



SOCIETY OF JESUS AGRICULTURAL & SOCIAL INSTITUTE (SOJASI)
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Summer 2011

PEACE !!



JOY !!



LOVE !!



Dear Friends:

I feel like Rip Van Winkle after his long sleep, or like a bear coming out of hibernation. But being up at SOJASI—where I am now—is a delightful way to wake up. It's such a boost to my 85-year-old heart to witness the resurrection of the 5-year-death of the old SASAC II and to see Ben's Training centre back doing its thing. Sixteen hundred square meter beds that were full of Himalayan weeds for years are now full of vegetables of many varieties. Getting the beds back into production took a lot of sweat and hard work. Our soil is on the clayish side and five monsoons have made it as hard as cement.

Actually, taking a stroll down memory lane, thirty years ago when I was watching twenty women pounding at that tough soil for hours on end to get ready for planting the two crops that could flourish in our high altitude climate—potatoes and a huge radish—that I decided to come up and train our people in the square meter gardening method. Our plastic covers protect our soil from being turned into cement by our four-month monsoon. Now our soil is always soft enough to be turned over with a little hand fork—and I'm no longer being haunted by women pounding their lives away eight hours a day. Because all hill farmers grown potatoes and radish, at harvest time the going price is so low, we were practically giving away our hard labour. Now harvesting twenty two varieties of vegetables, we're getting a much more satisfying result from our much lighter work.



WHENEVER I LOOK AT MY PHOTOS, I CAN'T RESIST STOPPING TO LOOK AT THIS PICTURE OF DIMPLE AND HER HUSBAND AND BABY. DIMPLE (LYNDA) AND HER HUSBAND AND BABY. DIMPLE EPITOMIZES THE WHOLE PURPOSE OF OUR WORK AT SASAC, NOW SOJASI. WHEN DIMPLE'S MOTHER, KUMARI, BROUGHT HER SIX-MONTH OLD DAUGHTER TO US, THE POOR LITTLE THING WAS ALMOST DEAD FROM STARVATION. WE WERE ABLE TO DO FOR HER WHAT JESUS DID, "GIVE HER LIFE AND GIVE IT ABUNDANTLY." DIMPLE IS JUST ONE OF THE THOUSANDS WE SAVED FROM STARVATION. THE LORD BE PRAISED!



THIS IS WHY WHEN VISITING CECILIA'S HOME AT MORNING STAR, I SEE DIMPLE'S FACE IN ALL OF HER CHILDREN. IT IS A GREAT CONSOLATION AND COMFORT FOR ME TO SEE SASAC COME BACK TO LIFE IN SOJASI SO WE CAN GIVE MANY MORE CHILDREN "LIFE AND GIVE IT ABUNDANTLY". INDEED THE LORD IS GOOD.

It has always surprised me how many times in my 60 years working for and with the poor, how often a happening thought was a tragedy turned out to be a gift from the Lord. I'm thinking now how discouraged I was when we had to close down the poultry because of the threat of avian flu which is still causing poultry tragedies all over India. But it was that catastrophe that led us to mushroom cultivation. Poultry is very tricky, risky business. Hybrid birds are susceptible to more diseases than there are words in a dictionary. Then you have to market them in a few days or you end up delighting your customers with rotten eggs. And there's nothing that makes a market deader than a door nail (why not coffin nail??) than a rotten egg. Besides almost every villager keeps a few local chickens and since they subsist on a few grains of rice over dirty plates, is perfectly willing to sell them almost for a song.

And I can't pay our poor workers with songs even if I out-croon Crosby and Sinatra—as you know I do, especially in the shower. Our local hens, though disease resistant, lay one egg every fourth day. But a hen has to lay 8 eggs every 10 days or I'll have to start paying my customers by letting them hear me crooning in the shower. (I'd make recording of that an aural delight, but you know how shy I am—and modest!)

Though much has been done, much remains to be done. Cecilia was showing me some of the places where she has to do some repairing and building. It took me 50 years to get all the branches of SASAC functioning: they can't be put back together in five days. But Ceci and Co. are on their way.

God's choicest blessings on you all. Getting in touch with you again has been for me like a delightful old home's week!

Yours as always in Him, Fr.A.s.j.



FIRST COMMUNION DAY FOR THE CHILDREN AND CECILIA!