



Bill Dean, volunteer from USA, enjoys being the Basketball coach as well as teaching English, Oct. 2011

I stayed in the field of education (high school and middle school teaching, training teachers, directing an academic enrichment program for 8th graders in Boston public schools, and most recently coaching teachers on effective strategies for teaching English Language Learners).

I'm excited about an upcoming trip to the school in January; I hope to organize a reunion with my former students and hear how their time at the Fabindia School affected them. The modern age of Facebook has made it possible to get in contact and exchange photos of each other and our little children!

Julia Sommer, Brooklyn, NY, USA (who former students will remember as Julie Didí)

First Teaching Days in India by Bill Dean

I approach my first teaching day at The Fabindia School with all the nervousness of an entering first grader. At the farm where I am staying, I rise at 6am to a splendid view of the Aravali Mountains. By car along a dirt road, we encounter farmers on the narrow road with cows and water buffalo. On to the main square of Padarla, to await a yellow Fabindia School bus. On the bus I am enthusiastically greeted by forty young Fabindia students in their green school uniforms. So much energy so early in the morning.

In my first class, I share my experience of discovering Keats' poetry for the first time. I call upon students to read poems aloud and insist that they stand straight, look out at their classmates and not bury their face in the book, follow the poet's punctuation which means pausing at the end of a line only if warranted to do so by the punctuation, and project their voices.

Rishiraj, Vaishali, Pooja, Yash, Akshay, Naushad, Ahmed, Raza and Khushboo, with other boys and girls, call me teacher, a designation giving me great pleasure.

Bill Dean is a retired lawyer from NYC, NY, USA who is a volunteer teacher at the school for six weeks this fall.

PUTNEY STUDENT TRAVEL GROUP 2011 by Amanda Cross



Amanda Cross playing games with Fabindia students

This past July the school once again hosted a group of US high school students as part of Putney Student Travel Community Service program in India. We thank them for their hard work to build lovely paths connecting the school buildings during the height of summer.

Traveling to India this past summer was an unforgettable experience. Rajasthan and New Delhi were a whirlwind of bus rides, trains, and masses of people surrounded by jumbled noises. This is what I had expected India to be. But when I arrived in Bali Village to volunteer at The Fabindia School, I felt that I was discovering what India is really about.

What struck me was the relatively simple lifestyle filled with happiness. I live in a place so contrary to this, one where we crave true happiness and do anything and everything to find it. But I saw it everywhere in Bali Village and at The Fabindia School, in stranger's smiles and children's laughter.

I was discouraged at first by the heat and tough work of building the pathways, but it was interacting with everyone at Fabindia that quickly made this job enjoyable. Seeing how much the students appreciated our presence and their desire to become our friends made coming to Fabindia feel like anything but work.

Amanda Cross, 12th grade student at The Hotchkiss School, Lakeville, CT, USA

New Video on The Fabindia School

Visit the link below to see a 5 minute video of the Putney Student Travel/Fabindia School program:

<http://goputney.com/2011/10/21/putney-premiere-community-service-india-video/>



Shefali Jain in her Loomis Chaffee sports uniform

From September to March, Shaily Jain and Shefali Jain, two 11th grade students from The Fabindia School are attending one of the top American schools, Loomis Chaffee, in Windsor, CT, USA. Loomis is well-known for being academically rigorous and the girls are taking full advantage of this incredible experience. Shaily and Shefali share many similarities. Both are from the Jain community, joined The Fabindia School at age 2 1/2, were elected by their peers and teachers to serve on the Fabindia School Student Council, are top in their class, intend to have a career as a Chartered Accountant, and adore The Fabindia School. As life long school friends, the two are like sisters, sharing a dorm room at Loomis and taking care of each other.

20 YEARS OF PROMOTING GIRLS EDUCATION

When the Fabindia School started 20 years ago, all girls were given a 50% subsidy to promote girls education. Rajasthan had one of the lowest female literacy rates in the country. People were reluctant to invest in high quality education for girls. However, over the years, we have noticed a remarkable shift in attitudes, as more parents have started seeing the value of educating their daughters. Many today do not need a subsidy to send their girls to school. Therefore, in keeping with the changing times, the school has revised its policy to focus on need-based scholarships for those students who come from marginalized communities or economically disadvantaged families. At the same time, the school continues to provide 25-40% tuition subsidization for all girls up to Class III. Generous donations to the scholarship program provide critical support to help the school maintain its inclusive character, bringing in children from lower castes and lower socio-economic groups while striving for full gender equity.

