

Ramana's Garden Newsletter 2008 Dance Troupe Tour to England

Beloved Friends around the World,

Thanks so much for all the love and support so many of you poured into making this magical mystery tour happen. Each evening as we gather in the dome for singing, prayers and sharing, I offer up a prayer of my own. I pray that I'll be guided in giving these 68 kids what they will need most to make a difference in a world where yesterday, 20 bombs went off in separate locations, and thousands of children are cast into the street or enslaved in child labour daily.

Memories of sitting out under an open sky full of stars with my Grandmother flood over me. She always used to say "Choose a star and make a wish, then hitch your wagon to that star and never let anyone or anything take away your dream cause you know God is pulling your wagon for you." Touring England with our Dance Troupe was a wagonload of dreams coming true for us all.



From the first exciting moment of takeoff in something not one of the kids had seen before -an airplane- to the last moment when they all returned on their own from London, all the way to Rishikesh, each and every second was sparked with magic.

In my past, which seems so far from daily life here in Ramana's Garden, my favorite scene was Blanche's closing line in *A Streetcar Named Desire*:

"I have always depended on the kindness of strangers."

Never has that line had a greater meaning than on this adventure. Complete strangers who saw the kids dance came forward and not only offered us our air tickets but surprised us in London by putting us up in the Marriott. Can you imagine the kids delight when they saw their rooms? We were late for our first booking because they were busy cleaning their rooms so they would look like they did when they entered.

For our first 2 weeks we were hosted by Butlins Resorts. Many thanks to Robert and Jo Seaton who gave their all from the first day to make every moment a success.



Every day was a totally new adventure, from performing Centerstage in the Skyline Pavilions, to performing at the castle where Harry Potter was filmed. Everything was a “first”, from going bowling, to high wire climbing, to meeting a Baroness who flew in by helicopter just to see them perform.



The resort guests were a puzzle for the kids as well. They seemed to have “everything” yet many were so overweight and obviously unhappy slumped over their beers in the pubs? The kids had a variety of reactions, from asking them to please not waste so much food from the buffet, to deciding that they must not feel loved by anyone or they wouldn’t be like they were. So the kids on their own added a song for them to their show,

*“ Love, Love, People we are made for Love,
Love each other as your self,
We love you so...”*

We launched our “Giving it All Back” in Minehead at the Legionnaires Home thanks to a dear old friend, Devapama. A wonderful afternoon of sharing, celebration and tears. Some of the residents in their nineties carried wounds from 65 years ago in India. One of them cried, hugging the kids and telling them that by coming they helped him heal a past he had never been able to come to terms with.

In London the kids had a reality check. Our first performance was in one of London’s toughest schools, Quintin Kynaston. Thanks to their wonderful teacher Matt and his wife Gema who became our London Family.



At Omand Street Children’s Hospital, the largest in the world, our Dance Troupe performed for children in wheelchairs, some with electrodes wired to their brains. Afterwards our friend Simon from Pegasus Children’s Project (www.pegasuschildren.org) opened his big bag of magical instruments from around the world and we had a fantastic Rain Forest jam session. This was one of our favourite moments.

Jivamukti and Special Yoga centres went out of their way to make our kids feel welcomed for a wonderful evening of performing and sharing, then feasting on delicious Indian food cooked up by Panki and her team of friends. YUMMMM!

From there we entered the amazing world of Kids Company (www.kidsco.org.uk). What an extraordinary labour of love from an equally extraordinary woman, Camila Batmanghelidjh. She was a great inspiration for us all as we performed in schools where 62 different languages were spoken.



We performed at another challenging venue, Her Arches Shelter, established to help 1000's of kids rebuild their lives and dreams shattered by the vicious cycle of violence, drugs, and self destruction that holds inner-city London in it's deathly grips today. We all left feeling we just wished we could do more there. To see the difference one daring woman can make has changed all our lives.



We couldn't go all the way to England without Slaying the Dragon, and so on our last day we danced at the indescribable Glastonbury Festival together with 500,000 other people committed to making our world a better, greener and more joyous place to live.

And what was the greatest moment for me? When people would say to the kids, "Oh you must be so sad to have to go back to India after all this." they always replied, "No, we want to go home. We miss Ramana's Garden so much."

Toooooo many thanks for all those who helped make this wagon load of dreams a reality.

Love from all The Ramana's Dreamers

P.S. Another dream is being realized: Chunnu, our first 12+ graduate, has flown from the nest but not far from the tree. He is enrolled in the Film & Media Production Academy in Delhi.

