

CHAPTER 13



Seeing the Krishna Magic at Banabehari Mandir

SARANAGATI 1998–2011



Krishna is present everywhere. So this is magic. Why don't you see Krishna's magic? ... Poor heart, poor magic. See the real magic. If you want to see magic, see Krishna's magic.... Be captivated by the magic Krishna has shown.

—MORNING WALK, DEC. 5, 1976

THE “KRISHNA MAGIC” frequently referenced in Yamuna’s talks and exchanges often related to how strongly she felt the importance of endowing future generations with Krishna *bhakti*, as Srila Prabhupada had so selflessly endowed us. She had an uncanny ability to find the tiniest spark of interest and, with nurturing, patience and love, ignite the fire of devotion within the hearts of others. By applying the cooking metaphor we have previously used, this chapter expands on the principle of “Giving the Gift of *Bhakti* to Others” through the reflections and personal memories of some of the devotees whose spiritual lives became indelibly changed by Yamuna’s association. She was honored to be connected to the lineage of great Acharyas in the line of Lord Chaitanya and encouraged the youth to appreciate the importance of Vaishnava continuity through disciplic succession. Srila Prabhupada had earlier encouraged Yamuna to “just see; just see” by diving into the blissful ocean of devotional practice so carefully preserved and passed down by the previous Acharyas to himself and from Srila Prabhupada to his students. When Yamuna witnessed youthful devotees becoming serious in their devotional lives, as they feelingly reveal in these pages, she would often become emotional by observing this living process of *bhakti* in action. For Yamuna, that was the essence of Krishna’s magic.

The Idealistic Attraction of Saranagati Village in British Columbia

With both the desire and conviction to someday build a temple and ashram for Sri Sri Radha-Banabehari, Yamuna and I studied books and watched

how-to carpentry shows on television and video. Of course, the irony of those productions is that they are just that—productions; and the immaculately clean carpenters who build a kitchen, outbuilding or cabin in a half-hour lull the do-it-yourselfers like us into thinking that the endeavor will be easy, trouble free and cost effective. Not so—as our sore backs, cut-up and calloused hands and empty pockets attested to when we finally fulfilled our cherished goal at Saranagati Village.

“Who Would Want to Live Here?”

At the invitation of Bala Krishna das and his wife Harilila, Yamuna devi first drove up to Saranagati Village in British Columbia during the summer of 1998. Entering Canada from anywhere in Western Washington, you drive east on the TransCanada Highway, which then turns north at Hope. The drive from Hope to Lytton is considered one of the most scenic and beautiful in North America, with its sheer-faced, snow-topped mountains, plunging waterfalls and the rushing Fraser and Thompson rivers. But topographically, everything changes after Lytton, and the high desert landscape takes on a barren, one-dimensional look, with few trees and little attraction. As Yamuna drove toward the entrance to Saranagati Village, she later related that she almost turned back, thinking, “Who would want to live here?” Yet she forged on, turning onto a dirt road which led four miles up into a surprisingly picturesque and pristine valley surrounded by Ponderosa pine and fir forests, which showcased a large lake at its center and a smaller lake on its southern fringe.

The 1,600 acres of the Venables Valley was purchased by the Vancouver



Venables Valley viewed from nearby mountain peak



Saranagati north end

ISKCON temple as its rural satellite program in 1982 and renamed Saranagati Village. Later, a corporation was formed, and shares offered for sale to those who were dedicated to following the path of Krishna Consciousness and were willing to explore simple living and high thinking totally off the grid. Yamuna was at once enchanted by Saranagati Village, and when she returned to Washington, she said, “You can just feel the Holy Name vibrating throughout the valley.” That was enough for me. We purchased a share in August 1998, and in September rented a small house in Ashcroft, a nearby town. Yamuna immediately began meticulously planning an eco straw bale Vastu-designed ashram that would not only conform to rigid Vastu specifications, but would also pass the eagle-eyed BC Building Inspectors, who at the time had never heard of a straw bale house built to code. One of our first duties was purchasing the building-grade straw bales from a farm in Alberta whose wheat was grown, harvested, baled and dried specifically for use in building.

The High Cost of Simple Living

We chose a five-acre plot at the northernmost border of Saranagati Village and hired a draftsman who had experience with straw bale construction. We had previously visited two straw bale houses in the United States, and Yamuna was immovable on any other structural possibilities. She was equally determined to hire a professional Vastu architect, and used her persuasive abilities to convince a famous Maharishi Institute Vastu architect in Iowa to charge \$1,500 rather than his usual \$15,000 for the work. However, as we found to our dismay, harmonizing the concepts of eco straw bale construction with Vastu architecture proved to be a mammoth challenge. Yet Yamuna’s “mantra” throughout the process was that the ashram, initially called Bhakti Kutir, should combine all of the elements of spiritual auspiciousness, using natural and sustainable building materials. Yamuna wrote of the concept to several friends:

Yamuna: Vastu, one of the sixty-four Vaishnava arts, is auspicious architecture. It is both an art and a science which addresses site orientation, proportion of structures and placement. The blueprint for these calculations rests on the Jyotish astrological chart of the building’s caretaker-residents ... Building with non-toxic materials is important to Vaishnava thought and practice—*go brahmana hitaya cha*. Natural materials used in construction contain one to five of the elements created by Lord Brahma—earth, air, water, fire and ether/consciousness. Our Vastu-sustainable-eco building

project is sited to face east toward the rising sun. The direction, east, is good for growth, knowledge, health, happiness, and spiritual strength. As the first rays of the morning sun peek over the horizon, they filter through *tulasi's stambha* and then enter the front of the structure. 🐾

The next hurdle was convincing the TNRD (our local district) Building Inspectors to approve the design plans. We ended up smothering them with volumes of paper on the legitimacy of straw bale construction. The simple act of fortifying the building enough to satisfy the inspectors added at least 25% to the cost of the project, which we could ill afford. Skeptical and dismissive at first (“Oh, you want to build a three-little-pigs’ house!”), the inspectors came to the property no less than ten times, and on the last inspection, the first skeptical inspector enthusiastically posited, “I love this house!”

Our Vastu architect chose May 27, 1999, at 12:27 AM as the most auspicious time and day for the cornerstone-laying ceremony. Unfortunately, we needed to be in by October, so we circumvented that problem by first having the land surveyed and leveled—no simple task, because a perfectly square parcel was required for the Vastu specifications. Fortunately, two wonderful young Saranagati residents, Jaisacinandana, a multi-talented young man who included surveying among his skills, and his very sweet and shy younger sister, Radhakunda, offered to help.

Radhakunda devi: Jai asked me to help him, so we went out to their land, and with a really old-fashioned compass and chalk line, we tried our best to find the exact coordinates. I remember spending hours out there doing it over and over to get it right, because we were so nervous about making sure it was as perfect as we could get it. Every time Jai would ask me, “Is the line right at the mark?” or “Is the line straight?” I would become so nervous and double check it myself, thinking that if their house was off it would be all my fault. Finally, when we were done, Yamuna came up and told us how incredibly grateful she was for our service—that this was the first service anyone had done for Radha-Banabehari Mandir, and she was so impressed and pleased with our (mostly Jai’s) expertise and dedication. That was really one of the first interactions I had with her, and I remember feeling like I had just done the most wonderful thing of my life—like if that was the only thing I had ever done, my life was useful. I remember being so impressed and swept up in her affection and sweetness. She was the first person who I felt was truly genuine and real—who actually appreciated any little service



that we did for her. I remember feeling so proud of Jai and myself for being able to do some service. I think it was the first time I felt the real value of doing service for a Vaishnava and Krishna. I also remember feeling so wonderful and special because I knew and felt that Yamuna was the kind of person who would keep us in a special place in her heart just because of that tiny service that we did for her. I think it was my first glimpse into the incredible world of Vaishnava *seva*, although at the time I did not quite understand it at all, but just felt so good about it. 🙏

We next laid over 500 feet of water lines and completed two outbuildings and a root cellar. Then, at just after midnight on May 27, with most of the community members gathered, including Yamuna's sister, Janaki, and her dear friend Barb from Oregon, the cornerstone sacrifice for Banabehari Mandir was held amidst ecstatic chanting of the Holy Names and a glorious, green-twinkling aurora borealis overhead.



Radhakunda devi: The cornerstone-laying ceremony was another real eye opener and culture change for me. It was at midnight, as that was the most auspicious time, and they had this huge hole dug on their land. Most of the devotees were there, and Yamuna sang the *Samsara*

prayers in the evening (midnight) melody, then the kirtan continued as Dina placed the objects inside, and the ceremony continued. We had the most amazing midnight feast—all cooked by Yamuna and Janaki and served by Yamuna, Janaki and Dina. 🙏

A Joyful Crew Face an Endless Stream of Obstacles

A core team of four workers comprised our construction crew—Rasaraja das, a dedicated Italian devotee, dear friend, excellent carpenter and

inspiring Vaishnava; Vrajananda das, a hard-working, ever-smiling and optimistic devotee; Yamuna devi and myself. None of us had any straw bale construction experience, but each was filled with enthusiasm and the necessary can-do attitude to see the process through to its finish. This was extremely fortunate because from its very inception, obstacles stacked upon one another like bricks on a building.

Rasaraja das: After Yamuna and Dina asked me and Vrajananda to build their straw bale house, I was in terrible anxiety, but I didn't show it to them because I was thinking I needed some kind of work. But I didn't have any experience in building a post-and-beam house with straw bales. In my mind I was thinking, "How can I build this? Will everything collapse?" So Yamuna and Dina would talk about the project, but my mind was filled with a kind of panic and anxiety that went on until I realized I had to be honest about my fears. I approached Yamuna and Dina and said, "I'm not sure we can build this house; it's above our skills." And then Yamuna said in a very quiet and soft voice, "Oh, don't worry, Krishna will help us to do everything." I remember it was so quiet, so nice and so natural that in an instant all my anxieties just disappeared. I had never experienced anything like that. All my worries just disappeared, and then an enthusiasm came that "Yes, I can do it. Krishna will help me do this." These impressions come from someone living an advanced spiritual life. It was such a profound experience—very short, but very powerful. 🐦

After completing the foundation at double the anticipated cost, we hired another devotee to pour an adobe floor. Unfortunately, the adobe crumbled, and the floor heaved up toxic plumes of dust with each footstep. For the next year until we were able to resurface it, the floor was covered with flattened cardboard boxes.

When the post-and-beam supports were nearing completion, we contacted the Alberta farm to deliver our already-purchased straw bales and received in reply a six-page letter from an Alberta law firm informing us that the farm had become bankrupt. Five pages of the letter listed its creditors in order of amount owed, and our \$1,500 was dutifully noted on page four. When we



called the lawyers, we were bluntly told that although the bales were probably still on the bankrupt property, we could forget about both the bales and the money. Frantic, we placed a last-ditch call to the first number on the list of creditors—a major hardware store in Alberta—told them of our plight (it would have been impossible to find other bales on short notice), and they were so touched by our story that they sent one of their own big rigs to deliver our bales all the way from Alberta at their own expense—a distance of over 1,100 miles round trip. We were overwhelmed by the kindness of strangers and mercy of the Lord, and all of us literally whooped with loud shouts of “Haribol! Haribol!” when the truck arrived.

Rasaraja das: One thing that struck me from the very beginning was that Yamuna never said, “We are building my home.” In my recollection, she always said that this will be the home of Radha-Banabehari. I never paid attention to this until recently, like so many other special characteristics of her personality. 🐦

The Surreal Problem of Water or the Lack Thereof

Pictures taken of our joyful crew during the building of Banabehari Mandir invariably show Yamuna and I covered in stucco, paint, dirt, plaster and straw. What they don’t show are our numerous injuries, which were a natural by-product of the building process. Yamuna, while still grappling with her thyroid issues and unable to lose weight despite eating little, was

irrepressible, working 18-hour days with amazing stamina. There was no challenge she did not meet with equanimity, and she worked longer hours than any of us. When she decided to build a rock wall, she scoped out the valley, filled the truck bed with fifty-pound rocks, then unloaded them and painstakingly built the wall. She spent weeks spreading wheelbarrows of heavy gravel, and mixed and poured concrete—often while chanting the *maha-mantra* in a loud voice which resounded throughout the valley, or spontaneously calling out “Krishna! Krishna!”



Visakha, Dina and Yamuna

However, of all the challenges we faced in the building process, accessing a source of water was the most trying. Initially we drilled two wells with a small, hand-held drill. The procedure required digging a large pit that held a special mud and water slurry that was then pumped into the well hole as the drill rotated. One day two immaculately-dressed leaders of the local native Indian tribe came, bearing gifts of painted rocks to formally welcome us to the valley. I was operating the makeshift drill in my much-stained work clothes,



and Yamuna stood below. To our horrified disbelief, the slurry hose broke off as the drill still turned, throwing gallons of gray mud cascading across the bodies and faces of all of us as it whipped around. By the time I was able to turn off the pump, we all just stared in stunned disbelief at each other while covered head-to-toe in mud. Despite our profuse apologies, the men simply turned around in as dignified a manner as possible and walked away. This was one of our memorable surreal building moments.

After weeks of intensive and difficult drilling with no results, we ran PVC pipe in six-foot trenches from the Venables Creek bordering the east side of our property to a holding tank fifty feet above the ashram and pumped water from the stream using a generator. The water was then gravity-fed to the ashram and to a hydrant for outside watering. This system worked well initially, but after the second year, the creek dried up for what we were told was the first time ever recorded. This forced us to eventually bring in professional well-drillers, who drilled 520 feet and charged us \$8,000 to reach nothing but native jade. Finally we began manually filling a 500-gallon water tank in our truck bed and pumping it into the holding tank. In 2008, due to the efforts and hard work of Bala Krishna das and others, along with a grant from the government, the Venables Creek began flowing again.

A Moving-In Yajna and Yamuna's Tree of Gratitude

Although they progressively grew milder over the years, the first winters at Saranagati were especially long and harsh, with thigh-deep snow, treacherous ice and a five-month duration. Yamuna and I were determined that

come what may we would move into the ashram before the winter of 1999. So on October 15, a small ceremony was held to attach the front door, and two days later, at the auspicious date and time chosen by our Vastu architect, the devotee community gathered for the final move-in ceremony.



Yamuna: The move-in ceremony was observed on October 17, at 11 AM, with a fire *yajna* in the *brahmasthan*, then the first *bhoga* was prepared in the wood cookstove and distributed to all the assembled guests and Vaishnava Saranagati residents as *prasadam*. 🙏

While the outside of Banabehari Mandir had been completed by this time, the inside was another story. Two rooms had been framed out as sleeping rooms, but the rest of the ashram remained unfinished, with cardboard flooring and a tiny laminate table as a kitchen. The grand rosewood altar of Sri Sri Radha-Banabehari looked absurdly out of place in Their bare-walled temple and *pujari* room. Yet Yamuna and I were thrilled to finally live in our hard-won ashram and saw the bare interior as a creative palette to mold into something wonderful for the pleasure of the Lord. This process was ongoing, blissful, and cemented loving relationships with the many devotee friends who would often show up to offer their services:



Yamuna's kitchen in 1999

Harilila devi: Bala Krishna would come and chop wood for [Yamuna and Dina], doing some *seva*, and they would always poke their head out and say, “Bala! Come in for breakfast.” He would come in, and they would serve him breakfast. It was something they always did, serve the devotees—serve them breakfast, serve them *prasadam*, bring them in. 🙏

Kuvallesaya das: For the interior of the house they had planks, and we

were chopping them. Dina would call out the length she needed, and then I would chop it. There was an interesting dynamic between Yamuna and Dina. While we were working, Yamuna would be cooking and tidying. On one occasion she cooked what she described as Srila Prabhupada's favorite [vegetable], a *lauki* [squash] *sabji* and some tomato chutney. She also had herbed olive oil. I remember sitting down, and there was a Teflon wok she was very particular about what spatula to use in it. There was another identical wok, and someone was about to serve from it with a metal spatula. I said, "Oh, no; don't use that!" and she said, "No, it's fine; that's Dina's pan." I thought it was so funny. 🍷

One young devotee, Bhaktirasa, assisted with the heavy stucco application, making one of our hardest jobs look easy. Krishna Devata, petite and delicately feminine, surprised us by tackling difficult construction tasks with aplomb.

Radhakunda devi: Yamuna and Dina were grateful and appreciative for the help they were getting. Bhaktirasa, from England, was here when they were doing the stucco on their walls, and he was helping them do it. Yamuna was so happy and appreciative of his help; she would always say he was the king of stucco—that he could stucco faster than anyone else and had saved them so much time and money. They were like that with everyone who helped in any small way. 🍷

Other friends and even strangers interested in straw bale construction came to help. Henry Schoellkopf from Washington DC made hundreds of stucco wires, while others painted, raked gravel and brought *prasadam*. Almost every resident of Saranagati offered service in some way, and Yamuna wanted to honor each person's contribution at Banabehari Mandir in perpetuity, so she etched their names on brass leaves, which she later framed and placed prominently on the wall as our Tree of Gratitude.

Pictures taken of the building process often show a very large and fearsome-looking dog among

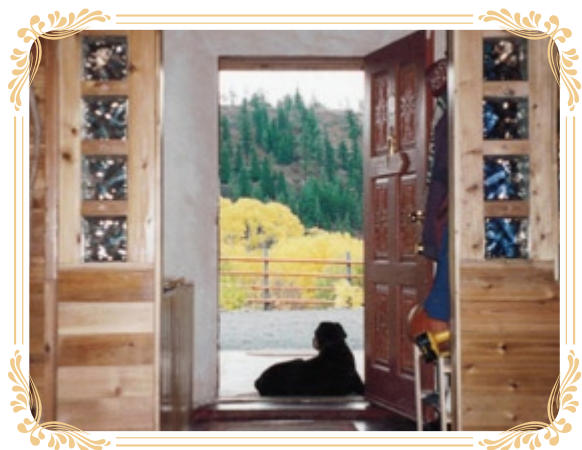


the devotees. Once in 1976 in Los Angeles, as Srila Prabhupada was giving instructions regarding our Oregon ashram, he said, “And you should keep a dog for watching—for guarding.” I don’t remember our reaction, but the idea at the time was incomprehensible to us, and it never manifested. Then while living in Washington State in 1997, someone “gifted” us with an expensive puppy, which we felt obliged to accept. We knew nothing about the breed (Rottweiler), and neither of us had had any experience with dogs since becoming devotees. Nevertheless, the dog, named Mira, grew to be an integral part of our Saranagati ashram, keeping bears and prospective violators away with her ferocious bark and intimidating look. What they could not know was that she was extremely gentle and quickly befriended the local cats, other dogs and free-range cows. We often found her out in the pastures sitting peacefully among a hundred cows. Mira was beloved by the children of Saranagati, and Yamuna and I were heartbroken when she succumbed to diabetes. “No more dogs,” Yamuna said. “I would rather deal with the bears than have another dog I’ve cared for die.” Yet we realized from the start that this dog was most fortunate because she ate so much *prasadam*, heard countless recitations of the Holy Name, and in her own way served Sri Sri Radha-Banabehari and Their ashram.

Through the late fall and early winter we continued building, painting and crafting and began to see Banabehari Mandir take shape. I made decorative scroll saw patterns in the cedar panels, built closets and finished the bathroom. Yamuna enthusiastically designed and built the kitchen from start to finish, including the pantry, cabinetry and marble-topped cooking island. She had often remarked over the years that many kitchens were poorly conceived, with unreachable shelves and limited counter space, so she was naturally thrilled to be able to create her own kitchen vision, albeit a humble one. From the early 80’s, Yamuna had carefully conveyed over forty “sweetie jars,” (an English term describing rectangular glass storage jars) to each of our ashrams. In the pantry at Banabehari Mandir, she built the shelving to precisely showcase those same jars.

Yamuna Addresses the GBC in Mayapur on Behalf of Women Devotees

In early 2000, Yamuna, along with other senior Godsisters, was invited to speak at the annual GBC meeting on behalf of women in Srila Prabhupada’s Movement. Although it was mid-winter in Saranagati, and she was reluctant to leave, the opportunity to formally address the GBC body on what



Mira guards the ashram



she felt was an issue of fundamental importance overcame any reticence on her part. Anyone who knew Yamuna over the years would have heard her oft-expressed concerns about the women and the youth within our ISKCON society. To present these concerns in conjunction with other senior Godsisters was seen by Yamuna as an imperative and a gift.

Visakha devi: In 2000, Sudharma, the head of the Women's Ministry, arranged for a group of devotee women to make a presentation to the GBC body about the position of women in ISKCON. Before the GBC meetings began, nine senior women, including Yamuna, arrived in Mayapur and regularly gathered in one of the *grihastha* apartments to brainstorm in preparation for this presentation. Yamuna, lively and insightful, repeatedly encouraged these women to make their many points in an organized, succinct and powerful way. 🐦

While careful to avoid offenses against Vaishnavas, Yamuna expressed the need to collectively reevaluate the example we were passing on to the next generations and relayed her concerns with the insight of her own catalog of challenges over the years. The following is an excerpt from her address to the GBC which paraphrases those oft-expressed concerns:



Yamuna: Srila Prabhupada trained me to be concerned about his Movement, and at this time I am deeply concerned. Now more than ever, it is time to revive and imbibe Srila Prabhupada's mood with his disciples. If we neglect this, an aspect of his greatness will remain unknown to future generations.

I appeal to you that, along with the laudable projects you are managing and those you are contemplating—especially the magnificent temple that will arise here in Sridham Mayapur—consider that the behavior of the ISKCON devotees who participate in these projects must also be magnificent. Any other behavior will make the projects less than worthy of Srila Prabhupada's name. This grave responsibility falls on you. In other words, let us instill in every person who comes into contact with Srila Prabhupada's Movement the healthy spiritual relationships that he had with his followers—his mood of encouragement, protection and

kindness. The closer we come to individually appreciating and honoring Srila Prabhupada's personal dealings with his disciples, the closer we will come to his sense of completeness in Krishna Consciousness, to his joyfulness, to his transcendently attractive nature.

With great care, our service is to create a devotional environment where men, women and children can thrive in Krishna Consciousness, rendering service according to their desire and inclination. Our service is to empower rather than inhibit the service propensity in others. 🙏

Visakha devi: Rukmini closed the presentation by questioning the GBC body about how they changed history by not portraying women on the *sankirtan* party in the bas-reliefs on the walls around Srila Prabhupada's *samadhi*, as well as about sheltering those women who had given their lives to serve Srila Prabhupada. When Rukmini finished and sat down, the room was silent, the GBC members impacted by the words just spoken. Madhusevita, the acting Chairperson, said: "Tomorrow morning a woman should lead *mangal arati*, and a woman should give *Srimad-Bhagavatam* class." 🙏

Unfortunately, despite the impassioned and insightful appeals of the Vaishnavis, there was resistance among some of the men, and it was after much debate and controversy that Visakha devi eventually gave *Srimad-Bhagavatam* class to the assembled Mayapur devotees two weeks after the GBC meetings.

Visakha devi: Thus the next morning a woman did not lead *mangal arati*, and it took two weeks of high-level talks before a woman was allowed to give *Srimad-Bhagavatam* class. Yamuna led *Jaya Radha Madhava* for that class, her melodious, rich voice traveling the length and breadth of the large temple room, melting hearts and transporting unbiased souls to a transcendental realm. 🙏

When Yamuna returned to our Saranagati ashram from India, she was ambivalent about the experience in Mayapur. While she enjoyed the camaraderie among her Godsisters and the association of many Godbrother friends, she frankly felt that real change would be slow in manifesting.

Yamuna: I still feel after all these years that the real benefit of being a woman within ISKCON manifests mostly on an internal level—that women can develop great resources of tolerance, compassion for others and spiritual

strength on the path back to Godhead through having to overcome intolerance in their devotional lives. 🙏

A Sacred Space—The Morning Program at Banabehari Mandir

Kuvallesaya das: I remember that everything I did at the time was to get some sort of acknowledgment or social petting, but I observed how everything [Yamuna] did was just to please her Deities and Srila Prabhupada. I feel my attraction to establishing sacred space was founded in their ashram. There was such an aura in that space—people would become silent, and you would really notice when someone would not catch on to that. 🙏

Wherever our ashram happened to be in the world, we followed a fixed morning schedule. In our cardboard-floored Saranagati ashram, we began our regulated morning program and extended an open invitation to anyone who wished to attend. I would usually wake and bathe the Deities, while Yamuna prepared the offering. We performed *arati* and led the chanting on a daily rotation if alone, and either requested guests to lead when they attended, or we sang in unison. Then rounds were chanted and *Srimad-Bhagavatam* class was held, the *shlokas* repeated by all, the text and purport read, and then discussions held on the verse. Yamuna was always careful to see that no one left without *maha prasadam*—something she emphasized as Srila Prabhupada had done. These morning programs were particularly sweet and nectarean because they somehow engaged both senior devotees and the youth.

Kalakantha das: Yamuna and Dina charmed us with their very gracious mood and inspired us with their unalloyed dedication to Srila Prabhupada. Meeting them tipped the scales; we decided that Saranagati was the place to spend our summers. The two ladies were the heart of the ashram. They held a punctual morning program every day, open to all, plus evening reading and kirtan meetings two or three times a week. During the months we were there, we did not miss a morning, walking or driving the two miles from our residence to savor the sweet association.

Dina and Yamuna took turns performing the *mangal arati*. On her singing days Yamuna accompanied herself during *Gurvastakam* with a small keyboard instrument whose soft bell-like tone mingled with her gentle, angelic voice, creating a wonderfully mystical devotional atmosphere in the

cool Canadian pre-dawn mountain air. She insisted we sing not with call-and-response, but in unison, a method creating a warm intimacy among the devotees that melted away any bodily considerations of ashram, gender or seniority, bringing everyone present together in an infectious mood of love for Srila Prabhupada and Radha-Banabehari. After kirtan everyone chanted *japa* for an hour. Yamuna would sometimes bring out her set of large red wooden beads dating back to her early days with Srila Prabhupada—beads he had personally chanted on for her. She would invite devotees present to chant a round on these special beads. She did not hoard her blessings from Srila Prabhupada, but shared them with everyone.