FUNDING GIRLS SCHOLARSHIPS

For over two decades, the school has provided a top quality, English medium education to more than 7,000 rural youth with scholarships and financial aid given to 3,000 girls. Considering that five years ago only 5% of girls in the central regions of Rajasthan completed their secondary schooling, this is a remarkable feat. It would not have been possible without the forward thinking of a dedicated group of generous donors who have contributed to the John Bissell Scholars Fund since its establishment in 2001.

The Fabindia School was established by William and John Bissell who saw the need for a model school to empower young people in rural Rajasthan where literacy rates are extremely low, especially among women. From the beginning the school has been committed to encouraging education for girls in a region where most parents who can afford an English medium school would send only their sons. To encourage and promote female students, the school subsidizes their tuition and provides need-based scholarships. Started in 1992 with 11 students, the school now has almost 1,000 students. The John Bissell Scholars Fund was established in the year 2001 in memory of John Bissell. Its purpose is to support scholarships for female students. For comments or further information about the fund, contact Katherine Allen at k.allen@fabindia.net or write to the following address:

JOHN BISSELL SCHOLARS FUND

P. O. Box 1, Collinsville, CT 06022, USA

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THE FABINDIA SCHOOL

Newsletter

Fall 2011

LETTER FROM THE PRINCIPAL



Principal Parinita Ranpal with the Student Council - July 2011

Dear Friends,

Next year, on February 10th, The Fabindia School will officially celebrate its twentieth anniversary during our Annual Day school function. Thanks to all our well-wishers and supporters, the school has come a long way since its inception in 1992. From the first batch of 11 students, today we have almost 1,000 students from pre-school through Class XII with 40% female enrollment.

Affiliated with the Indian Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), the school recently added grades XI and XII. The results have been consistently good with all students passing the board exams without exception. It is a matter of pride that the school enables even the weakest child to succeed. For this achievement, I must thank all the teachers who have worked with love and dedication to meet the learning needs of each child. The proof of the pudding is the alumni, many of whom have found good jobs across the country. Some of them have even come back to the school as teachers!

Over the years, the school has invested in better infrastructure and facilities to accommodate the steady growth. From a single classroom block, today the main school has six classroom buildings, a library, computer lab and an administration building. There are also five feeder schools for pre-primary classes in different locations. The improved facilities include four school buses, wifi, a basketball court, playground, rain water harvesting and a solar array.

A regular stream of volunteers ensures that Fabindians get

opportunities to interact with people from all over the world and learn about their countries, while teaching them about Rajasthan and India. The last year has also seen new opportunities for exposure with students attending summer school and semester abroad programs at two of the top private schools in the US, Hotchkiss and Loomis Chaffee. I take this opportunity to thank the staff of these two schools for their generous financial support to make these amazing opportunities possible for our students. They have welcomed our students and taken exceptional care of them.

It has been a privilege to be associated with the school and see it evolve over the last six years. However, the school still faces several challenges. Foremost is the need for more classrooms. Just imagine, twenty years ago, our teachers had to go from home to home persuading parents to send their daughters to school. Today our classrooms are bursting at the seams and we do not have the heart to turn away a child eager to come to school and learn.

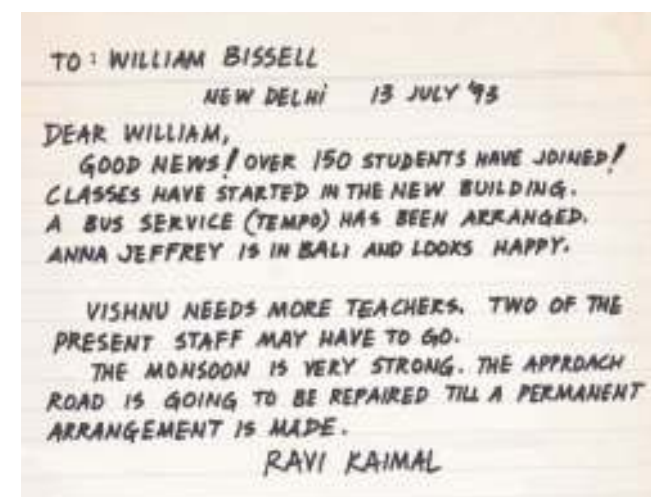
Investing in continuous teacher training and development is another critical need for creating a learning environment and improving the quality of education. Infrastructure is futile without skilled and compassionate teachers who can inspire young minds and take them on a voyage of discovery.



Students from Class XI sharing a prize they won during the welcome party at the beginning of the new school year - July 2011

I believe that together we can overcome these challenges and find new opportunities for The Fabindia School and its student body to shine and lead the way to the next 20 years.

