



February 2009

Dear Friends,

After the trying first trimester, we did settle down into a good but busy second trimester. Most of the children have settled into the routine of the school and have figured out how to get the most out of their classes.

The most common teaching method here is to read a chapter aloud to the children, write the questions and answers on the board, and have the children copy the board work into their notebooks. Then children are supposed to go home and memorize the information, but what typically happens is that one week before exams the entire city youth population is suddenly busy cramming all the information they've copied down in class for the last three months. It doesn't matter much if you understand what you are memorizing. You just learn it word for word and write it down on the exam paper. What this means is that you really don't have to pay attention at all in class; you don't even have to understand what's being taught. You just have to copy letter by letter so that you can cram it later.

In our school we try to teach in class itself so the children must learn to pay attention. If children have studied in other schools, this skill takes a while to acquire. But it is beautiful to see a child who finally figures it out. One day one of these mind-wandering children will suddenly pop up with a correct answer in class, surprising everybody, including the kid. There are always big smiles all around and then the child is usually off and running. We've had several breakthroughs this term.

One reason we've had an extra-busy term is that we have an extra-special children's performance coming up. It will take place next Saturday, February 7th. One of my parent's friends, Mrs. Jeanie Miller, has become a patron of the school. She is founder and president of International Ambassadors of Music, an organization that promotes world-class music education to children around the world. Last year Jeanie got the idea to come to our school, bring some musical instruments, and teach music to the children. Her time here would culminate with a public performance. After months of planning and preparation, her dream is now becoming a reality. Jeanie and another music teacher, Barbara Harrison, have arrived in Banaras; yesterday was their first day with the children. (It went very well!) We plan to perform a musical, a story based on a fish who wanders from school to see what life is like outside the ocean. In the end he returns to school having learned his lesson: the best place for a fish is in school. Included in the story will be plenty of songs, dances, circus tricks, and jokes.

We got permission to stage the performance at a very popular spot on the bank of the Ganges River, so in addition to the estimated 500 people who would normally attend our program we will have several additional onlookers. We are busy finalizing arrangements for the stage, sound, lights, photography, costumes, set design, and of course learning music and practicing for the musical itself. It's been overwhelming organizing everything; we have a cast list of 140 kids.

This will be our most ambitious children's performance ever. We have definitely graduated from our first grand and glorious event which took place with 20 children under the tree in front of my house in 2005.

Please pray for the success of this performance, most of all that the children and their parents would enjoy the show, that our main characters would not get sick, and that the spectators would be favorably impressed by our school. Also pray for stamina and health for Jeanie and Barbara as they have a busy week in a foreign place.

I have included an invitation to the show; you're welcome to come!!! One of our students drew the fish on the invitation. I think he did a great job.

Thank you for your prayers, love, Connie