After *japa* was *Srimad-Bhagavatam* class. Dina began each class with an excerpt from a selected book such as Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur's biography or Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati's writings. Then we read Srila Prabhupada's *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, often several verses and purports each day, always nicely facilitated by Dina, always conducted in an interactive discussion format involving all present without a main speaker. Yamuna would often stir the discussion with thoughtful questions, steering the topic from the day's verses and purports into a variety of fascinating directions. Many days it was just the four of us for class, and we talked about everything—their experiences with Srila Prabhupada, the dynamics of ashram and community life, the state of Kali Yuga, India, off-grid living, cow protection, Gaudiya Math/ISKCON issues, upcoming festivals, and much more. 🐾

Haripriya devi (Milkmaid*): My alarm clock rings. It is 5:00 AM on a summer morning in Saranagati Village, and it's almost time for *mangal arati*. After getting ready, I step outside into a crisp and quiet morning. Picking a flower from our garden for Their Lordships, I jog up the hill on the way to my favorite place, Banabehari Mandir. Once at the top, I look down towards the ashram and see dim yellow lights shining through the early morning mist. Coming up to the beautiful stained-glass *tilak* door, I lightly knock—one, two, three—and almost immediately, my favorite voice answers, “Haribol! Come in!” Slowly opening the door and stepping in, I say, “Haribol!” From the kitchen I hear, “Oh, *choti* Haripriya! I'm so happy you are here! I've been thinking of you!” Yamuna walks around the corner with a warm smile. She

* “Banabehari's Milkmaids” is the name for the five young girls in Saranagati ranging in ages from ten to thirteen years old who had developed an enthusiasm for devotional activities and were engaged in devotional service at Banabehari Mandir.



wraps me up in a tight embrace, and I squeeze my eyes shut and hug her, cherishing every moment in her arms. After a few seconds, Yamuna takes me by the hand and leads me towards the temple room. Before entering, she taps the hanging chimes, which ring in a high, sweet pitch. Wafts of incense mixed with the fragrance of flowers meet my nose. I hear Dina behind the Deity curtain, humming beautiful tunes as she prepares for *arati*. On this and every time I come to Banabehari Mandir, I think, “This is what the spiritual world must be like. I am home.” Yamuna asks me if I would like to play the drum, and picking up the whompers, she sits down on her blue ball in the back of the temple room. Suddenly, the conchshell blows, the bell rings and the curtains swing open to reveal a beautiful sight. There on the tall marble altar, lit by an array of candles, surrounded by silver animals and vases full of blossoming flowers, gracefully stand the most beautiful Deities: Sri Sri Radha-Banabehari. They take my breath away, as They always do. Dina begins singing the *Samsara* prayers while she gracefully offers incense to their Lordships. Then Yamuna and I softly join in with our own voices and instruments. Carefully listening for Yamuna’s voice behind me, I hear it dipping in and out, freely weaving notes over and under ours, as if wrapping our offering with love. It is a most melodious and transcendental sound. In Banabehari Mandir, everything is a meditation, everything is a heartfelt prayer. I close my eyes and try to hear. *Mangal arati* in Banabehari Mandir has only just begun. 🐾

Radhakunda devi’s Diary: DECEMBER 2002 — I went to Yamuna’s and Dina’s morning program this morning with Kar and his group. It was so beautiful—really beautiful. I can’t begin to describe what I feel right now. My mind is so overwhelmed with awe and amazement by such devotion as I’ve seen. What could I have possibly done to attain this beautiful association?

Being at Yamuna's and Dina's is like being given two precious jewels, and I, in my ignorance, take them so much for granted. I do not know how to properly appreciate them at all.... I wish there was some way I could show these amazing people how much they mean to me, how much they have helped me grow. Perhaps someday I will understand such devotion and love that [they] have. For now I can only look in awe and dream. 🙏



Blissful Bali, Nimesh, Kartamasa and Radhakunda after a December morning program at Banabehari Mandir

Bhavatarini devi: I remember coming to chant *japa* with Yamuna early in the morning. She would be so excited about chanting *japa* that you would be totally into chanting *japa* first thing in the morning. And she would tell you so many special things about her that made it sound so special. You were like, "This is awesome." I used to not want to chant *japa*, and now I am super into it. 🙏



Kalindi devi (Milkmaid): It is usually pretty cold at Saranagati in the mornings. So we go [to *mangal arati*] at 5:30 AM. And the sun is just coming up on the horizon on the tips of the mountains... So we would walk [to Banabehari Mandir]; and you pick a flower for the Deities because you know that Yamuna really appreciated that whenever you see the Lord, there are all these little things that we know we are supposed to do. She never really specifically instructed us, "You know you have to do this." She would show it by example. So we picked our flowers and walked over there. They have a small gravel walkway, and when you open the gate, and you crunch in the gravel, you are so excited to go see Radha-Banabehari early in the morning in Their pajamas. You can see the lights on, and you know it is warm in there, and so you would always knock a little bit, and then go in. [Yamuna and Dina] would always say, "Come in!" And they would always call us, "Come in, sweet things. Haribol! Good morning!" They were always so happy to see us. It was

like ever fresh or something, like they hadn't seen us in years, and they were so happy to see us. They have these little lights that line the ceiling, and the *mahamantra* is right underneath it. There is usually Prabhupada chanting, or they will have some tape going before, and you can smell incense. It is so warm and cozy. You feel like you are in the spiritual world—everything else is far behind you. You don't care about anything else. You are just so excited to sing for the Deities and see Radha-Banabehari. So they start the *mangal arati*, and it is so sweet. Everybody would sing together. And you could hear Yamuna sitting in the back, and she would play either a gong, shaker or sometimes a little keyboard.... And she was amazing at playing it. She would play all these notes, and she would be singing. And I remember I'd always be listening, trying to hear her sing. I would go quiet listening to her beautiful voice. And it was just so sweet.

Whenever we would have *Bhagavatam* discussions, it was never like a class; we would discuss everything together. And she was always so inquisitive: "How do you feel about it?" Yamuna would always put you on the spot. She would say, "Kalindi, what do you think about that?" And you were like, "Oh, Krishna!" and you say something. It would automatically make you go into your heart and pull out your deepest realizations and feelings. She made it in such a way that you didn't have time to think about what you were going to say. She just encouraged you to speak from the heart. ♪

Vraja Kishori devi: I remember we would look forward to coming [to Saranagati] in the summer so that we could come to the morning program there. We came every morning. There was a beautiful *mangal arati* going on, then chanting *japa* together. We always felt welcome, even though there was [outside] tension because we were initiated by B. V. Narayana Maharaja. She was always welcoming us and reading together. Yamuna and Dina came here to go deeper. You just felt that Yamuna was always so sincerely reading, delving into it. She would ask my son, Srivasa, "So what have you heard in your *sanga* about this?" She was so eager to hear, so happy to hear, and we would share things that would be inspiring for us, and she would be so inspired. ♪

Udarakirti devi: I experienced this with my children. One *mangal arati*, they were so enthusiastic to come. They went running in the van, wailing, "We're late! We're late!" When we were coming here, they were just running with their skirts up, and I was sitting with Yoginath and saying, "Gosh, I haven't seen anything like this." We were behind; we couldn't catch

up because they wanted to be on time for greeting Radha-Banabehari for *mangal arati*. 🐾

Yoginath das: The thing about the morning programs was that sometimes there would be a lot of people or some event, and it would be real exciting. But it was actually exciting every day. It was a real vital thing, even if there were only a few people there. Somehow, because I guess Krishna was there, it was alive, even to the point that Kalakantha mentioned that in his class in Mayapur—that the morning programs at this ashram made a big imprint on his Krishna Consciousness. 🐾

Kalavati devi (Milkmaid): For me at the morning programs, I would get this feeling from being very young that by coming here, from the moment you step in, it was mystical. It was different. It wasn't Saranagati. It wasn't anything. It was so different here. You would walk in, and Yamuna would grab your hand and bring you to the front; then Dina was doing the *arati*. It was dark, and you didn't see anybody, and it was just you and Krishna. And you knew that you were being guided to Krishna by Dina and Yamuna. It was interesting because that feeling of Radha-Banabehari being there is such a mood of Radha and Krishna. I had that same feeling when I went to Vrindavan. I got so attached to Vrindavan because that same feeling from Radha-Banabehari was there—it was Radha and Krishna. I got so attached to Radha-Shyamasundara because I could relate to that service, that love. That is what I felt with Yamuna and Dina. And that is something I noticed in Vrindavan, and I was kind of shocked by it. I knew I had felt this before, and it was with Radha-Banabehari. 🐾



Kartamasa das: [The morning program at Banabehari Mandir] was really a testament to how things can act on your heart, your mind. Because I was definitely trying to live both lives, I guess—a foot in each boat—many times staying up all night until *mangal arati*. And when the alarm goes off at four in the morning, if anyone I was with had said, “Oh, I am too tired to go,” we would all be like, “Okay, okay, I’m not going”—totally out of it. But every time, without fail, after we went to the morning program, we would be like,

“Oh, my gosh! That was the most amazing program ever. I am so glad we decided to come. If we had missed that ... !” I can’t recall anything from it now; that is why I am saying it was a heart thing. It is not like she said this and that, or we read this or that. The heart just changed. 🐾

Kirtaniya Sada Harih— Connecting with the Youth Through the Holy Name

Giriraja Swami: Yamuna devi had a dream. I don’t remember the details, and it is a little delicate, because she was a very private person. Anyway, in this dream, or vision—whatever it was, she took it as very real—she was a sage in the forest, and Srila Prabhupada was also in the same forest, and somehow he engaged her in doing kirtan. She felt that from her past life there was a connection with Srila Prabhupada in relation to kirtan.

About Srila Prabhupada’s kirtan she said, “Srila Prabhupada’s kirtan had no tinge of being a performance. It was purely for the pleasure of Krishna. It allowed the chanters access to the fact that the Lord’s Holy Name and the Lord are nondifferent. He said that the key to engaging in kirtan without *anartha* was hearing and studying our literature, and that gradually it would rise to the platform of pure devotional service.

And in an email to Bhakta Carl, she wrote, “Leading and chanting in kirtan has little to do with how we sound to each other. It has much more to do with how we call out to Krishna and immerse ourselves in hearing the vibrations of the Holy Names.” What a vehicle for experiencing love of Godhead! 🐾

Throughout our years in Saranagati Village, the community held a Sunday Feast program featuring a fixed schedule of *arati*, class, guru *puja*, and feast. In the beginning, a core group of youth comprised of the teenage offspring of some of the founding residents, along with a younger group of girls, attended these Sunday programs. Yet Yamuna could easily see that this was a duty for most of them, and their hearts were often engaged elsewhere. We held long discussions on how we could help encourage the youth, something so close to Yamuna’s heart that she often cried tears of empathy and frustration. “We are losing our next generation because they are not feeling inspired by Krishna Consciousness,” she often lamented.

One of Yamuna’s greatest attributes was her ability to create wonderfully

imaginative engagements, festivals and other events to encourage others to experience the joy of Krishna *bhakti*. For many years, we had been swimming in the nectarean ocean of kirtan and *bhajans*, especially the prayers of Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur and Narottama das, and Yamuna came up with the idea of giving singing classes to the youth as a means of engaging them.

Radhakunda devi: In the winter or fall, Yamuna invited us [the youth of Saranagati] to her ashram once a week to do singing lessons with her. She had printed out for each of us (about seven or eight) a thick booklet of exercises and lessons on how to improve your vocals and singing power. It was never like she was teaching us; she was just inviting us to learn with her. I remember marveling at how she would act like she didn't know a thing about singing, and how much she needed to know more, yet she was the most incredible singer I had ever known! We would sit on mats on the floor in a semicircle in the temple room. Yamuna would always greet us warmly, grabbing our hands and patting the mat beside her to sit down. Then we would go through the lessons and exercises together, making the unusual sounds that they asked and laughing about them. Yamuna would always have funny comments about them. Often she would use the *mahamantra* to do the exercises with. I remember saying Rama Rama or Krishna Krishna in so many different ways and styles. Afterwards she would have us do kirtan together, round-robin style, and we would all sing, regardless of how nervous we were. I remember she would be commenting on how beautiful Namamrita's voice was, or Krishna Chaitanya's, or others. I remember for one retreat she had our little group perform a *bhajan* with her. I sat beside her and played the bell chimes—just feeling so wonderful. 🐾



Yamuna teaching singing to the youth

Radhakunda devi's Diary: JANUARY 5, 2001—Tonight's singing class with Yamuna and Dina was great! As well as the morning melody, they are also teaching us how to lead a kirtan and how to really follow the leader. Everyone went and sang a few mantras, and everyone else tried to follow to their best ability. It was actually quite difficult. When it was my turn,

I had this tune in my head that I wanted to sing, but when I tried, it came out completely different. It was a difficult tune to follow, probably because I was half making it up, so I decided to switch to the normal tune, but it also came out very different. 🐉

Yamuna also engaged the older youth in ashram services such as planting a tulip garden for the Deities. Years later I dug up those tulips to separate and replant them elsewhere, but miraculously, those little white, perfectly formed tulips continued blossoming in the same area year after year.

Of course, one of Yamuna devi's principal attractions for the youth was her *prasadam* distribution. Everyone had heard of her culinary expertise, and Yamuna enjoyed preparing and offering *prasadam* to others perhaps even more than they enjoyed relishing it.

A Fortuitous Encounter Opens Hearts to the Joy of Kirtan and Sanga

In late 2000, Yamuna and I met a young, second generation devotee, Kartamasa das, whose presence immediately impacted us. Visiting Saranagati with his friend Nimesh from Vancouver, we observed him as he sat chanting surrounded by friends, and it was obvious to us that he was a born leader. Intrigued, Yamuna invited Kartamasa and his friends over for kirtan and *prasadam*, and this began what became a profound, loving and enduring relationship with both Yamuna and me. Over the years, this sensitive, thoughtful and sincere devotee has influenced so many souls with his deeply penetrating and ego-free chanting of *bhajans* and kirtan, and as a teacher and headmaster, but more importantly, by his personal example of unequivocal devotional aspiration. Both he and later his equally qualified wife, Radhakunda, became more dear to Yamuna and me than words can express.

Kartamasa das: The first time I met Yamuna devi, my life changed forever. I was in Saranagati for the Christmas holidays in 2000 having a reunion with my closest childhood friends. We were all in our early twenties, and having recently finished our university education and started work, we spent our time together recalling our childhood activities. One day we decided to have kirtan, but in a rather irreverent way, mocking the showy, elaborate vocal and instrument style we had all absorbed growing up in ISKCON. After one such parody of kirtan, while we were all laughing at ourselves, Yamuna was

standing over us. I don't quite remember if she introduced herself (I don't even remember how I knew it was Yamuna); I just remember her saying, "Oh, you do kirtan?" "Oh, no, no! We're just playing around." "And you can play harmonium and *mridanga*," she said. "Oh, no; we're just pretending." "Please come to our ashram and have kirtan there." "Uuuuhhh." We youth looked at each other with embarrassment and apprehension. Even without knowing anything about her, other than "Yamuna the cook and singer of the *Govindam* prayer lives here now," I could sense some kind of uncompromising purity from her, even though she was so jovial. It made me feel sheepish. "We have apple crisp," she added. Her determination, coupled with our youthful appetites, changed our demeanors to interested smiles.

"So, can you come at 4:15?" And so at 4:15 the four of us made our first trip to Banabehari Mandir. The atmosphere set the tone immediately. It was already rather dark out, and the ashram was only lit by candles. In the very center of the ashram was a *brahmasthan* [a dome over a skylight], and directly under that were plants and candles. Couches and chairs were arranged in a circular way around that center. We were seated there and served hot tea and delicious apple crisp on small china plates.

I do not remember any of the conversations that took place then. From talking to my friends about it years later, we could only recall that Yamuna and Dina seemed to take a genuine interest in us, and that genuineness instilled in us a very rare feeling of respect (for at that time we competitively took pride in noting hypocrisies and insincerities in people). What is forever etched in my mind is the kirtan that happened next. Yamuna and Dina both sat directly across from me, and Dina began strumming a tamboura and humming. They then began to sing together—just the two of them—the entire *Mangalacaranam* prayers. Their eyes remained closed. I had never been in a kirtan like that. There were no other instruments around, nor were we asked to play anything. We weren't even asked to sing. We just listened. And that changed my life forever, because as I listened I began to feel something. I was not feeling anything inside myself (I was as unconscious as a brick). I was simply "feeling" something they were feeling. In other words, I was palpably affected and moved by what they were feeling as they sang. Right then and there, I decided that I wanted to feel what they were feeling. It was the real thing—everything I had heard and read about chanting while growing up as a devotee, yet which evaded me as if it were a myth—here it was as clear as day right in front of me, in real live human beings. In a matter of seconds, all my cumulative desires, aspirations, ambitions, priorities and hierarchies faded into the pale, replaced unequivocally

by this overbearing drive to taste what they were tasting in this immensely deep, peaceful, prayerful kirtan. This jolted my entire being, literally waking me up from a dullness at least a decade strong. Mystically my senses suddenly seemed to sharpen. For instance, I suddenly became aware of the smell of incense that I couldn't distinguish minutes earlier. The plants in the middle of the room—I was now convinced they were all *tulasi* plants. "This is it," I thought to myself. "This is Vrindavan. This is kirtan. This is Krishna Consciousness." And I had never before had that thought in my entire life.

I then closed my eyes too and listened to the kirtan attentively again. I loved it. Towards what seemed like the end of the kirtan, I believe we mumbled along, almost inaudibly, to the *mahamantra*, since none of us were accustomed to serious kirtan. Furthermore, I felt a bit out of my league even being in the same kirtan as these two devotees. The kirtan lasted about 45 minutes. I noted that because I was used to participating in a kirtan for 5 or 10 minutes, and 45 minutes was a total novelty to me. I don't remember leaving or any other exchanges that evening. I had withdrawn into myself, and the conversations around me were faded soundtracks behind my new purpose in life. Not just my new purpose—it was my first purpose in life. And now and forever, it is my only purpose—to taste kirtan the way Yamuna and Dina do. I cannot comprehend anything higher than that, and I don't ever need to, because that was real Krishna Consciousness.

Upon returning to Alachua from my vacation in Saranagati, I was determined to explore kirtan. Nothing was more intriguing to me. I had spent much of the previous eight years playing in bands ranging from jazz to heavy metal, but hadn't touched kirtan since childhood. Now it was a mission, all inspired by that one kirtan with Yamuna and Dina. I can't remember if it was vocalized by either them or me, but I felt it was an instruction from them to try to have more kirtan. I may have told them that when I got back to Alachua I would try to have kirtan with my friends. Regardless, somehow I felt accountable to them in my heart to explore kirtan.... I gathered all my most musical and talented friends. I explained to them that instead of trying to make excellent contemporary music, we should try to make excellent *bhajans*. They all went along with the idea, most probably because I was so enthusiastic about it.

We chose to practice the *bhajan Gay Gaura Madhur Sware* because it had so much musical potential. We had a few soulful singers, harmonium, *mridanga*, *kartals*, violin, and I played guitar. There were possibly more instruments. Everything was intricately choreographed and rehearsed, like a

band practice. However, we would warm up and warm down with simple and spontaneous *mahamantra* kirtan. The “rehearsals” lasted only about three sessions. Without a word spoken about our previous plans, we unanimously opted to meet weekly for more spontaneous *bhajans*, taking turns leading and encouraging each other with a lot of love and patience. Soon, non-musical friends were invited, and soon after that we opened to anyone that was interested in coming. That was the beginning of Alachua’s “Wednesday Night Bhajans,” which still continue regularly as of this writing, and also coincided with a global interest in *bhajans* amongst the devotee youth. For myself, my role was as a facilitator, overseeing the sound system and pacifying my neighbors and apartment manager. But the drive and aim to engage in and taste kirtan came directly from Yamuna and Dina prabhhus.



While I greatly enjoyed those kirtans, I felt like I was just taking the first baby step of a very long journey. In my heart, I couldn’t wait to get back to Saranagati and to have more kirtan with Yamuna and Dina. The next chance I got to go was the following Christmas break, 2001, one year after my first meeting with them. 🐾

Over the next year Banabehari Mandir began taking on its own distinctive qualities and character—aided by Yamuna and my continued efforts and the contributions of many Saranagati devotees. A new adobe floor was poured, with parquet wood in the temple room. Flower and vegetable beds were prepared and planted and the *pujari* room completed. A fortunate by-product of engaging others in Deity or ashram services was that through *seva* many warm and loving relationships were established. Lilamrita devi, a selfless and dedicated disciple of Srila Prabhupada despite never having met him during his manifest presence, regularly came throughout our Saranagati years and shared Krishna Consciousness with us through the six exchanges of love. Harilila devi always brought gifts of flowers or wonderful jams and jellies she and her husband, Bala Krishna, made on their farm. Udarakirti, a Russian devotee who had endured the depredations of ISKCON’s early years there, was an enthusiastic support to us. And our long-time friend and Godsister Visakha devi, her husband, Yadubara das, and their two beautiful



Harilila, Dinatarini, Udarakirti, Yamuna,
Nirmala and Lilamrita

devotee daughters, were now our closest neighbors.

Kuvalasaya das: When I think of the ashram space, I remember a devotee called Lilamrita; and I remember one day she had come to do *seva* for Radha-Banabehari, and there was this certain mood of very gentle, delicate, sensitive and quiet worship. In that context, I felt that somehow the space Dina and Yamuna had created really obliged one to reconsider their whole approach to how they were going to live their life and interact in this space. 🙏

An Invitation from Radhanath Swami to Mumbai and Pune Yatra—January 2001

Yamuna and I had been hearing enlivening reports from several people about the wonderful devotional programs instituted by Radhanath Swami in Mumbai. He had previously invited her to visit the Radha-Gopinatha Temple in Chowpatty and also attend a great gathering of devotees at the Pune residence of Krishna Chandra prabhu and his family, but Yamuna wrote in reply that as Srila Prabhupada had instructed her to remain aloof from her former husband, she reluctantly had to decline. This in itself reveals much about Yamuna's dedication to Srila Prabhupada. She was very careful to follow his direct instructions over the years, whether they were fashionable or not. In her humility she would often say, "I'm not advanced enough to say that even though he said one thing, he meant another, or meant it for a moment in time."

When Radhanath Swami invited her again in 2001, Yamuna was excited at the prospect. As I could not go due to the possibility of winter damage to the still-unfinished ashram if left unattended, Visakha devi again accompanied Yamuna to Mumbai, stopping first for two days in England to visit old friends there.

Yamuna: We arrived in Mumbai at 3:30 in the morning and passed through customs without event. Two devotees greeted and garlanded us—one was named Palika devi, a very exuberant, bubbly and friendly escort who turned

out to be a great saving grace in the subsequent days of our stay in Mumbai. A wonderful driver put us into a brand new Toyota SUV vehicle—most unlike India. The morning was muggy and dark, with cicadas at the airport.... They took us to the home of Krishna Chandra prabhu and his wife, Radhapriya devi, called Mafatlal House. 🐞

In her recorded diary, Yamuna elaborately described the experience of being hosted by the family of Krishna Chandra prabhu, down to the notes of sincerity posted by the children on the bulletin board in the room where she and Visakha stayed. Yamuna felt an immediate connection with the entire family—gracious and humble, Krishna Chandra prabhu; his devoted and powerful wife, Radhapriya; his intelligent, sober and deep daughter Radha; Anjali, full of life, honest and forthright; and Priyavrata, still young and carefree. When she returned to Saranagati, Yamuna was effusive about their sincerity in devotional service. I can't recall how many times she said, "I can't wait for you to meet this family. There is no reason for them to be so dedicated and devotional because materially everything is there, but it comes from their hearts. I know you will feel the same way." And she was right. I did not meet the extended family of Krishna Chandra prabhu until his daughter Anjali's wedding in 2006, but I witnessed those same qualities and shared the same heartfelt appreciation of them.

When she saw the beautiful temple of Radha-Gopinatha, Yamuna was overwhelmed at the beauty and care taken with every service, and repeated to many devotees how pleased Srila Prabhupada would be to see the cleanliness, the punctuality and the attitude of sincere service. When she asked a senior member there what was responsible for the flourishing temple and temple standards, he replied: "Three things—Radhanath Swami, Radhanath Swami and Radhanath Swami." Humor aside, Yamuna saw the truth in this. Just as we had seen Bhakti-tirtha Swami in Washington DC convince many African-American professionals and others to join the Krishna Consciousness Movement by his personal example, so also Radhanath Swami had convinced so many highly intelligent and materially prosperous people to become sincere and dedicated devotees. This was nothing short of miraculous in Yamuna's eyes.

It is interesting that our Unalloyed team acquired so many talks and kirtans of Yamuna devi, because after Srila Prabhupada's departure, she was always reluctant to either lead kirtan or speak in any large assembly. In her diary, Yamuna expressed her fears that Radhanath Swami expected her to do both.

Yamuna: Radhanath Maharaja hinted that we were going to be engaged in *pravachan*, and of course, this was my worst dread, and something I had feared from the very beginning would be asked of me. Somehow or other he gave [Visakha and me] the general topic of speaking about Srila Prabhupada. And so we were introduced by Radhanath Maharaja with his standard means of glorifying the devotees—extremely moving and highly respectful. Then he said, “Now let us greet the devotees,” and everybody shouted, “Haribol! Haribol! Haribol!” and raised their hands. And then he said, “Louder,” and everybody roared this “Haribol!” greeting. Then he asked us to speak, and we bounced back and forth with each other for about 45 minutes until it was time to greet the Deities. At that point, Radhanath Swami said, “Now lead kirtan,” and I was very hesitant to do that, but when the curtains opened, I began leading the *Govindam* prayers. 🙏

Radhanath Swami: We are so blessed in this very temple room. On several occasions Yamuna devi spoke for us, sitting right here. She would lead kirtans. She would speak incredible deep memories of Srila Prabhupada. She would speak such powerful, pure, heart-piercing *siddhanta* of our teachings and philosophy, with such compassion.... Yamuna devi was here, and it was greeting of the Deities time, and we were all sitting in front as the doors opened. And just as the doors opened, the electricity went out. So *Govindam adi purusam* didn’t play. There was no electricity. So everyone looked at Yamuna devi, and I asked her, “Please, you chant.” And everyone was looking at her, “Please chant.” So she led, live, in person, for the greeting of Radha-Gopinatha. And I was thinking that devotees all over the universe would give anything to be here for this moment, where Yamuna devi is live in person greeting the Deities. And it was very heart-melting. As soon as she ended, all the lights went on, and the electricity came back. This is not just some sentimental idea. This is the reality—that Sri Sri Radha-Gopinatha wanted her to sing for Them, and They orchestrated it perfectly. And we were all the witnesses of this *lila*. 🙏

“You Will Live Ten More Years”

A few days after her arrival, Yamuna went to the Bhaktivedanta Hospital to receive Ayurvedic treatment for a few days. On entering the hospital and seeing Srila Prabhupada’s *murti* prominently displayed and worshiped by all the staff, and by observing the sincerity and dedication of the devotee doctors and facilitators, she spent virtually the entire visit overwhelmed with emotion.

Yamuna: I'm completely overwhelmed. [The staff] were already glorified with their qualifications—all specialists in their fields, and all devotee preachers first, and then their specialist positions—anesthesiologists, pediatricians, surgeons, lecturers, teachers—after. The level of sincere Krishna Consciousness here is earth shattering. You can hear Srila Prabhupada; he is being glorified in the background by his kirtan going on twenty-four hours a day. The halls resonate with Krishna Consciousness. Everything is offered; everyone who eats in this hospital—all the patients in critical care down to somebody who sits at the front door—gets Krishna *prasadam* offered to Jagannatha, Balarama, Subhadra *archa vigraha*. In the lobby everyone has on suits, and all the men have on *sikhas*. What can I say? I'm speechless—it is yet again as if a bomb was dropped on my head. I am speechless. 🙏

Vishvarupa das: [Yamuna devi] was standing [before Srila Prabhupada's murti] for the *Siksastakam* prayers that we sing four times in the day before the shift of service begins. And when she entered somehow that prayer was going on, and she was simply weeping and weeping throughout the prayers. Then she distributed the *prasadam* which we distribute after the prayers with her own hands. All the employees and people were there. And I remember that on that visit of hers, I never saw her not crying. Constantly she was crying throughout. And my wife would cook for her, and with every morsel, she would just close her eyes and just eat and glorify, and the next morsel, eat and glorify, and cry. Cry and eat, cry and eat.... I cannot imagine how one can be ecstatically crying every moment, all throughout the number of days that she stayed.... She was so appreciative of the devotees that Prabhupada's Movement had created, and she was thanking Prabhupada again and again. 🙏

Yamuna's initial desire was to take the *panchakarma* cleanse, but at her evaluation the Ayurvedic consultant advised against it, feeling it would put too much strain on the heart. Yamuna recorded his findings:

Yamuna: After four days of observation, the doctor has come up with the fact that I should not take *panchakarma*—that my system is not strong enough for it. That means that although it doesn't show up in a cardiograph, there is a chance of a heart problem, and the *panchakarma* would be too strong on that. [He said] that whatever healing I do should be done very slowly, and not in a dramatic way. That includes weight loss and/or working on any of the other functions of my body that aren't in working order.