Parinita Ranpal, Principal, The Fabindia School



Editor's Note: Anna Jefferys was the first foreign teacher at the school, visiting from England. Vishnu Kant was the first school Principal.

and is responsible for the design of the school buildings. He is also Chairman of Bhadrajun Artisans Trust (BAT), the non-profit, tax-exempt charitable society founded by William Bissell which established the school in 1992 and continues to help guide the school and provide financial support.

The first block was designed to be built using maximum local materials and local skills, so that it could be done with the least cost and time. The buildings are made almost entirely of stone available in the local area, and there is no wood used as wood is expensive and vulnerable there. This also came close to Mahatma Gandhi's approach of using only materials which were locally available. So our buildings are very much of their place, geography, climate and people. They are also optimized for their function, with very little energy being used.

This photo is from the hot summer of 1992 and the start of digging for the foundations of the first block at the school in Bali. The earth was so hard that water-bought from a farmer- had to be poured on it to break it! As you can see, the land was barren and there was no soft greenery, only thorny bushes.



Breaking earth for the first block - Contractor Narayan ba, 1992

Ravi Kaimal has been involved with the school since the first brainstorming discussions with John and William Bissell. Ravi is a professional architect

REFLECTIONS ON THE EARLY DAYS OF THE FABINDIA SCHOOL by Kamini Prakash

I visited the school in October 2011 to speak to alumni and teachers about the early days of The Fabindia School.

Amara, who makes chai and is really the school's institutional memory, dug out a carton full of old school photographs. He then took me on a journey of the school in the 1990's, pointing out and naming the different teachers and students and telling his story of the school.

Many pictures are in black and white and capture the spirit and excitement of these years. You can see that there was a huge focus on learning by doing, experimenting, playing, field trips and conducting classes outdoors in nature. The children look happy and the body language of students, teachers and parents speaks of an informal and equal relationship based on respect. It was lovely to see students sitting under a tree for assembly, dancing around a teacher, and climbing on trees. There is one picture of a student, Tara, in Champabagh with a big smile on her face. Today, some 20 years later, her daughter is in the same class in Champabagh.

I also met with Nimendra Raj Singh, an alumni from the first batch who helped me to get in touch with the rest of the batch and find out where they are today and how the school impacted their lives. The school can certainly be proud of this first batch of graduates. I think the greatest testimony is that the school gave the students the freedom to be who they wanted to be, to discover their true calling and have the confidence to pursue it.



Teacher Suman Dubey with students at the playground area 1995

Pushpa Jha, a teacher in Champabagh from 1992 – 2010 told me more about the way learning was transacted: "...we did not use books or give homework. Instead we used to play games and used the method of show and tell. For assessments, we never took exams. Instead we used to observe the children and write regular reports noting their speaking ability, enunciation, their activities, their knowledge in Hindi, Math and English. We knew every child and his/her needs and motivated students with appreciation and love." Clearly the emphasis was on building a supportive environment and a trusting relationship between teachers and children that made effective learning possible.

"This was never a job for me," she said. "It was always a joy coming to school and caring for the children. I looked after this place like my home."

And guess what? Fabindians are now on Facebook! Look up fabindians:) – there are 104 friends so far and lots of recent excitement, with classmates and volunteers rediscovering each other after so many years.

Kamini Prakash works for a youth organization in New Delhi and is the Secretary of Bhadrajun Artisans Trust (BAT) – the New Delhi based non-profit organization founded by William Bissell which oversees The Fabindia School. The board members of BAT are dedicated to creating a visionary school which continues to be a model for high-quality rural education in India.



Teacher Pushpa Jha and her class, 2010

CLASS OF 1998 – THE FIRST BATCH OF GRADUATES

- Himanshu Mehta received a Bachelors of Engineering in Electronics followed by an MBA. He is working in Noida, UP.
- Nitin Bhandari received a Bachelors of Engineering in Computer Sciences followed by an MBA. He is a brand manager with the Bajaj company in Mumbai.
- Surubhi Sharma describes herself on Facebook as the “first girl of the first batch.” She went on to receive a Masters in English Literature and is currently doing a B. Ed. She lives in Mumbai.
- Parag Sharma is a senior software engineer in Bangalore.
- Nikhil Jain received a Bachelors of Engineering followed by an MBA. Today he is a telecom consultant in Pune.
- Dilip Rajpurohit completed his MBBS and is a doctor in Pali, Rajasthan.
- Nimendra Raj Singh is an assistant engineer with the Electricity Board in Falna, Rajasthan. He is also a member of The Fabindia School management board.
- Sharad Jain graduated from the Centre for Learning in Bangalore and started an alternative school three years ago called Shibumi in Bangalore.
- Kranali Rajpurohit graduated from Mumbai University and worked with a real estate agent for many years. She plans to start a business in computers.
- Marc Loon was a volunteer teacher from South Africa in the 1990's. He founded and runs an alternative school in Johannesburg called the Kairos School.



