alain for believing in the boys who for so many years have been struggling to find work. It was a proud moment for me to see them all at the French Consulate in their uniforms serving the cakes, which they made themselves, to Calcutta society. I am sure under the guidance of Alain and Fabien they will be able to make a really successful enterprise.



THE BOYS AT THE FRENCH CONSULATE

Now you can see why I have taken so long to write an update – it has been so busy here with the preparations for the factory, the delivery of imported and local goods to set everything up and of course the daily tasks of running the home. Since Ratan came it has really given me a new lease of life in terms of shuktara and why we are here. He is a bundle of joy and to be greeted daily by his smiling face makes the difficulties of living in Calcutta fade away.

David Earp