The Ayurvedic physician has said that according to my palm I have ten more years to live. I can either live that in a healthy state or a diseased state. The healthy state will be obtained by living in an Ayurvedic way that is in tune with my constitution. 🐾

This prophetic statement turned out to be true, and except for the last two years of her life, Yamuna lived a remarkably active and blissful life full of energy and stamina despite her health issues. Before she left the hospital, Yamuna expressed her gratitude and appreciation to the assembled doctors and staff:

Yamuna: I just want to glorify your service. I have millions of thoughts and millions of words, and it would be very eloquent to begin to express how touched and how honored we are just to have your company, and how we appreciate the fact that while Srila Prabhupada gave instructions equally to all of his disciples, to everyone on this planet, you see how some [actually] hear them, and you have heard them. And not only how you heard them, but how you've acted on them, and that it is so rare and exquisitely beautiful, and so needed on this planet. This is like no place in the world. 🐾

More Blissful Association at the Pune Yatra

Yamuna devi would have been the first to say that she became uncomfortable in large crowds. The surreal effect of traveling from our remote ashram in the wilds of British Columbia to Mumbai, and the reception she always received, was frankly overwhelming to her. Whenever she stepped out of our cocooned existence at Saranagati, she was virtually mobbed with devotees who wanted her company. And Yamuna's nature was at once gracious and self-effacing. She would always try to accommodate everyone, but with vast numbers, it became somewhat overwhelming. As she attended the massive gathering at the Pune residence of Krishna Chandra prabhu, she later related that all she could feel was gratitude and appreciation—that these devotees were serving Srila Prabhupada's Movement with such grace and dignity. Her talk at the Pune Yatra is available online, but I attach a small indication of her overall feeling, which poignantly expresses what she took from the experience.

Yamuna: So, when I came this morning and sat down to *japa* amidst you all for the first time, again I was awestruck by your company. It was like “surround sound.” If you are ever in a recording studio—it's a bit high

tech—there are many tracks that can be recorded upon, and when you sit in the listening room and the sound comes on and the mixing is correct, you are surrounded in all directions with that sound—from the four directions: left and right, up and down. So I felt like that. Just being in your company I was surrounded by your *bhakti*, your prayer, the repetition of the vibration of the *mahamantra*, and again I was overcome by the quality of your association. 🙏



Yamuna simply beamed when she returned to Saranagati from that visit, enthusiastically recalling to me the glories of Radhanath Swami and all the devotees at Radha-Gopinatha Mandir. I lamented not being able to experience what was etched so clearly on her face—the pure bliss of sadhu *sanga* with wonderful devotees.

Saranagati Village—The Idealism Versus the Concrete Reality of Community Living

The early idealism of our conception of community life in Saranagati Village was quickly dampened by the challenges of its democratic management structure. With each shareholder also being a director, the passing and implementation of resolutions was never an easy task. Although Saranagati was an ISKCON-affiliated community, its directors focused on managing shareholder, property and legal issues, while steering away from the enforcement of devotional standards or infringements to its original spiritual mandate. This was attributed in part to the fact that many of Saranagati's residents were rugged individualists who had lived under temple management for years and now wished to be more self-determined. Having already been confronted with a variety of philosophical disagreements since its inception, it is understandable that the residents of Saranagati wanted to avoid such conflicts whenever possible; yet with no overall spiritual authority in place and little enforcement of its spiritual mission and bylaws, Saranagati's residents adhered to a cornucopia of philosophical understandings—from

radical *rtvik* to disheveled hippie-era mountain men, and from dedicated Prabhupada disciples to followers of other Gaudiya gurus.

Yamuna devi, seen as a desirable convert, was often approached by representatives of other groups or missions. As she fundamentally respected all Vaishnavas, perhaps some of them mistook this for something else, but in fact Yamuna had lived through so many presentations of *siddhanta* at variance with Srila Prabhupada's that, while she graciously received those who came to Banabehari Mandir, she was not interested in joining their ranks. Once, a young *sannyasi* disciple of Narayana Maharaja came and spoke for five hours—at one point asserting that Srila Prabhupada had only given the ABC's of Krishna *bhakti*, and adding that unless we joined his guru's mission, no advancement would be forthcoming. I will never forget Yamuna's answer. While she remained externally very gracious, I could see that it was a struggle for her. She said, "When I feel as though I have understood one ten-thousandth of a drop in the ocean of what Srila Prabhupada gave us, in however many lifetimes that takes me, then by his grace he may then give me more."

Early Saranagati Retreats and Festivals

In reflecting on our years at Saranagati Village, one wonderful quality of the community stands out—that irrespective of any external tensions, the core group of devotees were enthusiastic and hard-working participants in devotional festivals and functions. Every household could be counted on to bring at least one *prasadam* preparation and engage their children in plays, chanting, singing, dancing, and craft projects. Inspired by the exceptional exchanges of love among devotees at the Mumbai Radha-Gopinatha Temple, Yamuna felt that the cure for any spiritual divisiveness in Saranagati was to encourage more all-inclusive programs and festivals, to enliven everyone in Krishna Consciousness and strengthen the overall spiritual unity. She would sit for hours in deep thought, write copious notes about specific themes for programs, and then go door to door, list in hand, and invite others to make a preparation or engage in special services. The residents of Saranagati invariably responded with enthusiasm, and when the programs, festivals or retreats occurred, they were always blissful and dynamic occasions.

One of her first ideas was to begin quarterly Holy Name retreat programs, where the entire community, adults and children, would spend twelve hours together engaged in chanting, hearing, performing plays, singing and feasting. The first retreat was held at the home of Ghosh

Thakur das and Girija devi, or “Supermom” as Yamuna nicknamed her for her wonderful parenting of five exceptional children. Always smiling and tireless, Girija is a shining star in the Saranagati firmament. Each family or other participant contributed a reading, kirtan, play or other offering, and as part of our contribution, Yamuna engaged the women of her singing class in chanting a favorite *bhajan*.

Radhakunda devi’s Diary: APRIL 12, 2001—For the retreat, the ladies that went to Mother Yamuna and Dinatarini’s singing program are singing the *bhajan Kabe Habe Bolo Sei Dina Amar* in a choir to this really beautiful tune. It’s a little bit difficult, but not much—and it’s fun. I really enjoy it! We are practicing again on Monday at 10:00 AM. I am so glad I am able to get the association of those two wonderful ladies. Ten years ago, I never would have thought that one day I would be singing and learning to sing with Yamuna and Dina! I wonder what I did to get that special mercy? It’s a great hope for my future, for what will the next ten years bring? 🙏



Lasting until well after midnight, and engaging each of the adults and children, the retreat affirmed the Krishna Magic of devotee association within the community, and everyone left feeling uplifted and ready to plan the next retreat. Radhakunda devi, then seventeen, wrote about the event in her diary:

Radhakunda devi’s Diary: MAY 2, 2001—We had *japa* first, and that was a little bit difficult. After that we had kirtan and then *prasadam*. After *prasadam* Yoginath’s family gave their presentation. It was so good. Yogi wrote a song about Saranagati, and his family sang it in the *Navanita Gaura Varam* tune. It was the funniest, most truthful song about the farm that I ever heard. Jai said it made him cry. It was a really beautiful song. After the song [Girija] did a *Krsna* book workshop. She read us the Kaliya story, and we were divided in groups. Each of us imagined the story in our head and then shared it with the group.... We, the ladies, also sang our *Kabe Habe Bolo* song. It was so fun. Then Jai led a kirtan, and KC [Krishna Chaitanya] lead



Saranagati Yatra: February 2, 2002

Closing Thoughts...

*Let us chant... with great intensity... to
purify the heart... Let us pray together to the
Holy Name... to cleanse our hearts... of all the
impurities and material attachments present...
allow that natural, eternal krishna prema again
predominates our lives... The holy name is the
means by which our hearts can be cleansed...
but we must chant in a mood of helplessness
falling at the lotus feet of the Holy Name...
begging... please remove all my selfish material
attachments from my heart... which are birth
after birth separating us from the Lord of
our lives. Let us chant... ..*

a sweet kirtan. I think we might have had *prasadam* then, and then we built a bonfire ... and people sang and danced until about 12 AM. Then we went inside for the midnight *raga*. Yamuna got sick and had to go home, so Dina sang the tune. It was really nice, but hard to catch on. Then everyone went home. Nice day for sure! 🙏

We held the next twelve-hour Holy Name retreat in October, soon after the wife of our dear friend and ashram builder, Rasaraja das, was seriously injured in an automobile accident. Lilamrita devi, our multi-talented Godsister, wrote a beautiful and poignant song dedicated to her based on the *mare krsna rakhe ke*, *rakhe krsna mare ke* prayer of Narottama das Thakur, and Yamuna and she sang it together leaving everyone emotional by their heartfelt singing and its profound meaning. Yamuna later read her closing thoughts to the assembled devotees (see sidebar).

A Spiritual Warrior — Bhakti-tirtha Swami at Banabehari Mandir

One of the frequent discussions Yamuna and I had in Saranagati was on contrasting the challenges of living in a small community with its benefits. On the challenge side, because of the limited number of residents, you have to confront different issues with the same people over and over again, and this can erode your respect for each other. On the benefit side, it can teach you more tolerance, humility and self-

reflection. In July, our community was given an informal seminar on community values when our dear Godbrother Bhakti-tirtha Maharaja came to visit us in Saranagati, staying for four days at Banabehari Mandir. Not only had the entire concept of spiritual community been a principal focus of his for years, but he had written books deeply exploring it. Yamuna and I spoke for hours with him on the challenges within our own community, and his observations were both highly illuminating and relevant.

On July 4 and 5, Bhakti-tirtha Swami presented a two-day seminar on the importance of community and devotee relationships. As expected, it was profound with realization steeped in a liberal dose of love and compassion. His interactive seminar engaged young and old alike, and was much appreciated by those who attended.

Radhakunda devi: [Bhakti-tirtha Swami] had all the devotees in the room go around and glorify each other, which was especially moving because some devotees were glorifying each other and crying. I think everyone in the valley was there, and the mood was incredible. Even as a teenager, I remember being blown away by his personality and abilities. 🙏

Radhakunda devi's Diary: JULY 5, 2001—Bhakti-tirtha Maharaja is here and giving seminars on appreciating each other and building a stronger community. It's exactly what the farm needs right now—to appreciate each other more. Tonight is the last seminar given by Bhakti-tirtha Swami. He is really good, humble and kind. I really enjoy his seminars. 🙏

For Yamuna and me, the memories of our profound and loving exchanges with Bhakti-tirtha Swami during his stay were especially meaningful; it would be the last time we actually had his physical association in this life.

Radhastami

The observance of Radhastami was usually held at Radha-Banabehari Mandir, as Gaura-Nitai were worshiped at the community temple of Kulasekhara das. We held the first Radhastami celebration in 2001. Yamuna wanted to offer 108 preparations, and again went with her lists to engage others, though she made many dishes herself. We hung twenty-five paper diamonds from the temple ceiling bearing the qualities of Srimati Radharani, and each of the children and youth acted out a charade of one quality, while the rest guessed it. Then a full *abhisheka* of Sri Sri Radha-Banabehari was held with milk, yogurt, ghee, honey and sweet water offered by each devotee, accompanied by kirtan and Radharani *bhajans*. At the greeting of the



Deities after Their dressing, flowers and small clay ghee lamps were offered by each devotee, as Yamuna stood nearby asking them to offer a special prayer “from the core of their hearts” to Srimati Radharani. Then the 108 preparations were offered and honored with great happiness. This program,

with yearly variations on its theme, was observed for each Radhastami during our Saranagati years.



Radhakunda offering flowers to Radha-Banabehari

Radhakunda devi's Diary: OCTOBER 29, 2001—What do I know for certain? I know for certain one thing only, and that is that I want to be a devotee for the rest of my life. For sure—not just a Sunday Feast devotee, but an everyday devotee; a devotee that follows Ekadasi, chants sixteen rounds, reads Prabhupada's books, goes to the programs, has a devotee husband and devotee kids (maybe); be like my parents

and Yamuna and Dina, the devotees at the farm. It's amazing how much more I appreciate them now that I am away from them. It's like a big family over there, like I have so many parents and friends. 🙏

A Blossoming of Bhakti in the Heart – Kartamasa's Story

Kartamasa das (Kar) again came during his Christmas break, and Yamuna and I immediately sensed a change in him. The longing in the heart for glorification of Krishna through the Holy Name was now surfacing through the thin veil of material attachments. Kar again brought his friend Nimesh, a laconic and reserved second generation youth, who surprised us by quietly serving both Banabehari Mandir and the community behind the scenes. Nimesh, a loyal and generous soul, became a regular visitor to Banabehari Mandir and a much-valued friend to Yamuna and me. Sometimes he would work in Vancouver all day and drive at night to be in time for *mangal arati*.

Kartamasa das: This time, when I arrived in Saranagati along with the same friends I shared the previous holidays with, I was a different person. I was hungry for kirtan, whether it was listening or participating. I was interested in melodies, rhythms and moods—in short, I was a fan of kirtan. My friends

picked up on this, and for Christmas I was generously given a minidisc recorder and microphone, so I could collect and treasure all kinds of kirtan. This was the best gift I have ever received in my life.

Even though I was so close in proximity to Yamuna and Dina, I wasn't able to go there, for we were busy with holiday events, and I did not have a vehicle. From what I recall, we went to see Yamuna and Dina once before New Year, and it was for a cordial reconnect chat. The only memory from that conversation was Yamuna's question to me, which was delivered in the



Nimesh, Kartamasa and Yamuna

same manner as asking how the folks were: "And Kar, do you still do drugs?" My friends all snickered at this, and I did not live it down for some time. I answered no, and despite the fact that I had never in my life done any drugs, I took it as a serious question for two reasons. For one, I was struck with the revelation of my good fortune that I was able to actually honestly say no to such a powerful and spiritual personality; it justified my hard-fought battle against peer-pressure all those teen years. Secondly, I looked at the question more metaphorically, as in, "And Kar, are you still living unconsciously, without a purpose?" Again, I was so glad that I could say no—that I was ready to hear and learn, and that she had my total respect.

Yamuna and Dina also invited us to the celebration of Sri Sri Radha-Banabehari's installation anniversary and Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur's Disappearance Day, which fell on January 2 that year. They asked us to come at 8 AM for kirtan.

The next time I saw Yamuna was at the New Year's Eve gathering. I remember trying to do kirtan with my friends as much as possible during that week or so that I was in Saranagati. I remember Yadubara being inspired to participate, and he learned how to play harmonium shortly afterwards. I played harmonium for Yamuna at the gathering because in my ignorance I thought from the way she was talking that she could not in any way whatsoever play harmonium or a keyboard; so I thought I was assisting her because she was helpless in that regard. I had only just started playing that year. Imagine my sheepishness to find out later how many kirtans she led with a harmonium, including playing the keyboard so often at the morning programs. The point is, she made each of us feel important

and appreciated for whatever service we might consent to. However, at that New Year's gathering, I still spent most of the time with friends, away from the kirtan and Yamuna and Dina's company. The fact is I had cherished so much the meditative mood that they had shared with us the year before that the more social and raucous kirtans were not very compelling to me. I eagerly awaited January 2. 🐾

Festival for Observing the Appearance Day of Sri Sri Radha-Banabehari

Yamuna and I were thrilled to share the Appearance Day celebration of Sri Sri Radha-Banabehari with the Saranagati devotees and guests. Of all festivals and observances, this was one of the most dear to us. Both Yamuna and I deeply felt the blessings and mercy of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur in our lives, and being able to both honor his Disappearance and celebrate Radha-Banabehari's presence was doubly auspicious for us.

You should always pray to [Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati] because naturally he will be more affectionate to you than me. Generally one is more affectionate to the grandchildren than to the children directly. So I am sure that my Guru Maharaja will be [more] easily inclined to your prayers than that of mine. You will do good always by offering your prayers to His Divine Grace Bhaktisiddhanta Goswami Maharaja.

—LETTER TO BRAHMANANDA DAS, DEC. 19, 1968

Kartamasa das: Finally, the morning [of January 2] arrived. All my friends were there with me, and I made my first kirtan recording ever: Dina leading us in their signature *Gurvastakam* melody while playing tamboura, and then passing the lead round-robin style, engaging each and every one of us. For many of us, it was our first time leading publicly, even if just for one mantra. Dayalu played their precious yellow *mridanga*, and I played *kartals* for some of the time. 🐾

Our program always involved first chanting the *Mangalacaranam* and other *bhajans*, then having readings and personal glorification of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati. Yamuna traditionally requested each devotee to bring a reading, story or prayer of their choosing. Then the *abhisheka* was

performed and kirtan held as the Deities were dressed in Their white and burgundy velvet winter dresses.

Kartamasa das: When Yamuna opened the screen for the Deity *darshan*, I remained in the back, so I could not see so clearly, but I remember thinking how perfect a life this was—how the Deities were being worshiped so nicely and properly; how They were placed front and center in all of our lives; and how a devotee (Yamuna) knew how to do this all so expertly and efficiently. She and Dina were literally organizing and conducting the program while they were engaged in services like offering the *arati* and preparing the offerings. An example of this is how when the screen was pulled back for *arati*, Yamuna, while doing *arati*, instructed everyone to sing the *Govindam* prayers, and then when the usual verses were over, she led everyone in continuing the same melody, but singing the *mahamantra*. I have heard her sing the *mahamantra* following the *Govindam* prayers a couple other times, and it is one of the most precious sounds etched in my heart. Unfortunately, I had only a sense for kirtan at that point, and do not remember well enough anything from the event other than that. In fact, I was still too dull to even be able to properly see the beautiful forms of Sri Sri Radha-Banabehari. 🙏



Kartamasa's Worshipful Deities— Krishna and Balarama

Kartamasa das: Yamuna must have noticed my dullness, because the day I went over to say goodbye (having to go back to graduate school), she gave me another life-changing experience. After a few welcoming sentences, she called me over, away from the group. One of her larger armchairs was all the way by the wall of what became the dining area. She sat me down in the chair, and she pulled up a stool from the kitchen, sitting directly in front of me. “What do you do regarding Deity worship?” she asked. “Me?! Nothing! I have a few pictures on my old TV stand.” “Let me tell you how Srila Prabhupada engaged me in Deity worship.” She then proceeded to tell

me the entire story of her Deities, Sri Sri Radha-Banabehariji, which began much before Their appearance, beginning with her assignment in India to learn Deity worship from the Goswamis' temples in Vrindavan (particularly the Radha-Raman Temple) and her service of having Deities made for the ISKCON Vrindavan Mandir. She went on to share how Radha-Banabehari were one of the three perfect sets made, and how Prabhupada had himself named Them and instructed her and Dina to worship Them for the rest of their lives. She so humbly said how she was just practicing how to properly serve Them, and how distant a goal it was to serve Them well. But with the most emphasis, looking me in the eyes with her penetrating gaze, she told me how important it was to worship Deities. My jaw literally dropped, and I could not figure out why she was telling me all this. The conversation felt like an hour long. Due to my confused state, I cannot accurately remember details, just this general outline of the conversation. I do not remember why it was so important to worship Deities, although she certainly spent a good amount of time telling me why. All I know is I strongly felt that it was important to her that it was important to me, and that this was a direct instruction. The details quickly became just context for the message: you need to worship Deities. She then released me.

As we left and journeyed back to Vancouver, I told my friend Nimesh what happened, and how I was given a direct instruction. I was just feeling that I had taken her first (albeit indirect) instruction to heart (to dive into kirtan), and was just beginning to relish it with unlimited enthusiasm. Now I had been given a completely different instruction, and there were no ifs, ands, or buts about it. I had a new mission....

It was now January 2002, and this year became one of the most important of my life for many reasons. Even upon arrival in Vancouver, on the way to Florida, Nimesh and I had wonderful kirtan at every opportunity. Then in Alachua, along with my roommate Gauranga Kishore, we hosted six spiritual programs a week in our apartment, mostly revolving around *bhajans*. It was a special time, during which Krishna gave me so much opportunity to dive into Krishna Consciousness and get good association. However, I had the itch of Yamuna's instruction to me on Deity worship ever present on my mind. Initially, I brought out my childhood Deities and began worshiping Them, reacquainting myself with making offerings and performing *arati*. Yet within my heart I saw Krishna as Govinda, the cowherd boy, with His hand on His hip and a mischievous, all-knowing smile. My father had worshiped this form of Krishna and named me after him (Kartamasa). So I decided I needed that form of Krishna in order to whole

heartedly try Deity worship, and resolute in that purpose, I spent a lot of time in prayer.

Then one Sunday evening, I entered the temple gift shop and immediately looked up in the rafters high above all the merchandise. There, alone and unpainted, were the divine forms of Sri Sri Krishna-Balarama. I could not see any features, just Their *tribhanga* curving forms. My heart leaped; there They were, the most perfect forms of the Lord for me to worship. I couldn't have ever conceived of anything more suitable or perfect. Unfortunately, the proprietor told me they were not for sale—that she had brought them from Vrindavan to become her personal Deities. I became despondent, and seeing this, my parents and friends convinced the owner to give Them to me. Their Lordships were installed on the weekend of April 14, 2002. 🐦



Yamuna's Health Retreat and Alachua Visit—Summer 2002

By the summer of 2002, Yamuna was experiencing some health issues. Through the kindness of friends Devarshi and Nirmala in Alachua and Henry Schoellkopf in Washington DC, she spent sixty-three days at a raw food institute in Florida, which improved her health significantly. Whenever Yamuna tried a new culinary modality, she created new recipes—invariably improvements on what she had experienced—and even toyed with the idea of writing a raw food cookbook. Unfortunately, Saranagati's harsh climate, with its ninety-day growing season, was impractical for a year-round raw food diet, so she was ultimately forced to make adjustments. Still, her health remained stable, and she was always grateful for the experience. After the retreat, she visited the Alachua community and stayed with Nirmala, Devarshi and their daughter Vani.

Nirmala devi: Yamuna stayed with us for some time after her stay at the Hippocrates Institute. On the morning she was to leave, she already had her luggage by the door. We chanted, had breakfast and took her to the airport. When we returned, I went into her room. She had made a banner

from headrest paper from my husband's chiropractic table which extended across the entire wall. It brought tears to our eyes and longing to our hearts. I saved this banner, which she had stayed up to make in her beautiful calligraphy writing. In bigger writing she wrote, "With all my heart, with my all, Thank you. I carry you with me always." Then above and below that she wrote, "Dear Nirmala, Devarshi and Vani, In the wee small hours before departure, the full spectrum of embracing love, respect, gratitude and honor ..." She went on with two full lines across the wall of what she experienced on this visit. It was heartfelt, genuine and done with love. One of the many astounding qualities about Yamuna was her gratitude and appreciation. She didn't expect anything and appreciated everything! When we visited her she would go all out to make a wonderful stay, and when she came to us for respite, we tried to do the same, but could never measure up to her impeccable, creative, Krishna Conscious standard. Yet she magnified our little service, as she did for everyone. She boosted devotees up to encourage them in their devotional practices. If you did some service, she would say how much Srila Prabhupada would appreciate that service, and you would actually get a glimpse of how she lived her life for Srila Prabhupada. 🙏

Vani devi: At six years old it can be hard to appreciate what goes on around you, yet I remember quite clearly. I was asked to "assist" Auntie Yamuna in the kitchen for a raw feast she was preparing—stuffed red peppers with a mock cream cheese filling, various types of raw soaked rice salads, a raw pie topped with beautiful light and fluffy whipped macadamia cream, and various other preparations, each unique in flavor, color and ingredients. It was my first experience being utterly fascinated by what you could prepare with

food. Every movement, smell and texture was all new and exciting. The way Auntie Yamuna engaged me and explained to me and took care to teach me made it a completely unforgettable experience. From that day on she inspired a spark inside of me to continue to learn to cook and feed the Vaishnavas. She didn't just create delicious *prasadam*, though; she taught cleanliness, Srila Prabhupada's standard, and she showed by her example how not to waste any part of Krishna's creations. As I went to throw away the pepper seeds,



she stopped me and excitedly explained how if I let them dry for a while I could plant them and grow more peppers. Immediately I proceeded to follow her instructions and was eager to learn more. She named me “seed saver,” and I felt proud to do a part and re-grow the peppers. She made every aspect of cooking and all that it could entail possible and exciting. Sure enough, in time, a beautiful pepper plant grew, and I picked my first pepper with an overwhelming feeling of accomplishment and satisfaction that it was possible for a little six-year-old girl to grow peppers for Krishna. 🍆

Yamuna with Kartamasa and the Youth in Alachua

Kartamasa das: Somehow or other, I found out that Yamuna would be in Alachua in June of 2002. A group of ladies seemed to know Yamuna well, staying very close to her and engaging her in various programs. Even though I did not know the other ladies well, I felt very, very close to Yamuna, so I managed to go to one program at Bhadra and Ananga Manjari’s house. Two days later, I heard that she was at the Alachua temple morning program. I rushed there just in time to record her leading guru *puja*. It was the only kirtan I ever saw her lead standing up with a microphone and dancing. It was a most glorious sight; the entire temple room was moving up and down the length of the temple with her as she danced. She had her close lady friends stand next to her, sometimes holding their hands. That kirtan was so much “Yamuna,” and she was sharing herself with so many devotees that morning. From the rhythmic melodies to the spontaneity and flow with which she sang, everything about that kirtan was what I learned over the coming years to be “classic Yamuna.” There was nothing mechanical about it, and the melodies and style were uniquely her own.



Since returning to Alachua that year, my main kirtan mentor and inspiration was Bada Haridas, who so gently and lovingly opened up the doors to the vast storehouse of kirtan and *bhajan* melodies, sharing such treasures with youth half his age. Another close kirtan companion for me was Visvambhara Sheth, who, being immensely talented, had a way of making complex Aindra tunes very accessible. Both had a natural and contagious

love for kirtan. So imagine my delight when Nirmala and Devarshi arranged for both Bada Hari and Visvambhara to join Yamuna at their house for an evening of kirtan. My anticipation was off the charts.

I arrived eagerly and set up my recorder. Yamuna gave me so much love that night, perhaps seeing my joy at having my favorite *kirtan*iyas together. She sat me very close to her and spoke so lovingly. Bada Hari began the kirtan, with Visvambhara playing drum. I think Yamuna was playing *kar-tals*, and I was playing a tambourine. The kirtan was ecstatic, and I could not restrain my tears. Afterward, everyone requested Yamuna to sing. She humbly declined, instead asking someone else to sing the Nrsimha prayers, which they did. Again, afterwards, everyone insisted that Yamuna sing. After protesting for some time, she finally began to sing *Trinad api sunicena* with genuine humility.