*Back row (left to right): Himanshu Mehta, Nitin Bhandari, Surubhi Sharma, Parag Sharma
Front row: Nikhil Jain, Dilip Rajpurohit, Nimendra Raj Singh, Sharad Jain, Kranali Rajpurohit
Volunteer: Marc Loon (in the centre)*

Alumni Reflections

"Every year the students used to organize an entrepreneurship fair and market. We had to come up with an idea and market it. I remember bringing my cycle and offering people a ride in exchange for money. Others sold food items or made other things that could be sold. It taught us about managing money, profit and loss." **(Nimendra Raj Singh)**



Nimendra Raj Singh

"I have never seen a school that gave us so much freedom – freedom to be who we wanted to be and do what we wanted to do. I attribute what I am today and my success to The Fabindia School. My analytical abilities, my communication skills, my critical thinking; it is all thanks to the school." **(Nikhil Jain)**

"Today I am able to stand on my own feet. The school taught me that I do not have to prove myself to others and do what society expects of me. Instead I do what I think is right. For example, everyone expected me to pursue an MBA, but I wanted to teach English literature and so did my post graduation in literature.

I remember going for walks to the forest area – there was a silent zone where we used to sit for an hour quietly, eyes closed, listening to the sounds, ... there were lots of animals, nilgai, snakes, birds, buffaloes. Library time was special. I had never seen so many books. Charley and the Chocolate Factory was my favorite. In my previous school in Falna, my maths teacher was very strict and used to beat us. I hated Maths. But in The Fabindia School, all the teachers were so supportive, they helped me to get over my phobia of Maths." **(Surubhi Sharma)**

"The Fabindia School started as an alternative school. I got the best of what it had to offer. I remember participating in a workshop facilitated by Nandita Das (now a famous actress) and discovering my passion for theatre. Volunteers, such as Julie Sommer and Clare Saunders, built the foundations of my knowledge of English. Today, when I read to the students in my school, I often remember them. I really want to thank William and Ravi today. As a student, I often used to tell them that if I did not get a job because of this “weird” school, they would have to give me a job at Fabindia selling cloth! Today I know that the school helped me to find my true calling, inspiring me to become a teacher and start a school in Bangalore." **(Sharad Jain)**

After studying in the Lodha School (Falna) till the 8th grade, Meenal joined The Fabindia School in 1999 and graduated from the 10th grade in 2001. She then left for Kota where she studied science and, like many of her classmates, did her college degree in Engineering. After graduating, she worked for IBM in Pune for 3 years. This year she moved to Bayer in Mumbai where she works in the IT department as an application developer and trainer for SAP ABAP.

Meena recalls her days at The Fabindia School fondly:

"The bus ride was very long – almost 1 ½ hours each way. The school day was also longer than most schools and packed with activities. There were lots of physical activities like jogging, yoga, games and also extra curricular activities, like pottery. I guess what I liked best about the school was that it maintained a balance between studies on the one hand and fun and sports on the other.

We were only 5 girls in a class of 20. The teachers were good and gave us a lot of personal attention. My favorite teacher was Surender sir who taught us history. When I was in the 10th grade, Mr. Jayant Biswas joined as the new Principal. He made many changes in the curriculum placing more emphasis on studies – especially for the 10th grade – as we needed to get ready for the board exams. He discouraged us from using the exam guides (the normal practice for students) and showed us how to study using the prescribed NCERT books. It paid off – I got 85% in my exams and never looked back.

PHOTO GALLERY: THEN & NOW



The approach road to school was often flooded during the monsoons so teachers helped children cross the river to reach the school



Today the school owns four buses to transport the students and the approach road has been re-built to withstand the rains



Foundation of the Third Classroom Block 1996



Latest Construction Project - Administrative Building 2011



Teacher Neelamfi



Assembly under a tree 1995



The assembly today



Class XI with their English teacher and school Principal Parinita Ranpal



Early Days - A Teachers Workshop Under the Trees



New Playground built by Putney Student Travel volunteers in July 2010



Prince, the science teacher with students Meghna and Khusbho



Teachers Appreciation Day at Kumbhalgarh Fort 2011