



It was in October 1998 that Alison Saracena, Bryan Forst and I left our respective homes in San Francisco and London to head to Kolkata and start something that we had discussed for a long time, working with young people with disabilities. Nothing worked out as we had planned and we ended up teaching typing and computer skills to youngsters in Alison and Bryan's flat. I lived below them on Southern Avenue, here in Kolkata.

On the 1st July 1999, I received a call to say there were two young men who were being moved from child care to adult care in a home outside Kolkata and people had heard that we wanted to work with young people just like this - would I meet them.

I met Anna and Sunil. I brought them back to the flat below Alison and Bryan and as I was explaining where they would sleep and eat - I turned around and realised it was me and the boys alone in the flat.

That was the beginning of shuktara and today we celebrate 21 years. Celebrate, for me, is perhaps not the best word to describe today, because as you know Anna died in October 2018 and we had our 20th anniversary last year, our first without him.

There are so many wonderful memories and knowing Anna has changed my life in many ways. I truly believe we were connected in some magical, spiritual way and that we both helped to heal each other. I miss him every day.

A wonderful friend wrote to me last week saying this:
"On the day of the eclipse I woke up thinking that you and Anna are the same soul. That he came into your life as Anna to teach you unconditional love and that he has gone back to spirit now so that you can learn to open your heart to love yourself as much as you loved him."

We will have a low key ceremony in memory of Anna at the boys house, now known as Anna Bari, with a white floral garland draped around his photo and simple white cotton covering the space.

This year due to lockdown only the staff and shuktara young people will celebrate our Founders Day, the boys at Anna Bari and the girls at Lula Bari. As usual there will be delicious mutton curry and payesh (Bengali rice-based pudding).

We also celebrate Raju's birthday on 1st July, the day he chose - as with almost all of our young people, we don't know his actual day of birth. In the evening I will take a Happy Birthday Raju cake to the girls to spend some time at their home on this very special occasion.



We are all learning how to move forward and adjust to life during the pandemic. This year our celebration is smaller, quieter and more personal however we believe it is important to mark this milestone of shuktara's anniversary, as well as Raju's birthday and Anna's passing. Along with everyone at shuktara I would like to thank you for your continued support and assure you that everyone at shuktara is fine.

Stay safe and stay well.

David



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Shuktara provides a home for life for children and young adults with disabilities in Kolkata, India, who have no family.

shuktara.org

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