Yamuna then agreed to come to my apartment the next morning for Sri Sri Krishna-Balarama's morning program. I was ecstatic. Some months prior, we had started having youth over for a morning program three days a week. Our largest turnout was always on Sunday mornings, when a guest disciple of Srila Prabhupada was invited to share their realizations with the youth.

Yamuna came on June 25, 2002. Internally, I was exploding with pride and joy, for I could finally share my inspiration and the reason for my changed lifestyle with my friends. No doubt, my friends were just as eager to meet her, for I had a completely full apartment, spilling onto the balcony. My mother and Haribhakti's mother were cooking *prasadam* in the kitchen, and other older devotees showed up uninvited. I explained to Yamuna we always began with greeting the Deities with an *arati* and kirtan.

Somehow she took that to mean greeting the Deities with the *Govindam* prayers, so we got a treat everyone is always anxious for—Yamuna singing the *Govindam* prayers. Then she led a beautiful kirtan for Krishna-Balarama. It was all so perfect for me—the one who willed Krishna and Balarama to come, and the Ones who brought Yamuna into my life were face to face. Fortunately, it was to be the first of many such occasions.

Following the kirtan, I asked Yamuna



to speak on whatever she felt was most important for us younger devotees to hear and understand. This particular talk has been just that for me ever since: the most important instructions to hear and understand. The talk revolved around “enthusiasm, patience and commitment,” and she did not let any of us doze in that talk, for it was highly interactive. She began by asking everyone to introduce themselves and say what attracts them to Krishna Consciousness. When I look back on that now, I realize what took me ten years to get a hint of—she always emphasized the positive aspect of the positive form of Krishna Consciousness. As each person introduced themselves, Yamuna encouraged them by paralleling their comments with anecdotes from her own life—mostly Prabhupada stories. She was fully present—there to give everything she could possibly give in two hours. For instance, if someone said they liked *bhajans*, she responded with what Prabhupada said about the *bhajans* of Bhaktivinoda Thakur and Narottama das. If someone liked *prasadam*, she asked for more specifics, unveiling layers that most minds had never conceived of. Someone mentions *bhajans*, and she asks, “What does that word mean to you?” Deity worship? “Why? How?” Basically she brought us all from unconsciousness to consciousness, and then she was able to give us Krishna Consciousness. And not just lip-service Krishna Consciousness; she emphasized “the big C word: commitment.” When she realized none of us had a clue what commitment really meant, she had us look it up in dictionaries and then discuss how the definitions apply to us. Overall, it was a most significant time of my life, for she gave me (and I’m sure a few others) the tools with which to analyze our progress in spiritual life, and a whole lot more awareness. 🐾

Kartamasa recorded a telling and sometimes humorous exchange where he tried to bring up how Yamuna had been instrumental in invoking his attachment to Deity worship. Yet Yamuna, sensing that he was beginning to praise her, kept interrupting him. For those who knew Yamuna, this was a standard tactic. She did not like to hear herself being honored, and would often diffuse it by turning the tables on the person who was attempting to praise her, in this case, Kartamasa das.

Kartamasa das: Can I just take this opportunity to ... say something. Krishna and Balaramaji—since They have been in my life, I just take care of Them as best I can, in any way. They’ve taken care of everything else for me, completely, and of course, my friends,



too. And I wanted to thank you very much for getting me started in that. I don't know if you remember in January, when I was in Saranagati ...

Yamuna: I do. Very well.

Kartamasa das: I was at Bhakti-siddhanta Saraswati Thakur's Disappearance Day.

Yamuna: I remember it very well. Yes.

Kartamasa das: And you sat me down and talked to me about Deity worship.

Yamuna: Just for a ... little short while; we did, didn't we?

Kartamasa das: Well, you told me the whole story of your ...

Yamuna: Yeah.

Kartamasa das: ... Deities and ...

Yamuna: Yeah.

Kartamasa das: You asked me about what am I doing.

Yamuna: Yeah.

Kartamasa das: And since then Krishna facilitated all this. He put it all in my place ...

Yamuna: [deep breath]

Kartamasa das: And it's been really fulfilling.

Yamuna: Oh, yes, yes.

Kartamasa das: And you also ...

Yamuna: Oh, that's so nice.

Kartamasa das: ... started me on *bhajans*, which is my ...

Yamuna: Wow!

Kartamasa das: ... life and soul.

Yamuna: Too good! Yes! [laughter] Wooh! Gosh, that's nice.

Kartamasa das: I was at your ...

Yamuna: Just see! Here I'm thinking that you're bringing me into Krishna Consciousness, and you're thinking... See, that's what devotees do. When devotees really touch, then you think that devotee is the one who's facilitating. And that devotee thinks, "No, this one's facilitating," and that feeling goes on. And you know what? It just gets better and better and better, and there is no end to it. And that's what joy feels like. [chuckles] It's when you

have so much appreciation for that person you're with, and that person has so much appreciation for the other person. That mood is just like putting two combustibles together; it just explodes in transcendental potency. So I feel the same way about your company, Kar. Just the same way; it's so exciting to me because we're off the beaten path. And ... Kar just dropped into our lives. [He] came to Saranagati, and we just had wonderful kirtans. It was very enlivening for both Dina and me, and so many devotees—just in that short time. Is it now two visits you've been there?

Kartamasa das: Recently.

Yamuna: [Our Saranagati] valley is going through some growing pains now. So let's just take our focus of this mercy, this grace, this power that you feel in your life, and that I feel in mine, and just bring it, and inundate.

Churning the Ocean of Bliss— Summer/Fall 2002

On returning to Saranagati from Alachua, a physically rejuvenated Yamuna was even more “fired up” to spread the glories of chanting, hearing and sharing Krishna *bhakti* with devotees—especially the youth. We began evening kirtan programs that summer and started a Wednesday *Caitanya-caritamrta* reading which continued throughout our remaining years there and is maintained to this day by the grace of Rasaraja das. Shortly after Yamuna's arrival, young Kartamasa das also came to Saranagati with his Krishna-Balarama Deities. Still working on his Master's degree in graduate school, he had miraculously received permission to write his Master's thesis on the Saranagati community.

Kartamasa das: I left for Saranagati just days after Yamuna. I was in the midst of graduate school, but my mind was mostly on Krishna Conscious activities at the time, and particularly on the source of my motivation: Yamuna and Dina in Saranagati. By nothing less than Krishna's kind arrangement, I was granted permission to do my Master's thesis on the community of Saranagati, allowing me to spend the summer in Saranagati and get college credit for it. 🐾

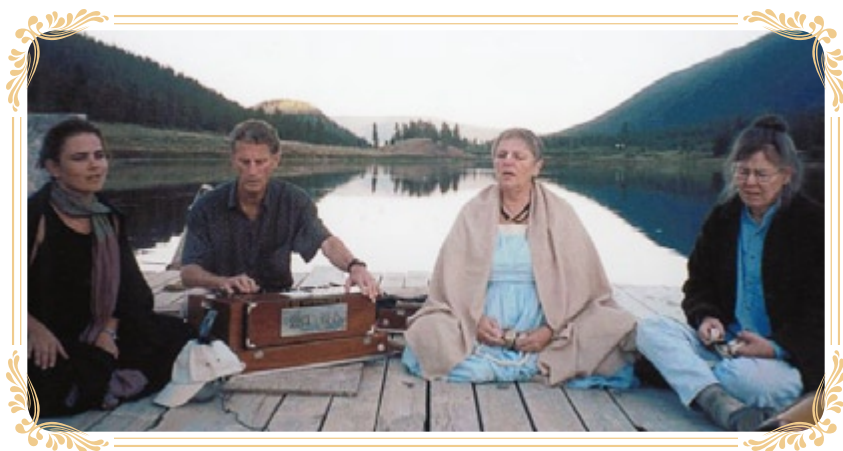
One of the first things Yamuna did was announce that we would hold a wonderful festival on Lord Balarama's Appearance Day for Kartamasa's

Krishna-Balarama Deities. This had the desired effect of enthusing so many devotees, and particularly the youth, to focus on specific services for the celebration. Unbeknownst to Kar and to his future wife, Radhakunda, Yamuna and I had noticed the similar gentle, mode-of-goodness natures they shared, and although we usually did not participate in matchmaking per se, we strongly felt that this would be an auspicious pairing. Yamuna had the idea to engage Radhakunda and her sister Bhavatarini in sewing the dresses for Krishna and Balarama, and though they felt unqualified, they agreed.

Radhakunda devi: Yamuna said, “I have to try my very hardest to make the outfit as perfect as I can because Krishna may see any flaw as my insincerity.” So for her it was like if she didn’t try her very, very hardest, Krishna would see whatever she didn’t try as insincerity. So when you make outfits for the Deities, you have to be very precise on measuring Them so the clothes fit Their forms very nicely. She had us take measurements of their ankles, knees, and where to put creases so it fits Their forms. So we were thinking that we can’t do this; this is impossible. But somehow we managed to do it anyway. Then, of course, Yamuna and Dina were just full of praise—“This is the most beautiful; I can’t believe you made this. Can we have some of this fabric?”—just so encouraging that it didn’t matter if you botched it like anything; they still made you feel like you did this most amazing thing. 🍷

Radhakunda came several times for fittings with Kartamasa present, and much to our happiness, the relationship between them blossomed through service to Krishna and Balarama.

Kartamasa das: I remember the first thing they did was give me a focus for the whole summer: celebrating Balarama’s Appearance Day at Banabehari Mandir. This was to be the first festival in which I served under them, and in which they showed me how to celebrate a festival. Everything was about glorifying the Deities, and a new outfit was needed for Them. Separately, Yamuna and Dina had recruited my future wife, Radhakunda, to make the outfit, and this was significant because although we had never met, like me, she had acquired a thirst for Yamuna and Dina’s association. So I brought Krishna-Balarama over to Banabehari Mandir, and Radha, Yamuna and Dina began taking measurements and having what seemed to be a joyous time together. I felt a little awkward that an unknown girl was doing so much service for my Deities, and wasn’t quite sure what to do to reciprocate.



All I could think of was to give her Krishna-Balarama's *maha prasadam* as often as possible. So I started dropping off sweet rice, *burfi* and fruit either at Radhakunda's house or Banabehari Mandir. This was also the first time Krishna-Balarama and Radha-Banabehari were together, and I brought Them a few times throughout the summer to try on outfit pieces.

It was actually a magical summer. Karnamrita, another enthusiastic *kirtaniya*, also spent the summer there, and the youth were also swept up in kirtan, with many evenings spent having *bhajans* and kirtan. The elder members of the community began gathering for *bhajans* on the dock of the lake on those warm summer evenings, and Yamuna and Dina attended several of those. 🐾

As the time grew near for Balarama's Appearance Day, Yamuna and I felt great joy to see the happiness of Saranagati's residents—elders and youth—to participate in the festivities. Kar's friend, Gauranga Kishore, a soft-spoken *brahmachari*, came from Alachua, and each morning they would walk for thirty minutes in the dark to attend the morning program at Banabehari Mandir. Yamuna and I were always inspired by the pointed and honest inquiries of the youth and looked forward to our *Srimad-Bhagavatam* classes with them.

Kartamasa das: It was through those morning programs in the company of Yamuna and Dina that my old life simply melted away. I remember listening to the *Bhagavatam* class discussion and feeling the Absolute Truth seep into me, as if it was the most powerful force in existence. It was so intense that all my other thoughts, aspirations, daydreams and so on simply

became irrelevant and inconsequential—they just dissipated. It was a true connection to my soul under all the layers of false identities and clouds of confusion. Tears would just pour out of my eyes uncontrollably. I remember being aware of it, and questioning why such a thing was happening. But I couldn't identify a particular emotion; it was just like a flushing of the old self. This happened on more than one occasion, but one morning Yamuna actually asked during class if I was all right, or if I had allergies and needed something. I replied by just putting up my hands in helplessness, and she said very gravely, "Oh, I see." And she never mentioned it again. I had been to so many *Bhagavatam* classes in my life, but hearing from these realized souls made all the difference. 🐝

Lord Balarama's Appearance Day Celebration – 2002

The festivities for Lord Balarama's Appearance Day were held at Banabehari Mandir on August 22. Yamuna designed the theme around Lord Balarama's affinity for honey. She engaged the young girls in making beautiful black and gold bees, which were hung on the ceiling of the temple room and on the altar. Each attendee was to bring honey to offer to the Lord. As usual, she meticulously planned each detail of the celebration and schedule to engage and inspire all ages. In addition to the honey gifts, everyone was asked to make a specific preparation.

For Radha-Banabehariji, we completed a glorious sky blue silk outfit with Ganga/Yamuna (gold and silver) *jari* flower patterns interwoven with black bumblebees. Yamuna had designed the outfit and commissioned the *jari* work in Vrindavan in 2000. She also invited the other Saranagati residents to make similar blue outfits and bring their Deities for the celebrations.

Kartamasa das: Although Yamuna and Dina consulted me on each aspect of the event, from what plates to use to the schedule itself, I felt useless, having never witnessed anything like their level of focus and careful attention to detail. Festival or event planning was something I was able to witness often in my later association with them, but this was the first time for me, and it simply blew my mind—it was another level, or to use a Yamuna word, it was in another "stratosphere." 🐝

Banabehari Mandir was flooded with blissful devotees for Lord Balarama's festival. Sri Sri Krishna-Balarama displayed a unique, almost impish aspect,



and Their outfit was lovely. Sri Sri Radha-Banabehari were exquisite, as were the other Deities in Their blue-colored dresses. Years later, Yamuna would again design and commission blue dresses in Vrindavan for all of the Deities in the community for a grand parrot-themed festival, but this was her first Saranagati theme for Lord Balarama—bees and honey.

Kartamasa das: The festival was absolutely tremendous. Virtually everyone in attendance was involved in some way, whether it was in singing, speaking about Balarama, or doing some other service. It mostly revolved around kirtan, but there was some time to share appreciation of Lord Balarama. I remember being so overwhelmed by the mood of the festival (and a big part of that was being involved in all the planning service in the weeks leading up to it), that I got too emotional when it was my turn to speak about Balarama. The taps had been opened in the *Bhagavatam* classes early, and they were still left on.

Yamuna and Dina and a few servers honored the Balarama feast after everyone else was done at around 9 PM. Only a few of the youth remained at Banabehari Mandir. The full August moon was directly shining on us, and we were reflecting on the program. I distinctly remember bubbling over with an ecstasy I had never felt before and telling Yamuna, “It just doesn’t get any better than this!” But to my surprise, she nonchalantly replied, “Oh yes, it does. It gets better. It just keeps getting better and better.” At the time, I remember feeling a little confused, since it seemed like we did everything



Singing *Jaya Radha Madhava*



Yamuna and Radhakunda reflecting on the festival

we possibly could to make a great festival. But over the years, I understood that it wasn't about the externals of the festivals she was talking about, but that internal connection that is made through serving the Lord together.

We were invited to come in and sing the Deities to bed. Krishna and Balarama spent the night there as well. About four or five of us went inside the temple room, and while Dina put the Deities to sleep, Yamuna sang *Jaya Radha Madhava*. I remember my mind challenging why she would sing *Jaya Radha Madhava* on Balarama's Appearance Day, but over the years I noticed that she often sang that to put Radha-Banabehari to sleep. After that kirtan, Yamuna encouraged each of us for our services and for sharing the festival together. It was the kind of sweet, personal and loving exchange that endeared her to so many devotees around the world. ॐ

Vancouver Rathayatra – 2002

Almost immediately following the Balarama festival, the Saranagati devotees and friends, including Yamuna and I, went to Vancouver to attend the Rathayatra on August 25. Throughout the festival Yamuna was perpetually surrounded by crowds and graciously interacted with as many people as possible. Later, the youth who were chanting on the festival stage, including Gauravani, Karnamrita and others, somehow convinced her to lead kirtan with them, something she rarely did among crowds.

Kartamasa das: The kirtan was exquisite; it was so good that I was constantly worried that I wouldn't be able to treasure it forever as a recording.

So I would periodically run offstage and check that my recorder was still plugged into the mixer, that it wasn't low on battery, and so on. Regardless, sitting next to Yamuna as she shared her incredibly soulful singing with so many people, with so much ease, made me feel like the most fortunate person in the world. During that kirtan, I was frequently stunned by how beautiful her singing was, and how she had a most unique groove, rhythm and melody style. For instance, she could transform any standard melody into something completely new and fresh, and with her own signature rhythm, which to me always made me feel like I was dancing in my heart (and I liked to think that she was too). The kirtan swept the crowd (of mostly devotees) off its feet, and got everyone dancing. With Radhakunda and the other Saranagati girls dancing behind me, and Yamuna leading the kirtan next to me, I felt like I had a new home, and that my Alachua days were numbered. Later that night, I asked Radhakunda if we could keep in touch, and within two years, we were married. 🐾



Radhakunda devi's Diary: AUGUST 26, 2002 — Yamuna, Karnam and Gauravani led an absolutely fantastic kirtan! Oh, it was totally ecstatic! I think I must have danced for four hours straight. My legs finally refused to function properly, and my knees were all cramping up, so I had to stop, unfortunately. But it was definitely one of the highlights of my year! 🐾



On our drive back to Saranagati, Yamuna and I discussed the power of kirtan and how Srila Prabhupada, through the purity of his own example, had given this precious gift to the disenfranchised youth of the West. To see a new generation diving into the nectar ocean of Krishna kirtan gave Yamuna more joy than she could express. Over the years, there was rarely a kirtan or

bhajan in which she did not shed tears of poignancy and happiness. In her Vyasa Puja offering, written soon after our return from Vancouver, Yamuna offered this prayer to Srila Prabhupada:

I remember how kirtan was so intense and joyous in your presence. How time and place dissolved in those kirtans. How your thumbs lifted off the surface of your *kartals* as they sizzled in sound, and how your vocal cords and mouth vibrated and extended as you filled a space with hauntingly beautiful transcendental sound vibrations. I remember losing myself in that sound and wishing never to leave this space or your presence. In this connection, I pray, even if only one more time, to hold the microphone for you as you chant your favorite Vaishnava prayer—*Hari Hari Biphale*—as experienced that final time at Akash Ganga in Mumbai. 🙏

Radhakunda devi's Diary: NOVEMBER 6, 2002 — It's Srila Prabhupada's Disappearance Day tomorrow, and Yamuna wants me to sing one of Prabhupada's *bhajans* with them, but I really don't think I should. My devotion for Prabhupada is not even a small fraction compared to theirs, and so I feel a bit like a fake. But she asked, and so I find it too difficult to refuse; I hope Srila Prabhupada can forgive me. I'm such a pretender. I've been going to Yamuna and Dina's morning programs for a few days now, and it's just what I needed! I feel refreshed and inspired by their atmosphere. Their temple and ashram is like the cure for all dissatisfaction!

NOVEMBER 10, 2002 — Tomorrow Yamuna and Dina are having a little festival with all the kids for Gopasthami, the day when Krishna became old enough to take care of the cows. So I'm going over there at 10:00 AM to help; we are all supposed to dress up as cowherd boys. It should be lots of fun! I'm also getting up for *mangal arati*. Srila Prabhupada's Disappearance Day was especially sweet. I went early to practice the *bhajan* but only Lilamrita was there, so I helped her decorate. It was really fun. After that everyone came for their offerings. Yamuna's offering was so beautiful, it made me cry. She asked me to say something too, but I couldn't. I felt really bad—I always do when I refuse to do something Yamuna and Dina ask me to do. But she got me for it. After everything was over except the last kirtan, she came up to me and asked me to lead the *Samsara* prayers! I almost died, but she led with me, thank God, and then in the middle, she asked me to carry on. I almost died again, but she was merciful and only made me sing



Offering cow-dung cows to the Deities

Jai Prabhupada once alone. It was an incredibly beautiful tune, the whole prayer—one that I never heard before.

NOVEMBER 11, 2002—This day was the most fun I have ever had in a long time! I listened to Radhanath Swami give a lecture on Gopasthami for a few hours—so good and inspiring to hear—then I went to Yamuna and Dina’s for the little festival. I don’t know how to describe the mood there—the simple pure joy of thinking of Krishna and Balarama on this day. It was such a deep-rooted satisfaction this simple, beautiful festival gave me; I have experienced a glimpse of what it must be like to be absorbed in these pastimes all the time. First we made cows out of fresh cow dung, and then decorated them with stones and candles. Then we offered our cows to the Deities, as well as cow dung sticks, and we sang *Govinda Jaya Jaya, Gopala Jaya Jaya*. It was so simple and sweet, no big kirtan leaders banging drums, banging *kartals*, just a bunch of very enthusiastic little kids. I have never had a kirtan like that before, with little kids, where every single person wants to be there singing for Krishna. Then we went around the cows, and I told the story of Gopasthami, as I heard it from Radhanath Swami. I didn’t tell it nearly well enough to do it justice, but it’s such an amazing sweet story that it was good anyway, and the kids were right into it. I just hope I can remember the story always; it’s such a beautiful one. Then we finally had lunch and shared it with each other. I can’t think of any festival that would be more appropriate to celebrate with Krishna and Balarama than this one. It has everything in it, and I’m so glad we did it! I went home feeling all joyful, excited, satisfied. 🐾

An Inspiration for the Alachua Youth

Kartamasa das: Upon returning to Alachua, my aim was to replicate what I was experiencing in Saranagati. The only way I knew to do that was to gather for hearing and chanting as much as possible, and to have very honest discussions with those who joined us. Although we had around six public programs a week in my apartment, a group of three youth were regular attendees and joined in the hosting through service. Gauranga Kishore lived in the living room and cooked elaborate and varied *prasadam*. Haribhakti brought *prasadam* for every program and was our *mridanga* player. Ramya was a professional singer and a *bhajan* fanatic. She also had Gaura-Nitai Deities carved exactly like Krishna-Balarama. Together we tried to practice Krishna Consciousness as Gauranga and I had experienced it that summer in Saranagati. As a group, we were so thirsty for kirtan that we would take every opportunity to share it together. And it was all always right in front of Krishna-Balarama. Soon enough, we were all convinced that we needed to be in Saranagati as soon as possible, for that was the source of this flowing river of Krishna Conscious momentum. The soonest we could make it back was our winter break in December 2002. Haribhakti's friend Vrindavan came as well.

I remember we had kirtan before we left, kirtan when we arrived in Vancouver, kirtan during the drive up and kirtan when we got to Saranagati.



The Alachua group at Banabehari Mandir

Our enthusiasm was so strong to be with Yamuna and Dina. We were joined by Neem (Nimesh) for the duration of the holidays, and were kindly hosted by Bala Krishna and Harilila. This was the first time we all went to Banabehari Mandir more in the mood of students—a little more humble and receptive. We had such wonderful classes and kirtans again. One highlight was that each of us got to chant on Yamuna's initiation beads—the famous “red beads.”

And of course, we got to share incredible kirtan with Yamuna and Dina. I be-

lieve this was when they first introduced us to the English prayers *Saragrahi Vaishnava* and *Adore Ye All*. These prayers went right to the core of my heart, affecting me so deeply, not only because what was being said in them, but mostly for the love with which they were sung by Yamuna and Dina. They

had parts of them memorized, and they added “loving” to the refrain “His Divine Grace” making it “His Divine Loving Grace.” I can’t describe the extent to which *Saragrahi Vaishnava* opened up my heart to Bhaktivinoda Thakur. I remember thinking that whoever wrote that poem is the most profound thinker in the history of the world, and how it was the answer to unity in the world, at least in the religious sphere. But I cannot stress enough how it was mostly the mood of how these songs were delivered that most crumbled my hard heart. It was like the greatest reverence saturated with the deepest familial love. Yamuna had us sing *Saragrahi Vaishnava* at the New Year’s Eve gathering that year. This was when she empowered me to play harmonium or keyboard. I considered myself totally unqualified and never aspired to play harmonium, but she encouraged/insisted and made it seem like it wasn’t even a thought to refuse. 🙏

“Markine Bhagavat Dharma” – A Soulful Beginning to 2003

At that time in Saranagati, with no phones (no nearby cell towers) and no internet, we went into the town of Ashcroft once a week to use its public internet service. Because contacting us was problematic, people would often just come to Banabehari Mandir unannounced, sometimes late or at inconvenient times. If I expressed frustration to Yamuna that we had just taken rest or were otherwise engaged, she emphatically reminded me that it was our duty to receive anyone who came as though Krishna Himself had sent them. This service mood, learned from Srila Prabhupada, was fundamental to Yamuna devi, and people were often surprised at how approachable and unaffected she was. This was never more evident than in her support and encouragement of young devotees in their Krishna Consciousness.

That summer Karnamrita had asked to record a *bhajan* with Yamuna, and she agreed. So early in the new year, she arrived with an animated, effervescent young devotee from New Vrindavan, Bhakta Eli, who acted as the recording engineer. I had heard Karnamrita sing earlier that summer and was surprised at how similar her voice was to Yamuna’s—rich and vibrant



with a wide vocal range. Yet Yamuna had not recorded for many years, and she chose an impossibly difficult prayer—Srila Prabhupada’s *Markine Bhagavat Dharma*, written in Boston Harbor in 1965 (which also included a series of Sanskrit verses). As Karnamrita was a perfectionist, and Bhakta Eli new in the recording engineer service, the practices and actual recording took many days, much to my happiness. I can still immediately recollect those prayerful stanzas of Srila Prabhupada’s heartfelt plea to Lord Krishna in their beautiful and resonant voices.

Nitai das (then Bhakta Eli): I first met Yamuna devi in the winter of 2002 while assisting Karnamrita dasi in an audio recording project she was doing for her university degree. It was a cold, dark winter in the barren tundra of northern Canada where they lived, but as I entered their divine abode, the warmth of *bhakti* quickly overrode any external discomfort. Their simple straw bale home was the perfection of Srila Prabhupada’s vision for simple living in the rural country. Built according to the highest standards of Vastu, the temple space filled about 30% of their home. Elaborate devotional woodwork, glasswork and metalwork filled the space with mantras, prayers and spiritual designs, which seemed to extend in all directions. It seemed to have *maha prasadam* of different sorts embedded into the walls and corners—Prabhupada’s shoes, his brass cooker, a doorknob from one of the

rooms at Radha-Damodara temple, and various other branches, leaves, dust and sacred elements from the *dhama*. Their ashram itself radiated Vrindavan. 🙏



Nitai das at Banabehari Mandir

Nitai das, who passed away soon after Yamuna devi, became a valued young friend over the years, and often came to Saranagati and Banabehari Mandir. Yamuna lightheartedly recalled that he would often enter the ashram with the words, “And then Radhanath Swami said ...” That natural spontaneity and exuberance were part of what endeared him to

us. Later, Nitai and his talented wife, Mandali, organized *prasadam* distribution programs at massive festivals, and he often called on Yamuna for menu and recipe advice.

