

My life in the villages

by Talina Brehm

My wish was it to travel after school to a country that is completely different from my home country. I wanted to know how people live in simple, original circumstances, without much money and without the luxury that we are exposed to every day. I wanted to know how other people are doing in another world. Even though I didn't think in advance that I would wash my clothes with my hands for four months, that there were actually no refrigerators in the villages, or that the water was pumped up from the earth with water pumps, I had the inner need to know all these things unknown to me at the time.

I would like to give you an insight into my time, into the villages, the Santalschool RSV, but also into my feelings towards the big, far away country India.

I have lived in a nice room in the girls' hostel and did many different things during my time. I had the opportunity to get to know the village life from different perspectives. I was at health check-ups and home visits, helped with cooking in a neighboring village called Rindanga and worked with my fellow volunteers Annalena and Johannes in the garden. However, my real work was to teach the RSV children and the teenagers from the hostel, as well as the young people in the neighbouring village Bishnubati.

Twice a week I taught the third and fourth grades. We tinkered, sang, made eurythmy (a subject of Waldorf School, a kind of dancing) and played. The children were adorable and I had a very nice time with them. It was always very nice to see how much joy the children had and this was very contagious. We really liked each other and every time they saw me outside of class time, some of them came to me to tell me with hand movements or simple words that they would like to play this and that game with me again.

It was also interesting to see how the teachers of the Santal School designed their lessons. With a lot of movement, but also concentrated learning, the lessons were a good mixture of joy and success. What impressed me most was that most Santal children learn fluent Bengali within six years, so that they can go to a Bengali school from fifth grade onwards. This quickly made me understand why English isn't a big deal in the villages. However, it is a pity that almost all young people can hardly speak English after many years of English lessons.

At the beginning I gave the teenagers English lessons, but when I showed them acrobatic exercises in their spare time, many were enthusiastic about it and we started to practice partner acrobatics twice a week.

They have come together as couples. The smaller ones performed exercises on the legs of the larger ones, which can only be mastered with the right posture and body tension.

In the beginning, it wasn't that easy. They laughed while falling and falling again, but grasp the courage anew and moved into the position of flying. Some were not afraid, tried again and again and quickly made progress. Others had many self-doubts and fear of trusting the other one. But within a few hours the more anxious ones also realized that they have the skills to do so and put down their self-critical attitude. When I was standing next to one or the other couple, the shouts "Talina di!" came from the other sides and I could look into radiant faces while they were exercising "Fly" or "Seat". And the most beautiful thing was that the teenagers shouted "Talina di!" every time, even when they had been able to do the exercises for weeks, to show me that they can do it and to get confirmation that I really saw it. I was amazed how quickly the teenagers found their way into acrobatics, how eagerly, with joy, they mastered one exercise after another.

Three times we had the opportunity to perform our performance and the spectators in Bishnubati and at school were always very enthusiastic and I was very proud of my "hostels".

Through the partner acrobatics I got the opportunity to get to know each of the hostel students personally and I am very grateful for that. Because it is not easy to get to know people in a community where only a few can speak a bit of English. I wanted to understand the people, to laugh with them, to be part of the community. And the only way to get in touch with the children and teenagers were the hours when I guided things, thought things out. I couldn't just sit down and chat. Whenever I came, all eyes were on me. "What happened?" was already shouted at me when I wasn't there yet and I would have liked to say "nothing, I just want to sit down with you, understand your language and laugh along".

I learned a lot during my time in the villages. About people and their traditions, but also about myself. Because there were different people who were responsible for me in different areas, I often had to repeat my concerns or didn't know who to turn to. For this reason, there were times when I felt misunderstood and alone, because I would have liked to have a contact person who would have followed my situation and with whom I could exchange my feelings and responsibilities at regular intervals.

Right at the beginning, I was advised not only to be in the villages, but also to travel a little to get to know the cities of India. And I am very grateful to have gained this experience, because the Indian villages and cities are really two different worlds.

Today, after my time, I can say that I think of India as an incredibly fascinating, unique and impressive country. On the one hand, I love the country, all the many colours, the people who are busy everywhere, the animals everywhere, the simplicity with so many things, no serious rules on the road, open doors on buses and trains. But on the other hand I was often intimidated, surprised and strained at the beginning of my journey through India. The big poverty, the role of women and many people in a confined space, the low distance and the strong assertiveness were often overwhelming for me and sometimes I had to adapt to the behaviors that I did not want to support in order to be able to prevail.

Nevertheless, when I think back to my time, I will always have a smile on my lips. I am incredibly grateful for this time because it was simply unique.



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The partner acrobatics performance on the Museum Day



Making boxes with the children of the RSV school



Doctor's visits to the surrounding villages

.. and a few more village impressions..



