

January 2012

Dear Friends,

A couple weeks ago, a friend wrote and said, "I haven't heard much about how the school is doing. Would it be possible to get an update?" I thought, "I just sent out a (pretty long!) letter. Maybe he didn't receive it." But when I started to think about what had happened since that last letter, I realized, "maybe I do need to send out an update; there's a lot going on!" So here's the scoop:



Just before Christmas, Asha Deep Vidyashram administered its 2nd term exams; I can hardly believe that the year is two-thirds over. Due to cold weather, school was closed for two weeks in early January, but now the students are back at work, studying in the last term of this school year.

Besides study, preparations are revving up for our annual song, dance, and drama extravaganza. Those of you who have been following our news for some time will recognize the name of *Performers Without Borders* (PWB). This rotating group of Europeans comes to India every year spending a month each with four different schools to teach underprivileged children various circus skills such as juggling, acrobatics, poi, diabolo, clowning, and the like. Last year they added fire dancing (for older children only!) to the mix. We are lucky; this will be the 4th year PWB will teach at our school. Just yesterday, teachers and students, as well as their friends and families, enjoyed an initial PWB performance at the school. After three weeks of hard practice (some during school hours and some after school), our kids will sing, dance, act, joke, and juggle their hearts out in front of a crowd topping 1,000 on February 18. This month of preparation is a lot of work, but it has been pivotal in bringing that special family feeling in our school every year. We try to get everyone involved. It's one of the best ways to help the children see the fruits of working hard together to produce something for others. So far, it's been a great success and we are hoping for the same this year. (These photos are from last year's show.)



This video is almost ten minutes long, but, if you have the time, I would highly recommend following this link to learn more about PWB and what they did in our school last year. The video shows some of last year's practice and public performance as well as interviews with five Asha Deep students. Check it out!
<http://www.performerswithoutborders.org.uk/video-VAR-2011.html>

In other news, we have hired two new teachers. One of them will replace our English teacher who had to quit due to her marriage last November. We have also hired a new 4th grade teacher because the current teacher was trying to teach as well as take care of administrative and public relations business (he is one of the teachers in charge in my absence). We needed to lighten his load! So, we will have two new teachers in the final term of the year. Let's hope they learn the ropes quickly and fit in well to become a part of our teaching team.

Some great news is that our volunteer English teacher, Sarah Hivner (pictured at right with Nitu Jha, our Junior Vice Principal), has stated her desire to remain at the school for a second year. She has been doing a fantastic job taking over many of the classes I used to teach. I am so happy that she is willing and able to stay. The continuity of her presence there will be so important. I recently found out that she is keeping a blog. Some of her entries have just to do with the sometimes absurd life in Banaras, but she has some nice vignettes of her time at the school and interaction with some of the children. You can read one of her articles related to the school at: <http://namastesate.blogspot.com/2012/01/i-can-speak-english-now.html>. From there you can go to other articles/photos if you wish.



In other news, the founder of the school, Amrita Chaturvedi, is planning to move back to Banaras in July. She has a PhD in education, and she will be able to raise the quality of teaching at the school by putting a greater emphasis on teacher's training. She will also help with school administration and may teach some of our classes next year.

Thanks to Amrita's persistence over a few years, I just learned that the school has finally received tax-exempt status from the Indian government. This is fantastic news. It means that Indians or Indian organizations who make rupee donations to the school will receive a break on their income tax. Hopefully, this will boost our rupee donations in the coming year.

Finally, I would like to sincerely thank those of you who sent in donations following my last letter. We have received an astounding \$6,600 since that letter went out. Thank you **so much** for your caring response. Your generosity has made it possible for us to continue to serve the midday meal as usual. If any of you meant to give but didn't, we will sure be able to use the money going into March! Details for how to give are shown below.

love,
Connie