Nitai das: One of the first gifts I gave to [Yamuna and Dina] was an MP3 CD player and a few dozen CDs, as these were the days before iPods were on the market. They listened to hundreds of lectures that I kept sending. They would relish them and keep asking for more Radhanath Swami lectures. 🐾

Yamuna: First, thank you big time for the MP3 feast. We are full-fledged addicts for these MP3s. They are like water for a dying man in the desert. (EMAIL TO NITAI) 🐾

Nitai das: They were listening to the 2002 Vrindavan Yatra lecture series, which is around forty hours of lectures; and they were listening on and off for several months. When they got to the last lecture they were overwhelmed by the story of Ghanashyam Baba, and were deeply inspired, as they thought that this lecture would be a great reintroduction for [Yamuna's] sister, Janaki, who hadn't been so involved in Krishna Consciousness for many years. I sent the CD of that lecture to Janaki, and it invoked a response out of her that she was finally beginning to understand the deep meaning of selfless devotion; and it inspired her to go and meet Radhanath Swami the following year when he visited the area. 🐾

Bala Gopal devi: Over the years, one of the things I appreciated most about [Yamuna] was that so many people go through so much, and she definitely suffered so much—it can be such a male-orientated society. Someone of her intelligence and ability can become very frustrated, and at times it was very frustrating for her, yet she always dug inside and found that inner strength—how to go deeper into her chanting. She got into chanting and kirtan I would say ten years before people grabbed the concept in our society. She was starting that way back when we went to visit her in Saranagati back in 2002. She was well into kirtans, and they had this amazing schedule, waking up at 2 AM so they could really meditate on chanting their rounds. It was quite revolutionary. 🐾

The diary entries and reflections of devotees on these pages are merely a representation of Yamuna devi's impact on the devotional lives of people everywhere. They also present a "Year-in-the-Life" scenario of her early years in Saranagati and the burgeoning effect of the kirtans, classes and *sanga*, especially on the youth. Yamuna could also see how enthusiastic the

younger children in Saranagati were for devotional activities, and she made a concerted effort to encourage their natural, playful *bhakti*. This would manifest in extraordinary ways in the years to come. She also taught calligraphy and gave special cooking classes. When the summer camp programs began, she thought of imaginative and entertaining ways to enthuse the children. She engaged them in painting a new sign for the entrance to Saranagati. And underpinning it all was the constant current of glorious kirtan.

A Reminder of Nature's Fury— The Fire of 2003

Forest fires are always a threat in dry, heavily-forested areas, and British Columbia was no exception. Almost every year at least one fire, usually started by dry lightning, appeared on the mountains surrounding Saranagati. However, the summer of 2003 created a perfect storm of weather conditions which caused epic fires in British Columbia—one of which nearly torched our valley.

Bada Haridas had just visited Saranagati, and we spent many blissful and unforgettable hours immersed in *bhajans* and kirtan with him and many of the youth he so inspired through his chanting. As he prepared to leave, he gave a demo CD to us. With most of Saranagati's residents at the Vancouver Rathayatra, including Yamuna, I sat sewing in Banabehari Mandir one morning, deeply immersed in one prayer from the CD—*Gauranga Tumi More*, by Vasudeva Ghosh. This prayer is a powerful appeal for the mercy of Lord Chaitanya, and just as it neared the end—"Since I have tightly grasped hold of Your feet, please keep me here by always bestowing their soothing shade"—someone began pounding on the front door. Startled, I opened the door to find a policeman standing with a halo of thick black smoke rising from the mountain behind him. He calmly and simply said, "You have thirty minutes to take what is important and evacuate." On reflection, it was certainly Krishna's mercy that Yamuna was not there, because she was usually more emotional than me. Yet I found myself reacting in an almost comically frantic way. I collected the Deities and Prabhupada with a few of Their clothes, and laid Them carefully in Their carrying cases on the seat of the truck; then I collected Prabhupada's cooker and shoes and a few other treasures. I put the dog in the truck bed and left, with no clothes for myself or Yamuna, no money, no important papers—nothing.

Fortunately, the winds changed for some time, and the next day when Yamuna came back, they allowed us to briefly return to bring out more belongings. Yamuna and I then retrieved all of her papers and notebooks, Deity book, some furnishings, pictures and other valuables. We had built Banabehari Mandir with the possibility of fires in mind, and even the Fire Inspector told us it was the most fireproof property in the valley. Yet this fire was massive and ferocious. As we drove down the mountain and reached the highway, the rearview mirror was bright red because the whole mountain was on fire. Unfortunately, in our haste, the bed of the truck opened as we drove and many things flew from the truck, including some of Yamuna's reference materials for writing her memoir. For a long time she was disturbed by this, taking it as a sign that Krishna did not sanction her writing project.

The Venables Valley fire, as it came to be known, eventually burned over 40 square miles. It was one of five major fires occurring near the same time, one of which destroyed over 250 homes in Kelowna. Of course, by Krishna's mercy the valley was not affected, due to the tireless and selfless efforts of the firefighters. Later I reflected on *Gauranga Tumi More* and the fact that the mercy of Lord Chaitanya can manifest in unforeseen ways. We were forced to look into the mirror of our hearts, at what is important—and further develop detachment from what is not.

The next year, as I stood outside of Banabehari Mandir welcoming devotees to the Wednesday *Caitanya-caritamrta* class, a bolt of lightning came out of a nearly clear, rain-free sky and struck the mountain behind the ashram. After the class, I saw that a fire had begun at the site. By then we had spotty cell phone service, and I called the forest fire emergency number we all kept close at hand. Within forty-five minutes a massive plane dropped fire retardant in several passes, which contained the fire until the helicopters came at first light and put it out. Needless to say, everyone in Saranagati appreciated the firefighters so much that whenever they came in their helicopters or trucks, devotees would bring them cookies and other *prasadam*.



The view from Banabehari Mandir looking northeast

Lessons on Srila Prabhupada's Cooker

Every year, the observance of Srila Prabhupada's appearance and disappearance was especially difficult for Yamuna, magnifying her feelings of separation from him, as it did for many of his disciples. For many years, Yamuna had prepared an offering to him on these days by cooking his favorite preparations in his own cooker. In 2003, she wanted to honor Srila Prabhupada by sharing the experience with others, while also sharing Srila Prabhupada's instructions and standard for observing the appearance and disappearance days of great Acharyas. Afterward, Yamuna wrote a synopsis of the event, which she sent to friends around the world.



Yamuna: Twenty-six years ago a group of saintly souls sent Srila Prabhupada's brass cooker into my care. Since then, as far as possible, on his appearance or disappearance days, we at Radha-Banabehari Mandir try to prepare his noon meal with his brilliantly shining cooker. All these years we have done this alone. But this year, as a noon program had not been arranged by others, and Srila Prabhupada clearly wished this to happen on such days, I invited any interested devotees in the valley to come to Radha-Banabehari Mandir and cook for Srila Prabhupada in his cooker.

In advance I requested only that anyone interested in tasting this experience should do two things: be prompt and wear clean cloth. For latecomers, I explained with a note at the door that today we would

all go back in time to physically cook for Srila Prabhupada. No talking except for service, and a full mood of prayer to somehow attentively prepare the meal in such a way as to bring him pleasure. Try for full focus, clear, pure, honest, rich, quality loving devotion.

We began by standing in front of Sri Sri Radha-Banabehari, recited the *Om ajnana* prayers and individually prayed to engage in this service with full attention and devotion. Then we washed hands, feet and mouth and immediately set out



to prepare dishes to place in the tiered steamers. Engagements included cutting of vegetables, preparing the wood stove, assembling *masala* mixtures for toasting and grinding, grinding fresh paste *masalas*, ginger and chili pastes, stem fresh herbs and make *chapati* doughs.

As thirteen people ended up coming, our tiny ashram kitchen and preparation area were filled to the brim. I set up pens and paper to take notes. We used two steamers—Srila Prabhupada's cooker, and a 14-inch diameter, three-tiered steamer with small steel inserts.

Menu for Srila Prabhupada's Disappearance Day in Cooker:

Bottom: Gingered Whole Mung Dal with Tomato and Fresh *Garam Masala*.

Center: Cubed Eggplant and Yellow Bell Pepper chunks to be made into Sweet and Sour Eggplant—recipe in *Lord Krishna's Cuisine*.

Top: Steamed Potato to later be pan-fried with *hing*, ginger, chilies, *haldi*, *tej patta*, salt and pepper, lime juice, cilantro.

Large Steamer:

Bottom: Barely Sprouted Chickpeas cooked and finished off with a cilantro-infused South Indian Coconut Chutney (sprouted chickpeas cook wonderfully in 45 minutes in steamer cuisine).

Center Tier: Three individual tiffins: one with Dilled Zucchini; one with *Shukta* ingredients; one with Cauliflower Florets in an Almond Broth.

Top: Plain double-steamed rice. (Soaked rice overnight, drained, and prepared in separate pot at a ratio of 1 part rice to 1-1/3 parts water. Amazing long, fluffy grains cooked to perfection. Steam it all for 40 minutes on just the right heat.)

Meanwhile, prepare *garam masalas*, *panir chapati* dough and plain *chapati* dough with freshly milled flour; prepare plate with lime slice, two kinds of freshly-milled pepper and two kinds of salt. Fry *karela* slices. Add a bowl of plain yogurt.

In precisely 1½ hours, the plate was ready to offer. While Srila Prabhupada ate, we sang the *bhoga arati* prayers, recited Gayatri, chanted *japa*, then kirtan, then *pushpa* flower offerings, then guru *puja* at noon sharp.

As often happens when intent is genuine and sincere, these *prasadam* dishes were beautiful to look at, fragrant in diversity, infused with goodness and blessed by Srila Prabhupada's touch—all this and much more. Magic.

Then all present respected tastes of the meal in sweet silence, absorbed in relishing, and concentrated on the mercy of this simple offering of love from the assembled devotees. 🙏

Narayani devi: We were invited to Yamuna's and Dinatarini's [Radha-Banabehari Mandir] to honor this special day. We all had the opportunity to participate in cooking a feast in Srila Prabhupada's original multi-tiered cooker. We cooked dal, rice and *sabji*; then Yamuna offered it. Then we all honored *prasadam* together. It was wonderful. Yamuna told us how Srila Prabhupada liked that all of the cooking pots be scrubbed and clean and shiny. So now when I cook and then do the dishes, I am always reminded of this event, and I meditate on pleasing Srila Prabhupada by keeping my cooking pots sparkly and shiny clean! 🙏

Nitai das: Her mastery of this art was greatly enhanced by her deep absorption in prayer. She would have us all chant together, focused on the series of *guru pranam* prayers, and the whole meditation of cooking was a very serious endeavor. There was no small talk or chitchat unless it was a question directly related to the preparation you were assisting with. Most of the times I assisted, it wasn't a major holiday. She would send emails of the feasts and the festival outline they would have. 🙏

Fanning the Flames of Positive Attachment to the Positive Form – 2004

While Yamuna devi had originally moved to Saranagati to explore a more rural “simple-living, high-thinking” Krishna Conscious life, by 2004 Banabehari Mandir was receiving visitors from around the world, fuelled in large part by the word-of-mouth enthusiasm of the youth. Over the succeeding years, we were often amused at the irony that while residing in or near major cities, Banabehari Mandir had never had the sheer numbers of guests who were now finding their way to the backwoods of Canada. Within Saranagati itself, more gatherings were being held around the community to chant *bhajans* and hold kirtan, and many adult residents were enthusiastic participants.

Many of the youth who came to Banabehari Mandir were brought by friends who had visited before. While all of them were welcomed and appreciated, some left an indelible impression on Yamuna and my hearts. One such devotee was the beautiful and talented daughter of our dear

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yet extremely feminine. She looked at us both and exclaimed in so much happiness to see my mum after decades. Then she gravely took our hands and pulled us in front of Sri Sri Radha-Banabehari. A sweet coolness radiated from Their altar. Everything was gleaming and suffused with *bhakti*. I was already overwhelmed after just twenty minutes. *Prasadam* followed immediately—a meal so nourishing and tasty, my worries melted away. The power of the love and devotion in everything was effortlessly palpable.

Later that evening some devotees came over for their regular weekly reading of *Caitanya-caritamṛta*. I was struck by how deeply absorbed Yamuna was. She had her eyes closed, and as she listened, the occasional tear would roll down her cheek. I was raised to be wary of expressions of deep emotion in a devotional context, but looking at her I felt complete conviction in my heart that her feeling was pure, spontaneous and genuine. She hardly seemed to notice what was going on, totally fixated on the pastime of Lord Chaitanya and His associates. Later that night, as she put us to bed, she pulled out a wooden box and announced that she was giving us a special good night surprise. “What is it?” I asked. “You’ll see,” she said mysteriously. In the small “Blue Lotus” cabin that stood close to the ashram, she shook the box and set it down. Soft, deep bell tones began to emerge from within the music box, playing as she checked that we had everything and then left, wishing us “sweet Krishna dreams.”

The next morning we attended the sublime morning program and feasted on a breakfast of cinnamon French toast with fresh peaches, all served with incredible love and care. As we spoke for the last time over breakfast, both Yamuna and Dina asked me questions about myself, and I was taken aback by their attention and appreciation of everything I said. I wasn’t trying to impress them, but they kept exclaiming at my maturity and depth, and I realized that they were expert at seeing potential and encouraging it to no end. I felt honored, blessed, purified and humbled. As we drove away, I said to my mum, “I feel like we’ve just been in the spiritual world.”

In those first twenty-four hours, I was able to observe the nature and activities of an advanced devotee of Krishna. I count these as some of the most profoundly illuminating moments of my life. Though her way of living was deceptively simple, the attention to detail in every sense revealed the depth of her love and focus. In the *Bhagavatam* it is stated that a devotee is a holy place of pilgrimage—through their own purity, they uplift everyone around them and can even invest inanimate objects with a sense of deep devotional feeling.

In the ashram of Yamuna and Dinatarini prabhū, I never felt overly

formal or awkward—their presence and the charged atmosphere of service to Sri Sri Radha-Banabehari was a powerfully uplifting force. Guests would come like tired birds, amazed to find their consciousness soaring upwards on the thermal of their *bhakti*. It came easily, naturally.

Over the subsequent years, I would travel long distances by plane and bus to that remote oasis, always feeling a combination of giddy excitement and deep gratitude upon my arrival. One day in that space made time stand still. The earthen floor, polished smooth and painted a deep red; the benches

that regularly accommodated scores of guests, hand covered by Yamuna in vibrant blue, yellow and green cotton—wherever you looked, there was something to remind you of Krishna: hand-painted renditions of favorite verses on glass; calligraphed records of honored guests; a brass steamer used to cook for Srila Prabhupada, now standing by the altar garlanded by a silk *kavacha*. The altar was immaculate—Sri Sri Radha-Banabehari glowed. I remember the first time Yamuna and



Dina showed me Their outfits, explaining that they had four versions of each one made—one for each season. Yamuna had extensively studied the art of Deity worship in Vrindavan, and this was manifest in the details—tiny silver instruments and toys for the Divine Couple, delicate ornaments, and even finer *bhoga* offerings. Once I visited during the Indian monsoon period, and though we were in the far west of Canada, the Deities wore Their monsoon attire—shot through with silver threads to represent the heavy rainfall. ♪

Another friend of Nitai das, Jean-Paul (Jagannatha Kirtan das), a young college student new to devotional service, impressed us with his insightful questions and sincere absorption in Krishna Consciousness. With each passing year, the numbers of youth inspired by the loving yet undiluted presentation of Krishna *bhakti* by Yamuna devi continued to grow. She felt both a duty and commitment to nurture them and try to pass on Krishna Consciousness as Srila Prabhupada had so carefully nurtured her, and the powerful combination of her soft-hearted, empathetic nature and uncompromising preaching style changed the hearts of many.

Kartamasa das: If I think of Bhaktivinoda Thakur, I don't think of him in his *babaji* time, but more in his householder time. But Srila Prabhupada I don't think of in his householder time; I think [of him] in his *sannyasa* preaching time. And I am just thinking—this ties to my next question—the ease of offending Vaishnavas. At the present time, sometimes we criticize when they are not necessarily manifesting some spiritual potency, but who knows if in the next forty years, they might be completely empowered Vaishnavas? I don't know if that is any more clear.

Yamuna: Well, there are different ways to answer that question, according to the realization of the hearer. But I would say that it is obvious that we worship the self-manifested qualities of the Vaishnava according to those qualities. For example, we have in contemporary times—in our times—the example of people who were not born as Vaishnavas. It has on my birth certificate that my father was a butcher. I never really met him—I didn't really know him—so that is a very low birth. So we have two things. For modern Vaishnavas, we have the physical birth and the spiritual birth, the *diksha* birth. So this is what Bhaktisiddhanta fought against so much. The *smarta brahmanas* said you must have this certain kind of birth to be considered not only a *brahmana*, but a Vaishnava. This was a very big issue in Bhaktisiddhanta's time, especially in Vraja. He fought against that.

In the same sense, Prabhupada wasn't able to start the Krishna Consciousness Movement with the dynamism in India that later manifested in the West. He tried, but it wasn't meant to be at that time. So when he came to the West and initiated both men and women with first and second initiation and brought them back to India, there were again even Gaudiya Vaishnavas who found that very difficult to accept. So why is that? Because they couldn't respect the fact that those qualities were not manifested. So it is the same question that you have. They were undergoing the same doubts: How can they be? How can you consider them? They are *mlecchas*; they have a terrible birth; their character isn't good. It is only a name you have put on them: "They are Vaishnavas," but how can they be respected?

So we have [some] examples in our Society that any little modicum of service that someone renders, they are glorified. And any falldown—just pray once again that they return to service.

To the point of serving persons that don't even practice Krishna Consciousness, just because they once served; they don't follow the rules and regulations: you still serve them. So there is that example. But the obvious answer is that to the degree that a person manifests—we worship.... I worship everything of my guru. But that is my responsibility as a disciple. There isn't anything that I don't worship about my guru. When you take a guru, you will have to find a place in your mind to do that by looking at the manifested qualities, not the name. It isn't the name "Bhaktivedanta Swami." It is everything about him. It is his character; it is his essence; it is his Krishna Consciousness that we worship as a disciple.



In the case of someone like Sacinandana Swami, he openly speaks about times when he was worshiping Mick Jagger before he was a devotee, and that is nice because he is honest and he talks about life before Krishna Consciousness. We have to be able to balance those things. Because if we can use what we learned before we became [committed] devotees, and dovetail that into the process of becoming Krishna Conscious, that is an asset. If we ignore it, denigrate it, or don't confront both our good and bad qualities before taking *diksha*, then we are losing on that too. It is a strange thing trying to integrate it, and our generation has had a horrible time doing that. In the very early days, we kind of denied that we had been born before. Born again. And that second birth was the only one we paid attention to. But all the baggage that was either good or bad that we brought before wasn't put in perspective, and there was some slowness in progress because of that. So I think it is a process of integration of consciousness on the spiritual platform that is the key to the answer. In the case of Bhaktivinoda Thakur, again, I see him as when he was a child—nearly his whole family is wiped out before he is thirteen years old, and he takes on the responsibility of being a man. This is remarkable. This empowerment came from another kind of culture and strength that is just remarkable to me. So there is nothing about him or Bhaktisiddhanta [that is not extraordinary]. So we have our disciplic succession, and you may have a personal taste

and just take those last *babaji* years and relish them. That is your personal taste. But for me, there is no difference. (BANABEHARI MANDIR BHAGAVATAM CLASS) 🙏

On Yamuna's birthday that year, she received the following email from Bhakta Eli (Nitai das):

Dearest Yamuna devi,
On this glorious day of your appearance, I offer my obeisances at your lotus feet again and again. All glories to your steady devotion and determination to the service of Sri Sri Guru and Gauranga! All glories to Srila Prabhupada! Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur states in the *Kalyana Kalpa-taru* that a Vaishnava is always transcendental, faultless and blissful. They are fond of chanting Krishna's Holy Name, indifferent to material enjoyments and very kind to all living entities. He is devoid of pride, expert in worshiping the Lord and detached from material objects. They are always without duplicity and attached to relishing the eternal pastimes of the Lord. Your glorious Vaishnava qualities are so present in your association. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur also states in *Sajjanatoshani* that a Vaishnava is recognized by 26 qualities. Among these, the quality of full surrender to Krishna is the primary symptom of a Vaishnava. These qualities are very present in you whenever I have ever had even a little of your association.

Bhakti is so present. When I think of you, I think, "Oh, yes, that is *bhakti*. That is Vaishnava." Srila Prabhupada and Sri Sri Radha-Banabehari have flooded Their mercy upon you. I pray that I may taste a small drop of this mercy and stay safely as your servant. Hare Krishna. See you soon. Your eternal servant—Bhakta Eli

In her reply to Nitai's email, Yamuna wrote:

Yamuna: I am such a rascal example of an aspiring devotee, with so far to go, but do have some deep desire to become a genuine devotee. [It is] interesting that you mention the twenty-six qualities of a devotee. As you know, we have water limitations. This year, for Their Lordships' pleasure, I am constructing a small pond made of different size rocks—larger rock walls for the edge of the pond, and rocks in the pond simulating water. Sitting in that lake of rocks are more rocks calligraphed in both Sanskrit

and English with the twenty-six qualities of a devotee. It is the Pond of Twenty-six Qualities. 🐾

The Saranagati community holds an annual Rathayatra at the beginning of July, and that year Yamuna took on the role of organizing it with her usual careful planning and attention to detail.

Kartamasa das: This was the most elaborately planned Rathayatra that I can recall. We had special Sunday Feast presentations and classes leading up to it which included Yamuna and Visakha doing a slideshow and talk on ISKCON's early Rathayatras, Uttama doing Jagannatha *lilas*, Yamuna singing Jagannatha kirtan, and the regular singing of *Jagannasthakam*.

Yamuna also tried to plan the parade kirtan based on the *Caitanya-caritamṛta* descriptions of Lord Chaitanya's Rathayatra kirtans, with several different kirtan parties, each with designated leaders and instrument players. I remember being so enthused, thinking how we were doing what Lord Chaitanya had done before, and I remember Yamuna blowing a conch to signal the start of the parade. But then within minutes, a few senior devotee men (mostly visitors from Vancouver) completely dissolved all the organization by saying, "What is going on? Why isn't everyone in one group in front of the cart? No, I want to be with all my Godbrothers; we should all be together!" I had been designated to help put Yamuna's plan into action, but could not muster enough volume and demonstrativeness to match them, so literally within minutes the multiple organized kirtan parties were disbanded, and the usual kirtan took place.

This was also the first year there was a major focus on Lord Jagannatha. Yamuna had conceived of many detailed touches to encourage more devotion and focus than I have ever seen before—a beautiful decorated pathway for welcoming the Deities into the building, showering flowers and blowing conches. The menu was all planned by Yamuna, and she also prepared bagged snacks for the visiting devotees to take home with them. 🐾

Yoginath das: Yamuna also started a band. It was called Saranagati Rocks.



Yamuna leads the kirtan for the kids' cart
at Saranagati Rathayatra

It was an *a cappella* choir, which means no instruments; we would just sing. Except there were two instruments—one was stones, and the other was sticks. So she orchestrated this kirtan with sticks and stones. So when the visitors came to Saranagati for Rathayatra, we would serenade them with the Holy Name in this very unusual style. It was typical in the sense that this was a person who just loved Krishna Consciousness, and [Yamuna] just

made it fun. You didn't even think you were performing devotional service. In that case, it just wasn't the performance with the sticks and the rocks, it was all the practice, how we would gather and sing together. Always joyful. 🙏



Summer camp at Banabehari Mandir

Kartamasa and Radhakunda also arranged a magical summer camp for children, which included their engaging in creative activities at each residence in Saranagati. The children would have a scheduled stay at each “stop,” and the householders would engage them in

something creative and entertaining. Near to our ashram they set up an obstacle course which was brilliantly conceived. Yamuna always made *prasadam* and thought of inventive activities, while I played a variation of charades with them.

A Memorable Visit with Radhanath Swami and Friends

Perhaps due to our remoteness, we did not often have *sannyasi* guests at Saranagati, except during Rathayatra. Bhakti-marg Swami, the “Walking Swami,” as Yamuna named him, came a few times a year in his capacity as co-GBC, and he personally visited each Saranagati resident. I have a vivid memory one winter of hearing a knock on the door before *mangal arati*. I thought I was imagining it, because it was dark and freezing, with near-blizzard conditions and over two feet of snow on the ground. Again a soft knock, and I cautiously opened the door to find Bhakti-marg Swami standing there: “Am I late for *mangal arati*?” Yamuna and I were stunned. He had walked over three miles in these conditions to get to Banabehari Mandir for *mangal arati*. We never forgot that.

Gopal Krishna Swami also came to Saranagati once a year in his capacity as co-GBC. We all knew it was an austerity for him, because he travels continually and has multiple preaching engagements at each stop. Without fail he would come to Banabehari Mandir, sit for a few minutes with us, and say, “Why are you living in this remote place?” Yet, during his short time at Saranagati, he graciously encouraged the devotees, giving succinct *Bhagavad-gita* classes and addressing community issues. Once in New Delhi in 2009, I asked his secretary, Madhava Mangala devi, if he ever took a break from his busy schedule. She simply replied, “The Saranagati farm is his break.”

In July, Radhanath Swami came for the first time to Saranagati. It was a memorable visit for many reasons, not the least of which was the fact that Yamuna’s sister, Janaki, also came with her friend Barb, as did Shyamasundara and Malati. Over the years, Yamuna and I had gently encouraged Janaki in reconnecting to Srila Prabhupada and her devotional life. We visited them in Oregon twice a year, and they tried to come every year to Saranagati until Janaki’s health prohibited it. On this occasion, Janaki was thrilled to



come because much of her burgeoning enthusiasm in spiritual life was due to hearing Radhanath Swami’s lecture CDs and through our own glorification of his devotional qualities. In 2002 Yamuna had purchased a brass Krishna *murti* in Florida for Janaki. Later, Janaki met Radhanath Swami in Seattle and was indelibly touched by his open-hearted warmth and sincerity. After that meeting, Radhanath Swami kindly arranged for a Radharani *murti* to be sent from India to join her Krishna.

For his part, Radhanath Swami thought that having Shyamasundara, Malati, Janaki and Yamuna together was a wonderful opportunity to churn their memories of Srila Prabhupada. But the temple authority resisted, wanting only to hear Radhanath Swami speak. After some careful diplomacy, the four of them spoke in the temple room, but for me the sweetest exchanges took place around the table at Banabehari Mandir. Janaki spoke in her usual unfiltered way, which worried Yamuna immensely, but Radhanath Swami and the others seemed to enjoy the exchanges. It was an unforgettable experience, which raised Yamuna’s and my already



deep appreciation for the compassion and sincerity Radhanath Swami so exemplifies.

Radhanath Swami: One time I went there to Saranagati. And with Malati devi and Shyamasundara, we decided to go, and somehow or other, Yamuna devi and Malati devi convinced Janaki devi to take a long drive—even with her ill health, to come and join us there. And of course Yadubara prabhu and Visakha devi were there. And we had *prasadam* together.... [Yamuna made] about six different flavored *chapatis*. Incredible. I wish I could remember all the flavors. There were like mango *chapatis*, all different flavored *chapatis*. And each one was absolutely flaky and tender and delicious in texture, in shape, in the design, in everything. And Yamuna was just making and making.

I was supposed to give a lecture that night. And I said, “This is such an historical event. When was the last time that Shyamasundara, Malati, Yamuna and Janaki were all together in the same place, these four prabhus?” I said, “Please let us have a program tonight where all of you speak about Srila Prabhupada.” And they said, “No, no. Please, you speak.” And I said, “No, I can speak anytime. I will speak tomorrow. I am dying of thirst to hear all of you here speak together. And everyone else will.” Janaki devi said, “No, I have not spoken in public for thirty years ... [and] there are so many devotees here; I will not do it.” I said, “Just sitting at the table sharing *prasadam*, you have been sharing so many stories about Prabhupada. Just whatever you said to us, say it.” She said, “No, no; you are my close friends, and we are sitting together at a table, but I can’t do it in front of an audience.” And then Yamuna devi said, “Just pretend that it is just us at the table and just speak.” And ultimately, only Yamuna devi could convince her younger sister to agree, to break out of that thirty years of isolation

and preach Krishna Consciousness and Prabhupada's glories. So Janaki devi finally agreed. But then Yamuna devi said, "But the three of them will speak. I am not going to speak." I said, "What is this? You know, it is the four of you." She said, "How can I speak? I live here. It is presumptuous that with all these guests here that I speak." So somehow it went back and forth, and because everybody wanted her to speak, she surrendered. And that was such a beautiful, historical event. It was incredible. Shyamasundara was just so expert at churning the nectar from people's hearts. And I was just so amazed to see the dynamics between these three sisters, Dinatarini devi, Yamuna devi and Janaki devi. The dynamics are quite inconceivable. 🙏

The next month, our cherished young friends Kartamasa and Radhakunda were married in a beautiful ceremony at Saranagati, bringing great happiness to our hearts. When Yamuna and I went on pilgrimage to India in 2009 with some of the youth, Radhakunda traveled with us, as Kar could not come for another week. While staying at the ISKCON Guesthouse in New Delhi, a devotee approached us bearing a Hindi-language *Back to Godhead* magazine. Much to our surprise, its entire front cover was a wedding picture of Kartamasa and Radhakunda.



On Srimati Radharani's Appearance Day, we began engaging the young girls in making flower dresses for Sri Sri Radha-Banabehari—a practice which became a signature event each year. The younger girls were becoming more focused, and even then their natural devotion and enthusiastic service mood was evident.

Adore Ye All the Happy Days— The Bhaktivinoda Bhajans at Banabehari Mandir

It is difficult to express the life-changing effect that chanting the song-books of Bhaktivinoda Thakur from 2005 onward had on the hearts of so many devotees, including Yamuna and myself. What can be expressed is

that of all of the programs and interactions through the years at Saranagati, these *bhajans* created an ocean of nectar which the participants swam in with great happiness. As Yamuna later eloquently wrote in a prayer to Bhaktivinoda Thakur, he taught us not only the power of prayer, but how to supplicate ourselves before the Lord in helpless appeal.

Most revered Bhaktivinoda Thakur: Today I fall at your lotus feet because it just occurred to me that of the many gifts you share through your prayers, the gift you taught me is how to pray. If anyone read your heartfelt prayers of longing for Krishna, for Lord Chaitanya and for our own spiritual preceptors, they would not discover that you were a highly-placed government officer with unsurpassed responsibilities, or that you possessed a large family and dedicated wife, authored a hundred books on devotional practice, edited several magazines and were a stalwart defender of Vaishnava dharma. Instead they would find a humble soul begging for the chance to make progress in spiritual life and begging for the mercy of the Lord and the Vaishnavas. I pray to you for the ability to increase the sincerity of my prayer from one of pretense to one of actual sincerity, and I thank you with all my heart for the unparalleled gifts you have given us all. ♪

Kartamasa das: We had been regularly having *bhajans* either at morning programs or evening get-togethers. Yamuna's first idea was to chant right



through the small songbook; then somehow that changed to Bhaktivinoda Thakur's *Saranagati* songbook. But before that, we would gather a few times a week—Yamuna and Dinatarini, Radhakunda, myself, Madhava, and sometimes Mahasringa—and chant kirtan together. They were the most magical kirtans—so intimate and humble. It was as if everyone felt they had no qualifications. Even though Yamuna and Dina had immense experience and qualification, they somehow conveyed a mood that they were the least qualified and would be thrilled if they could participate, always pushing us to lead them. As for the rest of us, we really didn't have any qualifications—it was all new territory—but they would encourage us to try, and try we all did; and we were all received without judgment or criticism, but

rather embraced as a close-knit kirtan group. We each cherished every individual's kirtan, whether it was whoever was leading, Madhava's drumming, Yamuna's whompers, Dina's tamboura, Radha's chimes or Mahasringa's guitar. I remember relishing every single kirtan, every night. It was amazing, ego-less kirtan. We were all letting it affect us, not coming with any preconceived notion of what we would do that night or how it would be. I think we were all surprised how satisfied and infused with joy we were. It literally felt like going from nothing to the top, from asleep to awake, or dead to alive. Even Madhava, who had never attended a Banabehari morning program or committed to any other spiritual activity, did not miss a night. 🐾

When we decided on singing through the entire *Saranagati* songbook, we requested Kartamasa to prepare the melodies and lead us. He was a natural choice because he had studied under Bada Haridas and was musically gifted. More importantly, he had a beautifully resonant voice, and the sincere and humble entreaty of his singing deeply touched us all.

Kartamasa das: I would meditate on each song for hours sometimes, trying to be sure a chosen melody was the absolute right and best one. My approach was if someone who I trusted like Bada Haridas had already established a melody for a song, I would use that. If that wasn't the case, I would try to get a feel for the mood of the song and apply another *bhajan* melody or even a *mahamantra* melody.... Then I would practice them before going to Banabehari Mandir. There is so much more depth to try to convey, but basically it was a mood of service—trying to facilitate the relishing of kirtan for Yamuna and Dina. 🐾

Listening to the recordings of the 2005 *Saranagati* songbook has been described by many as akin to being present in the temple room. The exuberance and absorption of our small group is palpable—especially Yamuna's regular joyous "Haribol!"s and "Gauranga!"s Yet this was only the beginning of the Bhaktivinoda Thakur songbook marathons at Banabehari



Mandir; and each time we began either the *Gitavali*, *Kalyana Kalpa-taru* or *Saranagati* prayers, more devotees came and tasted the potency of immersion in those prayers. Eventually the sparks of sincerity and dedication generated from our small 2005 group created a firestorm of pure bliss.

I got such a dose of reality when I put on kirtans from Radha-Banabehari Mandir this afternoon. They melted my ever-hardening rock of a heart. There is nothing in my life past or present that compares to those kirtans. I am soooooo grateful and appreciative for that association. It is so rare; it's unbelievable for me, in my present situation, to realize that I had that opportunity to experience that in your company. The way you sing is so similar to Srila Prabhupada's singing, in that it is so whole, unreserved and focused.... So I am so grateful for your kirtans; my parched heart soaks them up like they are life-giving ambrosia, which of course they are. Everything about your mood and style I leap in joy in my heart for—your dedication to kirtan and *katha*, your sustenance of Srila Prabhupada's mood, your *Krishna kirtan bhakti vilas premanidana* awareness, your Deity worship, your Vaishnava dealings, your ashram purity, and of course your kindness to obscure and tiny people like us. I cannot wait now for another opportunity to be there again.

— EMAIL FROM KARTAMASA, OCT. 2005

Dear Kar and Radha,
Pranam Dand[avats]; Jaya Krishna-Balarama.

How many times a day or week I think of you? Not only from sharing the experiences of the past, but for now as well. Yes, our kirtans remain an all-time high point in *sanga*. We will share that forever. Eli has taken up the spiritual gauntlet to do preliminary [work] toward a kirtan fest. If we can entice Sacinandana Swami to do it, we would crawl to attend.

Onto what stood out to us this [morning]: “From the four types of evidence—Vedic knowledge, direct experience, traditional wisdom and logical induction—one can understand the temporary, insubstantial situation of the material world, by which one becomes detached from the duality of this world.” (*Srimad-Bhagavatam* 11.19.21)

We aspiring devotees have so many lessons to learn before

becoming pure devotees. In the course of life, we experience untold dualities. Sometimes all our hours are free to engage in direct devotional service, and because of bad habits, we waste time. Sometimes we engage in routine engagements far from direct *bhakti* activities, yet [hanker] deeply for direct pure devotional activity. And on and on. One thing for sure, these four types of evidence clearly help the aspiring devotee to understand how unsubstantial mundane activity is. Our position here helps to see it in a glaring way, and in a bizarre way, [so we are] grateful for that. Eagerly, very eagerly, looking forward to your company again. Kirtan. *Katha. Prasadam.* Much love.

Your always friends and servants, Yamuna and Dina

—EMAIL TO KARTAMASA AND RADHAKUNDA,
OCT. 24, 2005

Banabehari's Milkmaids

By 2006, the young girls in Saranagati were just ten to thirteen years old, yet they had developed an enthusiasm for devotional activities far beyond their years. They were all talented actors, dancers and singers, and Yamuna and I enjoyed their company immensely. We thought of ways to engage them—sleepovers, service to the Deities, making garlands and vases, cooking—and they joyfully engaged in any and all services. These five girls—Kalindi, Haripriya, Rasa Mandala (Rasa), Kalavati (Kava) and Gopal Nandini—“Banabehari's Milkmaids”—would form an integral part of our Bhaktivinoda Thakur *bhajans*, coming faithfully every day to chant often difficult prayers, and then frequently leaving while crying tears of joy.

Rasa Mandala devi (Milkmaid): I can't recall why or how we came to the decision to make this group, but one fateful day, five girls ranging between ten and thirteen years old gathered at Yamuna and Dinatarini's ashram to change their lives. We sat around the table and brainstormed for an hour or so for a name and logo for this group of young girls, and together we came up with the name Banabehari Milkmaids, with the picture



The Banabehari Milkmaids: Haripriya, Kalavati,
Gopal, Rasa and Kalindi

of a backwards cow looking at you, her tail knocking over a pail of milk, and a stool beside her. That day, so many years ago, we made T-shirts with Yamuna, but unwittingly, we also created a bond, a relationship, that went deeper than we could perceive. From then on Yamuna became our teacher, our friend, our second mother, but most importantly, our spiritual strength and guide.

As a teacher, Yamuna taught us many things, ranging from calligraphy to building paper houses, but there were a few things we learned in her association that will forever impact our lives, the first being how to cook. When we began to have cooking classes with her, she would always make it so entertaining and enjoyable. We would first chant our *Om ajnana* prayers before beginning. She started very, very simple—with simply wonderfals. You might think there is not much to learn from that, but no, with just simply wonderfals, she could bring about important things to learn. We made several kinds—lemon, ginger, carob, vanilla, orange. She taught us how to analyze the right amount of substance to add to the simply wonderfals according to the power of their taste—less orange and ginger, yet more lemon—so they wouldn't overpower the rest of the sweet ball. She would intersperse the cooking sometimes with questions: "What is the most important tool in the kitchen, girls?" And we usually didn't know the answer. "Your hands. Your hands are the most important tool in the kitchen. They can kneed and mix and chop, but most importantly, they can feel; they can feel the consistency of this, the heat or coolness of that, the texture of this."

At the end of every class, she would sit down with us and we would hold hands and offer our preparation, and then she would hand out a bit to each of us and tell us to taste. We would go around the table and say what we thought it tasted like, what we thought it needed more or less of, and what we could do the next time. She was so supportive of what we said, so encouraging, and enthusiastically agreed with all of us. However, the most important thing she stressed to us, the message we knew was most important to learn from cooking with her, was that we cook for Krishna. She always told us that the consciousness you are in when you are cooking will be transferred into your *prasadam*, and it is the intention and consciousness of the mind that makes *prasadam*. I always attributed Yamuna's superb cooking not only to her experience, but to her consciousness when she cooked. She was always chanting, always humming, always immersed in thoughts of pleasing the Lord. She never thought of pleasing herself; it was always for the pleasure of Krishna, always for Him, and this was the legacy she passed on by making simply wonderfals with us.

In the summertime when we had no school, we would come to the morning program. We would enter the warm, cozy house, lightly glowing orange from the lights strung all the way around the house in the nook between the ceiling and the walls. Dina would be doing *arati*, and Yamuna would be sitting on the far couch, facing the Deities, with her chime instrument, lightly playing and singing, slowly shaking her head, her eyes closed tightly, relishing the words. We would join in, and after *arati*, after she had sweetly recited the *prema dvani* prayers, including “All glories to the transcendental *mangal arati* devotees,” she would exclaim, “Oh, girls, I’m so happy to see you! You just made my day!”

Every [time that] Radha-Banabehari were bathed and redressed, we would all engage in service. We would often team up in pairs for each service, two of us outside on the deck making vases, two of us cleaning the altar and paraphernalia, and two of us doing whatever else Dina or Yamuna needed: bringing wood, sweeping the floors, cleaning the Blue Lotus guest cabin. It was Dina or Yamuna alone who dressed the Deities. After about two hours, we would all come together with our various services—clean floors, sparkling altar, shining silver cows and peacocks, phenomenal vases—and put it all together. The Deities would then be set on the altar, and we would choose a theme for the week. Sometimes it was fruit or little disco balls hanging from the altar; sometimes it was the silver pond with fish and turtles and floating flower candles; sometimes it was the raked little sand box; or perhaps all the silver animals flocking about Their Lordships. We would all decorate the altar together, and then stand back and all exclaim at the sheer beauty of Radha-Banabehari, surrounded by flowering vases and sweet animals. Yamuna and Dina would say every week without fail, “They have never looked more beautiful! I have never seen Them so beautiful; this is even better than last week! They just can’t look any more beautiful than this!” And



The Milkmaids at Banabehari Mandir morning program



Yamuna would stand in front of Their altar, swaying back and forth, holding our hands, sometimes her head resting on one of our shoulders, and she would be smiling, and staring at Radha-Banabehari with such love, with so much tenderness and joy, and more often than not, we would all end with tears in our eyes. 🌸



Kalindi devi (Milkmaid): Once a week we would go to their ashram and help serve the Deities and clean. Yamuna and Dinatarini were so encouraging. Even if you were just sweeping the floor, they would be like, “I have never seen the floor more clean in my life. It is so beautiful. It is so clean. You did such a good job.” And it is just the floor. And you would polish the silver, and they would be like, “I have never seen the silver more shining before.”

You made vases, and there was so much encouragement. And it made you so much want to please them. You would try your very best, just to get that encouragement from them. And after anything we did together, you would walk out, and they would say, “See you in a couple of minutes.” If you went to *mangal arati* the next morning, “It is only a couple of minutes away,” even though it is actually more than that. But that is what it was like for them. Whenever they saw us it was, “We will see you soon,” or that “We are always together. We are always connected.” ... [Yamuna] didn’t really teach us by specific instructions. Everything she would teach was by example.... Instead of instructing Srila Prabhupada’s *vani*, she lived through his *vani*—his instructions. And she had so much love for Srila Prabhupada and Krishna. It was impossible not to feel that love yourself. Suddenly something you have no idea about, she talks about it, and suddenly you are in love with that—one of the Goswamis, or one of the personalities from the *Caitanya-caritamrta*, or anybody. She had so much feeling for everything. 🌸

A Pilgrimage to India and an Unforgettable Wedding

In early February 2006, Yamuna and I went on a month-long pilgrimage to India. Yamuna had been invited to attend the wedding of Krishna

Chandra prabhu's lovely daughter, Anjali, and she was thrilled that I would finally meet the devotees she had so appreciated on her previous visit, and see first hand the wonderful Radha-Gopinatha temple that Radhanath Swami had developed and nurtured by his example. Needless to say, I was overwhelmed by the temple, but more importantly, by the sincerity and service attitude of the devotees. We were warmly received as the guests of Nathji prabhu and Maithili devi—an unforgettable experience on many levels. Maithili devi, as we came to quickly realize, was a thoughtful, shy and deeply insightful person, and both Yamuna and I developed a heartfelt connection with her and shared many wonderful exchanges during our time there.

Krishna Chandra prabhu and Radha-priya devi, though extremely busy with wedding arrangements, graciously took time to welcome us. They were everything Yamuna had acclaimed—gracious, humble and sincere, as were their children. At the wedding itself, the largest and most grand I had ever seen, we noticed a tall, aristocratic man standing a few feet away with palms folded. Wherever we moved, he followed, but said nothing. When we finally asked if he had a question or some purpose, he said “No, I am simply here to serve you.” This young man, Mukunda das, and his incomparable wife, Krishna Chandra's daughter, Radha devi, would become very dear to both Yamuna and me. Yamuna spoke at the wedding of Anjali and Krishna Kanai, and we met many new and old friends. Unfortunately, after the wedding, Yamuna and I became extremely ill and just wanted to disappear and hibernate until we felt well enough to emerge again. But things are done differently in India, and the ladies came over the next day, brought chairs into our room, and began talking with us—stopping every now and then to hold a bucket near our heads as we threw up from nausea. Late that night we



Krishna Chandra prabhu welcomes
Dinatarini and Yamuna



Yamuna with Radhapriya devi

also talked to the new couple and their families, while still suffering from the same sickliness, until they received a call at 11:00 PM from Radhanath Swami asking them to come to the temple. These were very different hours than we were used to! Yamuna called the entire experience “out-of-body.”

Fortunately, Yamuna soon recovered and, encouraged by Radhanath Swami, spoke eloquently about Srila Prabhupada to the assembled devotees. Yamuna’s talks at the Radha-Gopinatha Temple are available online; but perhaps her overall impressions can best be understood through an email sent to Kar and Radhakunda.

Dear Treasured Kar and Radha,

Pranam Dand[avats] to you both. Jaya Srila Prabhupada.

Every day since arriving here, you have both been in my heart with intensity. Every day I feel some regret that you are not here physically with us. I don’t think you have ever experienced the level of *sanga*, purity, quality and cleanliness we have been blessed with this time. It is something wonderful and indescribable, and something that you simply must experience. If we ever do this again, you absolutely must come with us. In Chowpatty we have friends your age, a good handful, who are now eager to meet you both. Their company is too extraordinary to bottle or describe—deep, rich, meaningful, loving, respectful. Each day here has been an incredible adventure, inside and out. What manifests externally is digested internally with great gratitude. The quality of

devotees in Chowpatty is simply astounding. Never, never, never could I have imagined such pure-hearted, generous, well-adjusted devotees—in all ashrams. We in the West pale by comparison. They never push themselves forward, but by example are so extraordinary, it takes your breath away. We were there for eight days.

—EMAIL TO KARTAMASA AND
RADHAKUNDA, FEB. 20, 2006



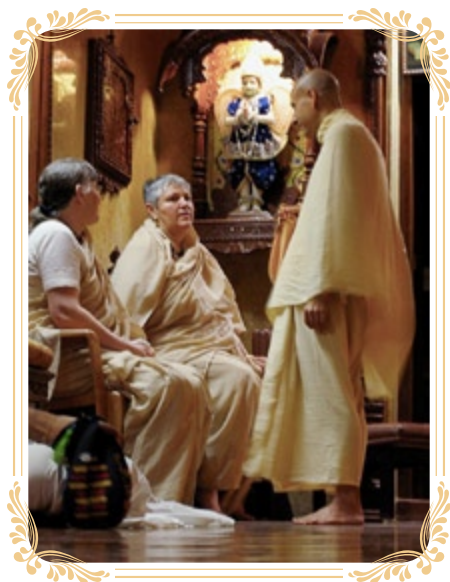
Yamuna instructs Anjali (now Karuna Manjari)
to follow the ideal example of her mother

Krishna Chandra das: [Yamuna] very graciously agreed to attend our daughter’s marriage. It was in 2006. She was

not expecting it, but during the time of the ceremonies, in addition to Radhanath Swami Maharaja, we requested her to speak a few words, which is not usual, but which was very special for us. So she agreed, and when she gave her wonderful instructions to the bridal couple, officially right from that time, she had such an amazing impact on all the devotees, including myself and our family. I think everyone has said the same thing, but just because I felt the same way I would like to repeat it. She had that amazing way of connecting to individuals, to every living entity, as if she was their real well-wisher, very concerned and very caring. She was to me a great inspiration, and really a personification of tremendous enthusiasm—tremendous dedication. She was so melodious in everything she did—not just the singing. In everything she could be very unexpected, but also at the same time, invariably very, very personal. 🍷

Yamuna expressed her gratitude to the assembled devotees before our departure to Vrindavan. Although they are her personal expressions of gratitude, I felt equally moved and even overwhelmed by the sincere service mood and dedication of these devotees.

Yamuna: I'd like to say something—that I don't have words to express my appreciation to Radhanath Swami for his company. I want to thank so deeply each devotee, especially Krishna Chandra and Radhapriya and Nathji and Maithili for so wonderfully hosting Dinatarini prabhu and myself. This place—the Radha-Gopinatha Temple—the first time I experienced it was now four years ago, and each one of you, all of you are in my heart so strongly,



from a distance. And I appreciate each and every one of you very deeply. The *brahmacharis* I treasure. They are like the quality of *brahmacharis* that I would imagine come from the spiritual world—Narada Muni men. And the *grihasthas* and the faces of the women here are so beautiful; they embody so much the qualities of service and sweetness and chastity and devotion and *bhakti*, and they are extraordinary. And the young men I just see as a huge army of powerful preachers. So also the wonderful one widow that I have left out—Tulasi Manjari, I think is her name—I deeply honor that ashram that she represents here. There is something so wonderful about Chowpatty and the balance of the interplay of these ashrams and the quality of service to Their inconceivably glorious and resplendent *archa vigraha* forms in this temple. So with all sincerity, I thank you for your company and pray to Krishna that in this lifetime I have it again. 🙏

In Vrindavan, Yamuna was very happy to be under the attentive care of Bala Gopal and Dhananjaya das at the MVT property. Bala Gopal had performed miracles with the restaurant there, and Yamuna was certain of her standards of cleanliness and purity. Each morning we arrived for Srila Prabhupada's *mangal arati* and heard Dhananjaya chanting *japa* outside his *samadhi*; and each day we immersed ourselves in taking the dust of another sacred holy place within the *dhama*. Our Godsister Kaumadaki devi, stricken with cancer, was living at the Kirtan Ashram under the management of Visakha Priya devi, and Yamuna held a *Bhagavad-gita parayana* there, with some of the ladies reading through the entire *Gita* aloud together. She was ecstatic to again be in Vrindavan—to sit under the *tamal* tree which held so many memories of Srila Prabhupada, and to again worship his rooms at Radha-Damodara Mandir. She expressed some of her feelings in an email:

Now in Vrindavan. Again, just always wishing you were here to experience this as well. So many wonderful old and new devotees here. Just yesterday, for the first time, met twenty-six devotees from mainland China—not Hong Kong, but mainland China—all chanting "*Halle Klishna, Halle Lamma*," the "r"s still elusive to them. It is joyous to hear and behold.

Yesterday a group of women went down the Yamuna River in a large boat having kirtan with many instruments. Too, too wonderful. Today Dina and I are going with a committee to discuss the renovation and restoration of Srila Prabhupada's rooms in Sri

Radha-Damodara Mandir. Too much mercy. The return will happen all too soon....

—EMAIL TO KARTAMASA AND RADHAKUNDA,
FEB. 20, 2006

“Gitavali”—and the Sweetness of Loving Exchanges

That summer, we began planning the next Bhaktivinoda *bhajans*—this time *Gitavali*, his longest songbook, full of many compelling and blissful glorifications of the Holy Name and the power of love of Godhead. As we were expecting many guests that summer, we decided to extend open invitations to anyone who would like to come. A schedule of five nights a week was set (which meant that a program was held six out of seven days at Banabehari Mandir). What had been a small group of five the year before now grew increasingly, as more devotees tasted these nectarean prayers, feelingly led by Kartamasa. Two friends who came from Florida were Nirmala and Rangavati. Nirmala, gifted in the art of aromatherapy, had provided exquisite essential oil blends for Radha-Banabehari for years, and these oils were deeply coveted by us for Their Lordships’ pleasure. Earlier Yamuna had written to them on the birthday of Nirmala’s husband, Devarshi, and this letter captures her loving and humorous writing style, which invariably conveyed a Krishna Conscious message within:



Rangavati, Dina, Nirmala and Yamuna in Saranagati

Dear *Slaghitani* Nirm and Dev, Pranam Dand[avats]; Jaya Jaya—well everything worth glorifying, again and again.

Though I’ve not written much in the last fortnight, know that you are in heart and mind daily.

On your B’day Dev—in fact even leading up to it—have been sending streaming gift postulates and well-wishing thoughts. Then on the day itself—I think Dina explained this morning in *Bhagavatam* class [from] Canto 3, Chapter 4, Text 33—I found one

of those words not yet registered: “*slaghitani*.” It means “most glorious.” Hearing this word, my thoughts went to sharing it with you—a wonderful word to describe you two *slaghitani* souls, along with *chota slaghitani* Vani. Yesterday Kalindi, one of Banabehari’s Milkmaids, brought over a gallon of milk, of course organic. A sweet gift out of the blue. What is something Krishna really loves that I have not made for decades? The result was a batch of Saffron-Pistachio *Rasa Malai*. Hope you’re sitting down to relish this one. As you read, mentally sending you bowls of chilled, saffron-hued *slaghitani* nectar *prasadam* from the lotus feet of Sri Sri Radha-Banabehari. Hmm. How about it?

This is what Krishna likes, with a taste from the spiritual world. This morning after bathing Their Lordships, dressing Them in thin silk chiffon *sringar* with a multi-colored lotus theme, cleaning the altar, surrounding Them with dramatic vases of multi-hued tulips, Dina swabbed a dot of two kinds of oil on my wrists. When I went into a literal swoon, she said: “Nirmala’s—who else?”

Oh, my Lord!—exquisite, subtle, pure, refined oil blends. Another realm of taste so befitting the Supreme couple of Vraja—creators of all things *slaghitani*. Those scents, now hours old, continue to linger on my soul. Thank you for that expert service. We save each of those tiny bottles you have offered and spread them out for years. Such a wonder, this gift of *bhakti-yoga* we have been offered. In truth, how difficult to access it. So many blinkings of our eyelids daily we spend away from this nectar. But we have been blessed by many blinking eyelid moments relishing this exchange. Such opulence—an opulence of spiritual love exchanged in the spiritual realm of Krishna Consciousness. *Slaghitani* to our past together, our present together and our future together. Okay, maybe it still seems like a strong improbability that you ... will make it up here.

But what about that miracle element? What seems like an absurdity today can happen tomorrow. Pray we are soon the recipients of that happening despite the fact that ours is materially a “No-Facility Zone.” Saranagati still remains a place of prayerful transformation in the heart. In that mood, have a *slaghitani* day and expect the miracle. *Kirtaniyah sada harih*.

—EMAIL TO DEVARSHI AND NIRMALA, MAY 17, 2006

Rangavati devi: The contagious joy and enthusiasm of Banabehari Mandir came from the strong hearing and chanting done by Yamuna and Dina along with guests and friends. Life felt deeper and grander in Yamuna's world; she was a powerful force of nature. Her presence spoke volumes of the days she spent with Srila Prabhupada; her absorption of his message, and the need to pass this on to others rang out loud and clear. The sheer creativity of the ashram created an ambiance of meaning and love from her years of service and enlightenment—each detail meticulously tended to and an overall sense of devotional refinement—the sweet, quiet *mangal arati*, where Yamuna would play her small keyboard as her mesmerizing voice filled the *brahma muhurta* hours with devotion; the light footsteps that honored the *tulasi* plant which stood in a pot beautifully painted by Kim Waters; the gentle flames glowing from the tea candles on the windowsills in the black night.... I felt loved and cherished around her, and yet insignificant in the perfect balance of her Vaishnava behavior. 🙏

Nirmala devi: Of course, whenever I had visited Yamuna and Dinatarini in the many different places they lived, it was a transcendental experience, but this was more gripping than any other, as they had designed and built their ashram according to *Vastu shastra*. They were off the grid, and everything was natural, earthy and pure. I was captivated; the attention that went into every detail of this little sacred temple resonated with every cell in my body. 🙏



As the year progressed, Yamuna, profoundly inspired by the transformative potency of the Holy Name, took every opportunity to share its glories—inaugurating Holy Name nights at Banabehari Mandir in addition to our regular kirtans and other programs, and specifically focusing on the youth, feeling that their infectious enthusiasm would impact some of the more diffident adults. While I was away visiting my mother in Florida, Yamuna wrote to me:

Yamuna: I am more and more convinced that the *mahamantra* is the best

remedy for all of life's ills—it's always been so, but especially in these confusing times. We may have so many divisions and identity problems, but the Holy Name is the glue that binds us all together. Let [us] make the rest of our lives a sacrifice to the Holy Name and pray to Banabehari and Prabhupada that we can give to others what we so deeply feel in our hearts. 🙏

Saranagati's residents always delighted in the plays organized by the parents of the children. I cannot count the number of plays we attended over the years, but it was clear that Saranagati seemed to harmonize most effectively as a community when serving together to facilitate plays, Rathayatras, camps, retreats and other programs. Each such community event elicited a spirit of unity that overcame any divisiveness. However, individually we each tackled the myriad challenges of living in such a remote environment—infestations of pine beetles, which killed almost all of the pine trees in the valley, thus forcing us to hire excavators to remove hundreds of fallen trees; grasshopper infestations, which decimated the carefully-tended gardens; determined rodents that seemed to find their way into seemingly impenetrable structures, including cars; mud seasons after the snowmelt that could sometimes last for two months; and the ever-present bears—a persistent and damaging nuisance to everyone.

Yamuna and I learned by trial and error over the years how best to deal with the bears. After the dog died, we kept an air horn which boaters use that emits an ear-piercing shriek. Once a *sannyasi* had come for a visit, and Yamuna drove with him and his host to the Sunday Feast program, while I

stayed behind to finish the food offering. I watched in horror as a large bear, sensing that everyone had left, sauntered up to our Blue Lotus guest cabin and began peeling the cedar siding from the cabin walls—just like one would rip pieces of paper. I quietly opened the nearest window and blasted the air horn—its effect literally causing the bear to jump three feet straight up into the air, feet pedaling, then hitting the ground running. Although the outcome was somewhat humorous, it taught us not to leave any food in the outbuildings. Each Saranagati



Bear sauntering up to the Blue Lotus guest cabin

resident has similar experiences, and Yamuna and I used to joke with others that we could write a book just about the bears.

“Kalyana Kalpa-taru” – the Desire Tree of Auspiciousness – 2007

In early 2007, it looked like Yamuna’s and my desire to attend a Japa Retreat facilitated by Sacinandana Swami would finally manifest. We had read from his *Nectarean Ocean of the Holy Name* book before each kirtan and *bhajan* program, and had appreciated his sincere and thorough presentation. The retreat was to take place in Ojai, California, and Yamuna, Visakha and I were invited to attend. Unfortunately, after our travel arrangements had been made, Sacinandana Swami canceled, and as he was the principal facilitator, many others also canceled. In the end, only eleven attended—six women disciples of Srila Prabhupada: Yamuna, Malati, Visakha, Rasajna, Urvasi and I. Yamuna was happy to have the chance to connect with dear God-sister friends through the Holy Name, and the facilitators, Giriraja Swami, Romapada Swami and Ravindra Swarup das, were gracious and supportive.

We spent several days before the retreat with Urvasi devi, a refined and soft-spoken friend from our England days, who has lived in Ojai for many years. On two occasions we visited Giriraja Swami at his nearby Carpenteria ashram, where he recorded talks with Yamuna he later shared in tributes and in this book. There we also met Niranjana Swami, who was recovering from an illness. During a home program we saw him chanting from his personal songbook, which was extensive and included Prabhupada’s purports with the songs. I inquired if it was available for purchase, and he personally had several copies made and gave one to each of us as a gift.

Yamuna: Niranjana Swami was [in California] visiting Giriraja Swami, and he had a songbook he’d compiled of many of our Vaishnava prayers that either had a purport by Srila Prabhupada or by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati, and he had [gone] deeply into the prayers, both to vibrate them in Sanskrit or in Bengali and to study their purport. At the end of that book he had collated a few prayers that he chanted before his *japa*. So at Sri Radha-Banabehari Mandir, we have been vibrating those prayers ... glorifying the Holy Name. They are invocations to make us receptive to chanting the Holy Name and honoring the Holy Name, especially in relationship to *japa*. 🙏

Yamuna wrote to Kartamasa and Radhakunda on April 7, 2007:

Returned last night [from the retreat]. In the light of today's morning—cold winds, recent snow thawed, roads passable, and early spring bulbs sprouting green shoots—back to Their Lordships and Their sublime domain! But while it is fresh, I want to share something of the experience before it fades away. As always, Krishna's arrangements are superior to our best-laid plans....

Dina, Visakha and I stayed at Urvasi's home in Ojai, arriving there late Thursday evening and until the retreat began Monday afternoon. The days were engaging, as Urvasi lives alone and was especially hungry for intimate, peer women *sanga*. We never left her company, and she never left ours—such a serious desire to share Krishna Consciousness with others. Saturday and Sunday night we attended evening kirtans [with] Giriraja Swami and Niranjana Swami.

What had been promised as intimate Godbrother-Godsister kirtans were instead considerable gatherings with many present—from second-generation disciples to new *bhaktas* and *bhaktins* and local neighbors—and with Nrsinghananda das filming everything. Anything but intimate, but as always, wonderful to meet new devotees.

The Retreat program ran three full days—5 AM to 8:30 PM, Tuesday through Thursday—with a Monday evening [welcoming] and Friday morning concluding session. A Considerable Surprise: Of the many invited leaders, only four men attended. Many canceled when Sacinandana Swami could not come. Three of them were facilitators who had also attended the New York retreat: *kirtaniya* Bada Haridas from Alachua, presenter Romapada Swami from Brooklyn, and presenter Ravindra Swarup from Philly. Giriraja Swami was the fourth. Niranjana Swami (not feeling well at the time) attended two evenings for retreat kirtans. Extraordinary Purusha Shukta das remained a vigilant facilitator on the retreat periphery and, though not present at the retreat events, remained fully cognizant of every minute at the retreat. He felt everything should remain as Sacinandana Swami would want it. Strangely enough, all six retreat attendees were

women. Some high points on this retreat: chanting sixty-four rounds together; outstanding *prasadam*; kirtan and *sanga* with Bada Haridas; the opulent setting of natural beauty.... That's it for now; out the door. *Krishna kirtan jaya prema nidhan*—eagerly looking forward to your company.

—LETTER TO KARTAMASA AND RADHAKUNDA,
APR. 7, 2007

Yamuna reflected on the retreat experience, and on April 26 again wrote to Kartamasa and Radhakunda:

“One should learn how to associate with the devotees of the Lord by gathering with them to chant the glories of the Lord. This process is most purifying. As devotees thus develop their loving friendship, they feel mutual happiness and satisfaction. And by thus encouraging one another they are able to give up material sense gratification, which is the cause of all suffering.” (*Srimad-Bhagavatam* 11.3.30)

The association of sincere Vaishnava and Vaishnavi practitioners is spiritual sustenance. All who attended the small Ojai Japa Retreat tasted that life-giving sustenance; and the women attendees, all in heartfelt ways, have expressed their appreciation for it. I am firmly convinced that sharing the glories of the Holy Name within communities must be a core activity. [In Saranagati] there is good room for improvement, and my constant prayer is that somehow or other this happens.

—LETTER TO KARTAMASA AND RADHAKUNDA,
APR. 26, 2007

Niranjana Swami: Whenever I would see her—and it was quite frequently, I would see her in India, in California—I would always see her wherever there was either a festival with emphasis on kirtan or discussion about chanting. I saw her at a Japa Retreat in California. Whenever we would meet, she would ask me, “Please share something about the Holy Name with me—anything, Maharaja. Whatever you would like to tell me. I am getting older, and I realize that I don’t want to waste my older years now. In Krishna Consciousness, the most important thing is my relationship with Prabhupada and the Holy Name.” 🙏

Yamuna and I had discussed the upcoming Bhaktivinoda sessions for the summer and decided to chant the first book of the Thakur's songs—*Kalyana Kalpa-taru*—"The Desire Tree of Auspiciousness." First published in 1880, the "Desire Tree" is divided into three branches, of which the first, "*upadesha*" or spiritual advice, can be difficult both to sing and, for some, to hear, due to its graphic depictions of material incarceration. Yet some of the most profound and heart-rending Vaishnava *bhajans* come from *Kalyana Kalpa-taru*, such as *Gopinatha* and *Vibhavari Sesa*, and we waited anxiously for our summer *bhajans* to begin. From Florida, Kartamasa wrote in late February:

I started (preparing) the *Kalyana Kalpa-taru*, and got that feeling back where I feel so moved by the magnitude and purity of Bhaktivinoda's songs that I want to chant, chant, chant. I actually tried calling a couple of friends right away to share these songs with them in kirtan, but they were not home. I hope I can maintain this focus in order to prepare for this summer. It is such an interesting phenomenon, that whenever I get into these *bhajans*, I have an overwhelming urge to share them with as many potentially appreciative people as I can, because I feel they are so special, yet so hidden or undiscovered. It is so interesting—the passage from *Amrita Vani* you read, we also read that exact passage at our Sunday program. We are all truly connected by Krishna's mystic love. Yes, that is what we yearn for; all that you do at your ashram, we just want to be part of it.... Thank you again for all the mercy. I love that Krishna gave us to you.

—LETTER FROM KARTAMASA DAS, FEB. 2007

By this time, attendance in the Bhaktivinoda sessions had increased significantly. Each person knew that there would be one assigned expert drummer (Nimesh or Haribhakti in early years), one *kartal* player, chimes, myself on tamboura, Yamuna with gentle whompers, and Kar on harmonium. Sometimes subtle shakers were used, and as the Milkmaids grew older, Haripriya or Kalindi would sometimes play flute. Banabehari's Milkmaids came each night, and even at their young age felt the transformative potency of the prayers by often expressing great emotion on leaving. Before beginning each session, we would read from Bhaktivinoda Thakur's poignant memoir, *Svalakhita Jivani*, written in the form of a long letter to his

then sixteen-year-old son, Lalit Prasad. After each *bhajan* at Banabehari Mandir, we gathered in a circle for what Yamuna called a “*kavacha*,” with one person chosen to offer a prayer of gratitude and the rest raising arms in loud and ecstatic “Haribol!”s.

Kalindi devi (Milkmaid): When we would read them, every *bhajan* was better than the next one, even though they were so heavy. Certain songs were so intense. I never felt that way about them, but I would always just think, “This is such a nice *bhajan*.” Just his poetry, the way he wrote; his messages were somehow able to completely satisfy and pacify my mind, even though it was very intense words. Somehow I would always come out of those *bhajans* completely at peace with everything—completely blissed out. When we were singing, as soon as the Hare Krishna part would come, Yamuna would say, “Haribol! Gauranga! Krishna Krishna!”—always calling out different things. Now, whenever I call out in kirtan, I remember Yamuna. They were so nice. Now, whenever my mind is the most disturbed about everything in the world, I always go to Bhaktivinoda’s *bhajans* and read just one translation, and it brings me back to such a happy, peaceful place; it soothes my mind from all troubles. It is so nice. 🐾



The Kalyana Kalpa-taru group



Kalavati (Kava) devi (Milkmaid): Basically, I felt I learned a lifetime of lessons just from singing the Bhaktivinoda *bhajans*. I don’t know the lessons—I can’t put words to it—but I have a strong feeling of it, and that strong foundation from Bhaktivinoda Thakur that is so strong that I feel that wherever I am in my life, I will be able to go back to this feeling and remember it, and be able to continue my Krishna Consciousness from that feeling. It just completely opened my eyes to Krishna Consciousness and humility and patience, and it also showed me the importance of knowing our Acharyas.

I am so attached to Bhaktivinoda Thakur now. I think the *bhajans* taught us all how to pray—how to be in a prayerful mood to pray to Lord Krishna. I actually didn't know how to pray. 🙏

Rasa Mandala devi (Milkmaid): Perhaps the most important thing we learned and did with Yamuna, what shaped our lives the most, what utterly molded our hearts, and where perhaps our deepest connection was with Yamuna, was kirtan. Not just kirtan, but Krishna Kirtan, as we called it. It began first many years ago, about the same time we became the Banabehari Milkmaids, but it wasn't until 2007 that we first participated in these kirtans, these Bhaktivinoda *bhajans*. It had been going for two years before that ... led by Kartamasa das. He had gone through three of Bhaktivinoda's songbooks, *Saranagati*, *Gitavali* and *Kalyana Kalpa-taru*, and devised a melody for every song—hundreds of songs—and he led us in chanting every single one of them. Yamuna and Dina often remarked that when they first heard him, they knew he had the potency and potential to transport them to another place with his chanting, and he did just that.

On the third year of the Bhaktivinoda *bhajan* sessions we came and brought our parents along with us. I was twelve years old that first time, and we sang *Kalyana Kalpa-taru*—the first and most direct and perhaps harshest, of all Bhaktivinoda's songbooks. They were all named with titles like “Madness for Wealth is Ridiculous” and “Cheating Devotees are Rejectable.” This was also the first year that some of the other residents came, and Dina has so often said, “I was just so amazed to see these girls coming and sitting there every week, when even some of the older devotees had to leave, saying it was just too much to take in.” Half the truth is that we simply didn't understand most of it, but the other half is that these songs of Bhaktivinoda, these prayers he wrote that are all so beautiful, and so singularly unique, unconsciously worked on our hearts and our minds. They are so powerful and so pure that although we hardly understood the English and couldn't sing along with the Bengali, we could listen, and it was hearing these prayers that caused an attachment to develop within our hearts, although we did not yet recognize it.

For four years Kartamasa led us in chanting these songs of Bhaktivinoda, at first just in the summers, but then all year round when Kartamasa and his wife Radhakunda moved to Saranagati. Yamuna often described singing these *bhajans* as “transporting” because that is exactly what they did—they transported you to a place where there was no time, there was no recollection of material problems, there was nothing but the transcendental

sounds that entered your ears and filled your heart with an inexplicable feeling of completeness, with an understanding that this is where you belong, not out there, trying to resist *maya*'s snares and temptations, but here, where you can leave the material world behind as you step through the door and surrender to Bhaktivinoda's prayers, where you can give your material self up and become an entirely different person—someone who sings with all their heart to Krishna, with no reserves or hesitations. When we sang these prayers of Bhaktivinoda, the obstacles between ourselves and our Krishna Consciousness dissolved, there was nothing but the immersion into hearing and chanting, all of us begging and praying to Krishna through Bhaktivinoda. Every time we began an evening of these prayers, it was like coming home, like you had finally found that place, that inconceivable place, where you think, "Yes, finally, this is where I am meant to be. This is home. This is the spiritual world." Here or there you would hear Yamuna's voice rise or fall, flooded with emotion, and at those moments you would strain your ears to listen, to catch a glimpse of what pure chanting sounds like, to hear that potent sound coming from within her and treasure it, aspire to it, because we knew, we all knew, that this was pure chanting. She would sit in her rocking chair, eyes closed, sometimes tears silently sliding down her cheeks, tapping the whompers that rested on her chest. At times she would ecstatically let out a "Krishna, Krishna," or "Gauranga, Gaura Gaura." We would sit and chant, and listen, capturing the mood in our hearts and minds, this mood of sweetness and quiet, personal meditation. This mood would become attributed as Yamuna's mood. It reflected her sweet personality and her close relationship with Srila Prabhupada and the Lord, and cannot be replicated without her. Yamuna taught us, not through instruction, but through example, how to sing and play instruments for Krishna, to keep pride and the desire for fame at bay, and simply sing and play for the pleasure of the Deity and the devotees. When Yamuna sang, there was not a hint of pride or vanity, not a drop of arrogance or self-satisfaction; there was only pure love for Krishna. Her emotion when she sang the Holy Name was tangible; it entered immediately into your heart and chased away the desire for anything but to be able to feel what she felt while chanting the Holy



Name. We never had the chance to develop a desire for fame or pride, because from the beginning Yamuna showed us the higher taste—she showed us the real thing—and next to that powerful feeling and palpable love for the Holy Name, chanting for name and fame was like choosing rotten food over pristine *prasadam*.

Eventually, we learned how to nicely accompany the prayers ourselves with *mridanga* and *kartals*. When we began to play for the *bhajans*, Yamuna, simply through her method of chanting and prayerful mood, taught us that we do not play instruments to demonstrate our prowess and skill; we play only to sweetly accompany the chanting and to bring increased pleasure to the ears of Lord Krishna and his devotees. That is the only reason. We did not play unless we could sing as well, because forsaking the reason for Krishna kirtan, chanting the Holy Names, simply for being able to play in increasingly complicated ways was unreasonable and would defeat the purpose. Simply through example, not through lengthy discussions and instruction, but merely by example, Yamuna showed us what it was to do kirtan for Krishna, to feel bliss at bringing Krishna pleasure rather than showing everyone what mantra you learned to play today. 🙏

Vani devi: My ears, listening intently, can hear her soft yet powerful voice, quivering with *bhakti* emanating from her heart. Tears begin to pool in her eyes as she experiences something most of us aren't pure enough to perceive. I can hear her small *kartals*—1,2,3; 1,2,3—so unobtrusive, just loud enough to embellish the Holy Name and please the Lord's ears. Her chanting brings me to Srila Prabhupada in New York City, in Vrindavan dhama, in Mayapur dhama: she brings me wherever he has gone. She reveals to me

layer after layer of the intricate meanings of the Holy Name. 🙏



Again, words cannot describe how transformed we all were by the final night of our *Kalyana Kalpa-taru bhajans*. Kartamasa recorded each evening's session, but with somewhat questionable acoustics, they do not fully convey the "Krishna Magic" of those prayers. On the final night, to honor the Disappearance Day of Bhaktivinoda Thakur, as well as the culmination of our songbook, Radhakunda

baked a commemorative *Kalyana Kalpa-taru* cake in the form of a tree with three branches. The leaves of the branches contained each named prayer within the branch. It was a memorable culmination to an unforgettable experience.

A Virtual Govardhan Parikrama and 32nd Anniversary of Sri Sri Radha-Banabehariji

As the young girls became more absorbed in devotional activities, their spontaneous enthusiasm was contagious. Simply said, they were good company—keenly anxious to learn, to chant, to hear and to serve. Yamuna and I were planning to go on pilgrimage to India with a small group of our young friends and promised the Milkmaids that we would also take them in the next year or so. To enthuse them and honor Govardhan Puja, we began a virtual *parikrama* of Govardhan Hill—placing a large map on the ashram wall and researching and discussing each holy *tirtha* as we marked our path around Govardhan. We had collected dust and holy water from many of these *tirthas* on previous pilgrimages, and distributed the “mercy” to them as we performed the virtual *parikrama*. They would taste the dust from a *tirtha* and exclaim, “I have never tasted dirt like that! This is from the spiritual world!”

In December, Yamuna planned a Holy Name theme to honor the Thirty-second Anniversary of Sri Sri Radha-Banabehari. During her Vrindavan pilgrimage in 2006, she had designed and commissioned a white Holy Name outfit for the Deities, with the *mahamantra* embroidered in red over white satin with a chiffon variation. Various kirtan instruments were delicately embroidered on Radharani’s veil and Banabehari’s shawl. For the festival, Yamuna made a “*Vijayate Sri Krishna Sankirtanam*” sign, and the Milkmaids performed a play. Radhakunda made a cake with the translation “Oh! I do not know how much nectar there is in the two syllables ‘Krish’ and ‘na,’” and many other creative offerings were made. It was a magical celebration. Afterward, reaching out to friends around the world, Yamuna sent this email report expressing her gratitude:



Dearest Friends, Pranam Dandavats to you all, in no special order; just a reach-out of gratitude. *Param Vijayate Sri Krishna Sankirtanam*.

Closing out the year with the last photos taken of Their Lordships on the occasion of Their Thirty-second *Mahotsava*. As you know, it fell on December 27 this year, of course on the Disappearance Day of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur. We made a *yatra* day celebration to commemorate the occasion.

5:30 AM at Radha-Banabehari Mandir:

Fresh snow on the ground overnight, the temperature is about 5 degrees F. Many devotees attended *mangal arati*. Their Lordships were in white and gold silk chiffon nightdresses and capes. During *japa*, They were bathed in *panchamrita* and dressed in Their new *mahamantra* white silk outfit with pearl and gold jewelry. Then [we held the] *Govindam* greeting, guru *puja*, *darshan* and kirtan.

10:30 AM at Jagannatha Mandir:

All valley members met at the feet of Lord Jagannatha, Subhadra, and Baladeva, with a life-size painting of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta beside Srila Prabhupada. Devotees spoke on the glories of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta, then sang *je anilo*, made a joint offering, performed *arati* and *pushpa* worship, then respected the wonderful feast. This year, all five of Banabehari's Milkmaids made a feast dish for the occasion: Haripriya made creamy *chaval khir*; Kalindi made sumptuous whipped cream-filled pastry horns; Kava made incredible bliss balls; Gopal made yummy *pakor*as, and Rasa made too-good yogurt and fruit.

6:00 PM at Radha-Banabehari Mandir:

A packed event starting with a Rasaraja candlelight kirtan; then a play performed by the youth in the valley, directed by Radhakunda. An incredible harmony song was organized by Uttama and sung by many transcendental ladies. Then an offering of three cakes: Harilila's ebony and ivory double-decker with whipped cream filling, with Their Lordships' name on it; Uttama's heart cakes with whipped cream frosting; Radhakunda's masterpiece single layer cake surrounded by thirty-two very large *sandesh* pieces, each

one with a Holy Name written in Sanskrit, plus scores of other smaller *sandesh* pieces; and the cake decorated with a calligraphic *shloka* glorifying the two syllable name of Krish-na. Practically everyone offered a wonderful gift to Their Lordships; each one stunned Their servants. We humbly thank you from the core of our hearts. Yadubara led a kirtan; then a Kartamasa kirtan. Then every devotee lit a ghee lamp and made a private prayer to Their Lordships. Then we respected cake *prasadam*, topped off with a spoon of Rasaraja's Sour Cream Vegetables—a real hit. We all wished Maharani well, as she was in hospital during the celebration. Then Dina and Yamuna gave each parting guest a gift bag of Sri Sri Radha-Banabehari *prasadam*: Fresh Ginger Shortbreads; Lemon Cream Cheese Nuggets; Almond Roca Bars; Peanut Butter Cookies; and Masala Puffed Pastry Palmiers.

So to each of you who were present, those who were present in heart and those from afar:

Thank each of you for this year going deeper into *sanga* than we ever imagined possible.

Thank each of you for your devotion and sincerity in exploring Krishna Consciousness.

Thank each of you for your company and mercy. Let us all please try to get together again this summer in July for the fourth annual session relishing the prayers of Thakur Bhaktivinoda.

It may be our last chance to do this together.



We will keep you posted if we can squeeze in a mini-retreat focusing exclusively on the Holy Name.

—EMAIL TO FRIENDS, DEC. 30, 2007

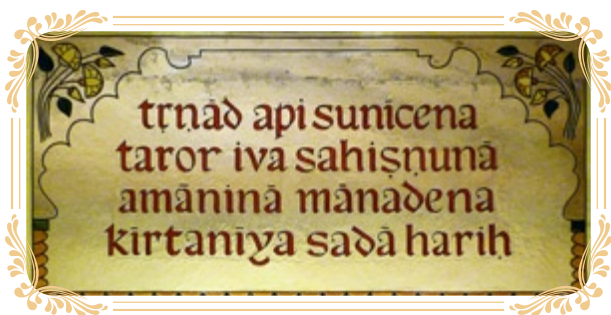
Krishna Kirtan Jaya Prema Nidhan—2008

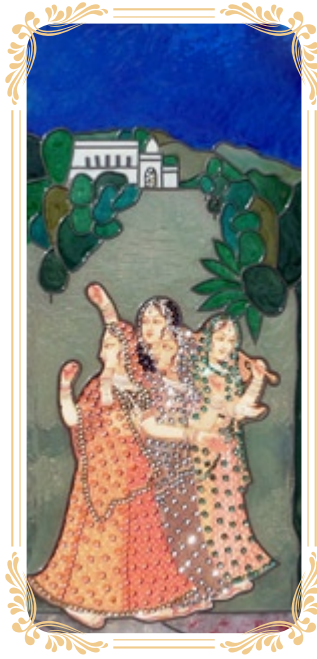
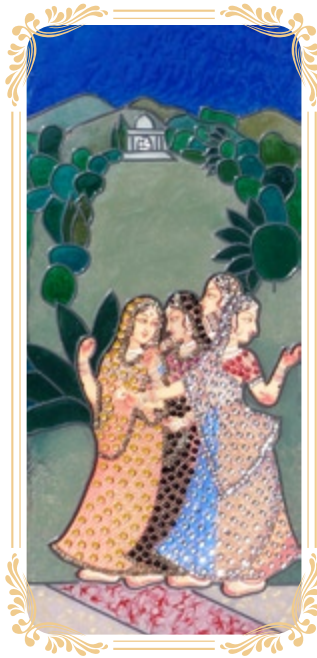
Yamuna had envisioned a stained-glass entrance to the Deity room for many years, and in 2008 began work on her vision. Using faux stained glass paints, she designed the entrance to feature the *Trinad api sunicena* verse of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu centered at the top, with two stanzas from the *Siksastakam* prayer of Bhaktivinoda Thakur in *Gitavali*—*Krishna kirtan jaya prema nidhan* “chanting is a storehouse of love of God” and *Krishna kirtan jaya bhakti vilas* “chanting is the pastime of devotion”—framing each side. Although the project took many months to complete, it was extraordinary and perfectly exemplified her devotional mood.

The long winters in Saranagati left its residents housebound for much of

the time, and Yamuna utilized the time in writing her memoir and corresponding with devotees and friends via email. Frequently, a person unknown to her would write with a cooking, Deity or kirtan question, and she would unfailingly reply. Her emails were always instructive, encouraging and supportive:

Kartamasa das: Thank you so much for your association there in Saranagati. It was so brief—almost like a dream—but yet still so essential and vital to my health to see and hear and taste and feel the *bhakti* which my soul desperately craves despite all my efforts to distract myself and smother all feeling with dullness. I particularly liked the morning classes, and the *japa* on the first night. The simplicity of those activities really halted the lemming-like march of my mind. Actually Radha and I are trying to read from *Srimad-Bhagavatam* now every evening after *arati*. I hope we keep it up.





Here and opposite page: Stained glass at Banabehari Mandir made by Yamuna

Yamuna: Dear Kar and Radha,

Both of your emails are rich with your advancing Krishna Consciousness.

They help to give insight into how Srila Prabhupada must have relished seeing his fledgling devotees advance in Krishna Consciousness. Radha-Banabehari's Thirty-second was made especially relishable because of the many services you rendered for Their Lordships' pleasure.

Yes, I agree; the *japa*, morning programs and kirtans together were over-the-top nectar.

The news [is] that a December India pilgrimage could be a reality. We are so fortunate. *Slaghitani*.

Even 5 minutes—10 minutes—any time daily will give you life.

Highs and lows are mercy. How else can we learn what we are meant to learn? How else can we lift ourselves up if we do not experience down? Your honesty and integrity are inspiring. Recently we had wonderful exchanges with Jagannatha Kirtan and Neem (Nimesh) about where they are at—sharing discomfort at various levels. If we are not feeling this, we are simply zombies trying to eke out various kinds of satisfaction from playing with material energies—and how that covers our vision, our senses! Any thinking person feels burdened with his own mediocrity. Only in a sleeping condition are we unaware of the prison of unconscious existence. Only time separates all of us from pure Krishna Consciousness. Let us use time well together and lift each other up to higher and higher levels of Krishna Consciousness.

Kartamasa das: The major issue, I finally realized, is that I haven't been able to exact any substantial satisfaction from any of the nondevotional activities I have always relied on for either enjoyment or association. Sports, games, music, chatting, movies have for various reasons felt very unfulfilling this year, and left me with virtually no interest in them. Not that I haven't tried, and don't continue to try to milk them, but I am not trying as hard, leaving me a bit more quiet and lonesome than ever before.

Yamuna: You are so fortunate. Practically the whole world is asleep on the lap of *maya*, dully sucking up any and all enjoyment at hand. Only the most fortunate person gets tired of



chewing the chewed-dry sugarcane stalks of sense enjoyment. May higher tastes continue to be your goal and solace. I pray for such company.

Kartamasa das: Your last email was very powerful; thank you. It was a lot to meditate on, and a lot to swallow. Basically, I am like a New Age practitioner who is accepting of the religion and the lifestyle, but is not so interested in the commitment. The fact of the matter seems to me that if people like me are never given any responsibility, then we will just plateau at the level of involvement of a congregation member, stakeholder or supporter. In other words, our involvement in community and ISKCON is a comfortable role as a welcomed guest, for everything else continues on (the Deity worship, the *Bhagavatam* classes, etc.) without needing us. On an internal level, without responsibility, there is no need to commit, because as I pointed out in different words, chanting *japa* faithfully, taking initiation and following strictly don't become relevant to a comfortable congregation member until one is faced with accountability and responsibility, whether it be to one's own integrity, one's guru, one's community, Prabhupada, etc. So, I am trying to acknowledge that as a representative of the mercy of Krishna and Balarama, Gaura-Nitai, the Goswamis, Srila Prabhupada and yourselves, I absolutely have to dedicate myself to these basic commitments. Also, I gripe about the dryness of my material life, and then Krishna sends these opportunities

to absorb in the Holy Name, so I have to “be the change I want to see.” Without your care about my spiritual life, I would feel hopelessly ugly and bitter. Since you’ve given me these glimpses and the taste for the most relishable activities one can possibly experience, my life and my character have completely changed.

Yamuna: Thank you for your honest and inspiring correspondence. This January portion is akin to a long conversation with interrupted intervals—in this case, the interruptions being time. The truth: to commit to daily *Srimad-Bhagavatam* and *japa* is both difficult and easy. Observe the first ISKCON generation: initially [there was] 100% commitment; then each decade revealing difficulty maintaining the commitment ... The time factor reveals so much. Never mind how you address your weaknesses; live in the moment, and with intent, try, try, try. The truth: many days in my Krishna Conscious life, I failed to daily study *Srimad-Bhagavatam* or chant all my rounds, even after initiation. When Srila Prabhupada inquired, I admitted the same to him. But he, like Bhaktisiddhanta before him, encouraged his disciples to continue on with enthusiasm, patience and determination, fully knowing the ultimate result. Taste, strength and resolve surely increase with practice. Balance, steadiness and commitment increase with practice. A long road, yes. In the end, only our sincere trying satisfies your spiritual hunger, needs, hopes, etc. If you sincerely try, of course, this will happen to you too—to anyone who follows the process. Our previous Acharyas have given their stamp of guarantee. For what it is worth, we are surrounding you on all sides with encouragement and support. *Krishna kirtan jaya prema nidhan!*

—EMAILS BETWEEN YAMUNA AND KARTAMASA,
WINTER 2007–2008

Kartamasa had been reluctant to lead kirtan at a kirtan and *japa* seminar held in Alachua. Yamuna encouraged him in her usual exuberant style.

Yamuna: All glories to the Holy Name!

All glories to your chanting the Holy Name!

All glories to anyone who hears you chanting the Holy Name!

All glories to all who wish to increase their attachment for chanting the Holy Name!

All glories to kirtans at the *japa* seminar event in Alachua!

All glories to your sincerity in wanting to go deeper, chanting the Holy Names!

Not sure what “intermission style” kirtan is. Hope it is more than background sound or Musak-style kirtan. At any rate, we are most eager to hear your report on this experience. Thrilled with your involvement.

Kartamasa das: Thank you for your support. To use the imagery of Haridas Thakur, please consider me the absolute lowest prospect for Krishna Conscious advancement and continue to give your special mercy to Radha and I, for if we are ever able to make something of our fading lives, it is all to your credit.

Yamuna: Every devotee is sustained by the mercy of other devotees. Real devotees always feel themselves the lowest of the low. All glories to *sanga*! With much encouragement and affection, Your servants and friends, Yamuna and Dina

— EMAILS BETWEEN YAMUNA AND KARTAMASA,
WINTER 2008

During the summer, we sang Bhaktivinoda Thakur’s *Saranagati* songbook—the numbers of ecstatic chanters growing such that they now spilled out of the temple room. At the conclusion of the prayers, Radhakunda again made a cake honoring the Thakur’s Disappearance, this time in the form of a lotus flower surrounded by paper scrolls—each containing the last line of one of the songs of *Saranagati*. Each participant chose a scroll, with many expressing delight that its message was ideally suited to them.



Yamuna: Four summers ago, the five of us committed to a six-week daily study group to chant through Bhaktivinoda Thakur’s namesake *bhajan* of *Saranagati*. The next two summers we chanted his *Gitavali*, and then *Kalyana Kalpa-taru*. Kartamasa is the kirtan leader; Nimesh plays drum, and Radha percussion. This summer the six-week program reverted back to chanting *Saranagati* and expanded to include over forty participants from around the world chanting at Radha-Banabehari Mandir. 🙏

In July, Romapada Swami brought many Seattle devotees for a Japa Retreat at Saranagati Village. Each morning the large congregation chanted *japa* together, while many of our community residents worked to facilitate the retreat, including the Milkmaids, who served each meal to the assembled

devotees. After the morning chanting, discussions on *japa* were held, and at one point, Yamuna was asked to elaborate on our practice of chanting auspicious invocation prayers before *japa* at Banabehari Mandir.



Yamuna: So *vandanam* is one of the nine processes of devotional service; and once in Indore, Srila Prabhupada was witnessing devotees chanting together. There are several nice stories of Srila Prabhupada and *japa*, and in this particular one, after the end of the *japa* session, he said, “Unless we hear nicely and chant nicely, how can we remember? We cannot remember. All remembrance of Krishna is by hearing nicely and chanting nicely.” So how do we define [nicely]? Srila Prabhupada would use simple words. So what does “nicely” mean to us? Nicely means

practically an unlimited ocean of change. And change we must. Change happens whether we are conscious of it or not ... it is part of Krishna’s glory. So if we become conscious of the change [that comes] by hearing nicely and chanting nicely, then *smaranam*, the remembrance, comes. And when we remember nicely, we want to pray to Krishna for more: more, more, more of that. So, there’s a wonderful book called *Amrita Vani*, which is a compilation of statements made by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur, and if any of you get a chance to go deeper into prayer, please read the section on “Prayer”—the instructions he gave on this subject matter.

Devotee: What subjectively or energetically has been your experience from doing that?

Yamuna: A huge connection and appreciation for the gift of the Holy Name. Just like we all have families that we love, and we do so much for our families, and *sannyasis* put a huge amount of energy into their service and their [spiritual] families—as each ashram does. So putting that same kind of energy and focus into

an invocation to beg the mercy of the Holy Name is very powerful, and it's unlimited because the Holy Name is unlimited. So, just by vibrating these prayers and hearing them—trying to let them into the heart—naturally sets a very transcendental mood: an invocation for chanting the Holy Name. Can those ... who have chanted those prayers confirm the effect on you? [voices enthusiastically say “yes”] So all of us who do this just feel very cleansed by that.

Later on that summer, the Bus Party tour again came to Saranagati, and a youth-oriented Japa Retreat was held for them. Yamuna was deeply appreciative of the service of Manu das and Jaya Radhe devi (now Manorama das and Jaya Sri Radhe devi) in engaging the youth, and enthusiastically participated whenever they came. They were always welcomed at Banabehari Mandir amid shouts of “Haribol! Haribol!” from Yamuna. The kirtans held there with the youth—some of them cherished children of dear friends and others who became dear *kirtaniya* friends to both of us—were enlivening, while the discussions were honest and illuminating. Yamuna was somewhat surprised during the Retreat at what she felt was a take-it-or-leave-it approach to *japa* by some of the facilitators. Typically, her own presentation was direct and uncompromising. She later wrote to a friend:

Yamuna: I was the last presenter, and unfortunately, I rocked the boat when I spoke by saying: “Nothing you can do this year is more important than getting access to chanting *japa*. Take it! Take all you can grasp of this seminar. Do not reject any of this valuable experience. If you cannot use it now, store it close by in your heart, senses and mind for when you reach for it.” Not sure that was much appreciated. 🙄

Jahnvi devi, one such cherished young friend, wrote a synopsis of Yamuna’s Japa Retreat talk:

- Chanting is a lifeline to Krishna. Hearing is most important. This is a process of self-realization; you can’t live as a Vaishnava through someone else.
- Just keep chanting and everything will come.
- Let Krishna as the form of time reveal Himself in your heart.



- If you are attentive, taste is sure to come.
- Chanting in Krishna Consciousness is a centering process to find a form of balance.
- Prabhupada said, “Be sincere.” He didn’t make it complicated; we make it complicated.
- How do you feel in kirtan? Are you feeling it or detached? *Japa* is the opposite side of the same coin as kirtan. Like eating and sleeping, we need equal amounts of both.

Radhakunda devi: I am missing the beautiful serene mornings at Radha-Banabehari Ashram more than anything else. What an incredible summer it has been! Every year it somehow gets better and better, even after I think it was the very best. One thing I have been appreciating so much this year is the power of association. I have never experienced how powerful association actually is as clearly as I have seen this summer. So many people that I know have become transformed into these wonderful sweet personalities, just by associating with you both and coming to Radha-Banabehari programs. When I saw my sisters in Florida, they were completely different people after a summer spent in your association. Gopal has become so sincere, honest, helpful and eager for Krishna Consciousness; Kalindi has become so attached to serving the devotees and appreciating the sweetness of *bhajans* and kirtans; the twins (Kava and Rasa) are also eager and appreciative of everything to do with Krishna Consciousness; and Haripriya has become so serious and dedicated to really trying to go deeper. It is the most incredible thing to witness, and it is not just the children. I have seen my brother change just from one evening in your association, and Yoginath, Udara, Lila, Braja Kishori, Jagannatha Kirtan, Rob, Dylan—anyone who has your association for even just a little bit comes away a different person, more genuine and sincere, more enthusiastic and appreciative, more honest and eager to go deeper and really taste the sweetness of Krishna.

And now I’ve been hearing how much the Bus Tour youth have become transformed by your association during the Japa Retreat. How can I ever express my love, gratitude and appreciation for everything you are doing? When I read your email about the beginning of the Japa Retreat and the mood created by the facilitators, I was so, so thankful that you asked everyone to really try and go for it—to go deeper into understanding and appreciating *japa*. Thank you so much for gently pushing everyone to keep going, to really try and move forward on the path back to Krishna. Your

words, instructions and personal examples are our beacons of light, which we are always aspiring to move closer to. (EMAIL TO YAMUNA) 🐣

A Revealing Look at Yamuna's Humility by an Unsolicited Appeal for Financial Aid

Yamuna and I had been debt-free for several years before moving to Saranagati. Unfortunately, the cost of building Banabehari Mandir to satisfy the exacting Building Inspectors was nearly three times what we had budgeted, forcing us to take loans to finish it enough to move in. This financial burden had forced us to work selling calendars in malls over the long Christmas season for three years—a great hardship and irony, because Yamuna would not even enter a mall at any other time. Needless to say, it was onerous and surreal in many ways, but for us a necessary austerity. It would have never occurred to Yamuna to ask for financial assistance from the ISKCON society or anyone else, as she was loath to accept service from anyone. Yet, unbeknownst to us, some concerned and well-intentioned Saranagati devotees approached the GBC on behalf of the two “renounced widows,” feeling that ISKCON should actively care for their aging devotees, especially Yamuna, who had rendered so much service and given her full life to devotional service.

Another irony is that Yamuna herself often spoke of the need for aged devotee care, especially for renounced women in similar circumstances. She felt that while it was laudable that much of the society's efforts were directed toward mitigating past mistakes, more effort should be directed toward honoring and caring for devotees who had faithfully served in ISKCON for thirty or forty years. Still, she was mortified by the actions taken on her behalf without her knowledge. The following are Yamuna's comments on an email exchange between Yoginath das, one of the concerned devotees, and Kartamasa das, which was then forwarded to us. Yamuna's insightful comments reveal her own humility and her compassion for her renounced Godsisisters.

Yamuna: Thank you for your thoughtful email. We are moved by your sentiments, and the words you use to express your concerns. Some of what you say we resonate with, and some things give us a headache. Will try to respond to your statements.

Yoginath das: I wanted to share a few thoughts I have regarding

the maintenance retirement fund for the two primary servants of Sri Sri Radha-Banabehari.

Yamuna: Thank you for your concern—as a Saranagati family member and Godbrother friend—regarding the two primary servants of Sri Sri Radha-Banabehari. We are definitely in sync with



you, as we also wish to see that each member in our Saranagati family has sufficient maintenance, spiritual support and encouragement to flourish in their devotional life. Surely it was Srila Prabhupada's desire that we help each other in these areas. How we do it is another thing. Most likely success depends on our individual and collective spiritual purity, strength, desire, vision, resolve, integrity, commitment, potency, and so on. That and sheer mercy.

Yoginath das: The history goes something like this: Last year a few of us dinosaurs were talking about how ridiculous it was that a renegade *sannyasi* from Scotland received such a handsome monetary settlement from ISKCON, and yet these two highly-esteemed Vaishnavis are forced to tolerate the indignation of working in a mall

for their maintenance.

Yamuna: In this regard, it seems irrelevant to mention ISKCON's past, even recent policy dealing with renegade/off-the-mark/disturbed ex-*sannyasis* or gurus. Yes, the tremendous service that many of them rendered in the past is respected and appreciated, but to receive a handsome monetary honorarium or settlement is questionable. Srila Prabhupada repeatedly warned us of becoming paid hired reciters. Surely this ISKCON policy is a moot point in regard to the servants in Radha-Banabehari Mandir.

Yoginath das: We talked about making a proposal to the GBC, asking for a small monthly pension, perhaps as a token royalty payment for two million playings of the *Govindam* prayers over the years, or perhaps for the integrity of ISKCON itself, which as an institution should already have offered support to such prominent female servants.

Yamuna: Help! This is a headache idea. Please... no! But because

of proximity, you have hit on a very important issue: the future of widows in, and supporting the infrastructure of, ISKCON. To date, the GBC has not seriously addressed its widow population. In a recent European poll, the topic was only important to 2% of those polled. We pray that in our lifetime, the GBC finds the will to value, trust, support, facilitate, encourage and empower qualified widows in this tiny segment of the worldwide devotee population. Until this is done, talk and/or implementation of monthly pensions are likely to come with strings of expectation, and end in disappointment.

Yoginath das: Although our talks were casual and informal, in some circles it was taken more seriously, and things spun a little out of control; and I'm sorry to say that perhaps Dina and Yamuna might have felt a little embarrassed by the efforts of some of their friends.

Yamuna: Yes; at least in part, true. Somehow rumor and innuendo about our health and monetary status spread like wildfire in the last couple of months. Several GBCs emailed us regarding widely exaggerated statements they had heard about health and monetary status; hopefully the fires are now extinguished.

Yoginath das: For this reason, I was pleased to learn that between you [Kartamasa], Radhakunda and Nimesh, these matters have already been dealt with in a discreet and satisfactory manner.

Yamuna: Our connection with and appreciation of these three goes beyond words.

Yoginath das: However there is another line of thinking that I would like to consider with you. To me the point is not so much a question of the health or financial status of these two personalities. It seems to me to be an undeniable fact that these two are our very own home-grown Hare Krishna *babajis* in the truest and most honorable sense of the term. They live and share a brand of Krishna Consciousness that is so genuine and penetrating that those who come into contact with the Banabehari ashram are deeply spiritually enriched. The impact they have is actually an amazing phenomenon.

Yamuna: Ha. Humor is always welcome.

Yoginath das: Now contrast this with the worldwide cynicism regarding the spiritual integrity of [some] ISKCON leaders. In the

name of Krishna Consciousness, the amount of financial waste has been horrendous. Not only that but [it has been] guilty of decades of ... neglect of its women.

Yamuna: My two cents on that: Before the annual GBC meetings, various topics are slated for discussion and implementation. To my understanding, the only time women's care and the like was addressed on a GBC level was in 2000. The discussions after various [Godsisters'] presentations proved difficult, and controversial. Even policies that were voted on and accepted by the GBC—policies to return to standards implemented by Srila Prabhupada himself—were later rescinded with the conviction that they were not meant to be. The position and care of single women in ISKCON is a touchy subject, understood variously in different temples. Future change is possible through the Krishna Conscious vision of even one powerfully pure individual, GBC or otherwise. If even one devotee can articulate the vision clearly, and convince others that ISKCON will be a better institution because of it, there is a chance of positive change. Even if it is just to see that single celibate women—*brahmacharinis* or widows—are given the same care as are celibate men—*brahmacharis* and *sannyasis*—this alone would herald in a much brighter future.

Yoginath das: For “Yamuna,” it was quite possible to raise several thousands, if not tens of thousands, of dollars from well-wishers everywhere who would love to have a venue to show their support. Something on the level of the Hurricane Katrina relief fund. Such a fund, it seems to me, would help to heal the internal culture of ISKCON by acknowledging the contribution of women to the *sankirtan* movement—not with lip service and ribbons, but with real money and power. Those who are acquainted with Banabehari's two servants know that they are extremely frugal and extremely responsible, and simultaneously they love to see Krishna glorified in beautiful ways. So who better on planet earth to manage a large trust fund than these two? Aside from this, I can imagine that beyond just gas and groceries they may be faced with some larger capital expenses such as the installation of proper plumbing, propane heating system and perhaps the construction of some suitable guest facilities somewhere in Venables Valley for their ever-increasing number of visitors.

In conclusion, I am thinking that if they could be persuaded to let a few people run with this and turn it over to some connected fundraising types, it may indeed be possible to establish a Banabehari trust fund to not only enhance the lives of Their servants, but to make sure that there are facilities for their Lordships' worship for generations to come. What do you think of all this rambling? Am I missing some essential point? What have I failed to consider? And why do I remain locked in the material concept of life? Hare Krishna, your friend and uncle in our village relationship.

Yamuna: Please shelve the above for now. Your servants and loving Godsisters—the primary servants of Sri Sri Radha-Banabehari.

Vyasa Puja in Seattle with Radhanath Swami

On hearing that Radhanath Swami would be attending the Janmastami and Vyasa Puja observances in Seattle, Yamuna and I drove there from Saranagati. Although Yamuna's sister, Janaki, was extremely ill, she also came with her friend Barb from Portland to have Radhanath Swami's association. On Vyasa Puja, each Prabhupada disciple was asked to speak, and Yamuna eloquently spoke one of her "day-in-the-life" stories about how Srila Prabhupada interacted with his students in the early San Francisco days, ending with the following plea:

I feel so terribly grateful to Srila Prabhupada for the process of *bhakti-yoga* he gave us. And my deepest, deepest, deepest prayer this year and in coming years is that somehow we all together try to preserve the purity of Srila Prabhupada's process—that we don't change it, we don't merge it with something else that is convenient or popular, or is close by and looks good, but that we maintain the purity of what he gave us, all together, each one of us, in whatever community, whatever *sanga* we have; that we try to purify that, relish it as deeply as Srila Prabhupada and his Spiritual Master did and Thakur Bhaktivinoda did—that they have handed us this most incredible gift, and that we don't change things. This is my deep, deep prayer. I beg all of you to assist me in doing that myself. Thank you all. Hare Krishna 🙏

Oh! Lead, Lead Me on to Vrindavan—A Life-Changing Pilgrimage with the Youth

In December of 2008, our long-held desire to experience pilgrimage to India with dear young friends was fulfilled. Yamuna and I had so emphasized its profound potency and bliss over the years that they were “over-the-top” inspired, to use Yamuna’s phrasing. Kartamasa and Radhakunda came during their Christmas break from teaching positions in Alachua; Haribhakti also came from Florida; and Nimesh, a Canadian of Gujarati extraction who had never been to India, came from Vancouver.

In preparation, we exchanged many emails emphasizing that Vrindavan must be experienced through the heart, rather than visually. We were frankly

worried that the sensory overload of India in general and Vrindavan in particular might discourage them with its overt commercialism, dirt, pollution, cars and scooters, monkeys and other externals—contrasting sharply with our portrayals over the years. Yet this proved an unwarranted fear, because all of them drank in the mercy of Vrindavan like pilgrims lost in a desert. Yamuna wrote in one preparatory email to Kar and Radhakunda:



Yamuna: Oh, the situations we are placed in to learn. At every step, this life experience is a training-ground opportunity. We each go at our own pace, and hopefully have others to wish us well. Always present: Srila Prabhupada and merciful Vaishnavas who are there to lead us on, lead us on to Vrindavan. What can we do but try to follow the footsteps of the great Vaishnavas who traveled before us? What a journey it is for us all. Forward march, O Saragrahi [Vaishnava] souls, thou art angels so fair. Lead me on to Vrindavan; the spirit’s power declare. *Slaghitani* in all directions. (NOV. 10, 2008) 🐾

We were again warmly received by MVT caretakers Bala Gopal and Dhananjaya, who could not have been more accommodating. Yamuna enjoyed reminiscing with them on early England and Vrindavan pastimes with Srila Prabhupada, and they both came often to our evening kirtans.

Each day we concentrated on immersing ourselves in each holy place, spending time in prayer, discussions and kirtan before moving on. Then in the evenings, devotees would join us for kirtan in our apartment. We rolled in the holy dust of Govardhan and attended the Govardhan Retreat seminar of Sacinandana Swami for a day; and we offered prayers and *bhajans* to Radhakunda from Jahnava Mata's holy sitting place.

Before leaving for India, Yamuna had conceived a festival for the entire Saranagati community based on a parrot theme. She offered to design and have Deity outfits made for all of the Deities—fourteen sets in total—and sat for hours with Saranagati residents, helping with design ideas, measuring Deities and making paper templates. Once in Vrindavan, Bala Gopal encouraged her to have two talented Russian ladies actually paint the designs on silk cloth. Somehow, all fourteen outfits (with four changes for Radha-Banabehari) were completed, and Yamuna was thrilled with the results.

Bala Gopal devi: I helped her make some outfits for her Deities, and the detail and love was just amazing ... I suggested a painted outfit, and she said, “Oh, no, no, no, no.” But I kept pushing it a little bit, and said I thought it would be gorgeous. So she relented, and we had these amazingly talented Russian girls come, and we would sit for an hour and a half every morning and discuss all the details. She was in love with the whole thing and would come up with these amazing ideas.

The other thing she did was to really focus on the youth. Prabhupada always told her they are our future, but I don't think anyone really took that to heart as much as she did. What she did in Saranagati and everywhere she went in the world, she would be encouraging them, training them and



giving them Srila Prabhupada in her own very gentle way. We were always fortunate to be involved in her kirtan gatherings in Vrindavan, and it was just so inspiring. I feel that she was one of the pioneers in developing this kirtan consciousness and culture that we regard now as a new wave. She did it for her own humility—as a lesson for people that we are always in a shaky position and we always need to meditate on that need for greater humility. She was a pioneer in so much. Her love of life was to sit down and do kirtan and *bhajans* way back in the very beginning. It wasn't an easy road, and most people take that and fall aside or say this is too difficult, but she never gave up. It's not an easy thing. The society changed—completely different from what it was when she joined. She recognized that things had to evolve and would always embrace it and understand it as a new challenge almost immediately. 🐾

Although Yamuna was blissfully engaged in Vrindavan, her health had taken a downturn, and she was not able to go to some of the holy *tirthas* with the group. Yet when the young devotees returned and recounted their experiences at a particular site, she would say, “I feel I was right there with you. I can see it all in your faces.” On a few occasions she agreed to interviews and speaking engagements. At one question-and-answer session in Srila Prabhupada's quarters, she spoke about his health the last time she had his *darshan* in 1976:

Yamuna: I came to Vrindavan in 1976 ... to ask [Srila Prabhupada's] permission to write a cookery book. Because many devotees had asked me to compile a book, I thought etiquette-wise it was proper to ask the Spiritual Master first to get his blessings. I remember when I came in, he was sitting in this room, in this building.... So it was just before taking his lunch, and [Prabhupada] had his legs out straight, underneath his desk. And I remember his ankles were big, like grapefruits, and his feet were a little blue; and I was so shocked. I paid obeisances and looked up, and the first thing he said (like I had just seen him yesterday or the day before) was, “So I am an old man; I may die at any moment. This body is finished.” He [motioned] towards his feet. So Prabhupada was very candid with me, and very matter of fact ... So I said, “What is [wrong with] your feet?” and he replied, “They are like this all the time; my kidneys are finished.”

I spent a few days in Vrindavan with Prabhupada that Kartika of 1976 and asked him many questions. I saw him sit underneath the *tamal* tree. He had always promised that when the temple was built, he would sit under the

tamal tree with his disciples. So that was a very wonderful experience for me to see, that the temple was finished, and Prabhupada was doing as he said. He thought the *tamal* tree was very sacred; and I was a little unhappy here to see that there are signs underneath the *tamal* tree advertising things. So he wouldn't have wanted that at all. He almost cut the *tamal* tree down because he said the devotees would not honor it properly. I think he must have been able to see the future ... So he said [that we can] sit under and around the *tamal* tree for special kirtans. It was very glorious to see Prabhupada in the afternoons sitting under the *tamal* tree with his disciples, even though he was very sick. He had to sit in a rocking chair then It was a very, very glorious time. 🍃

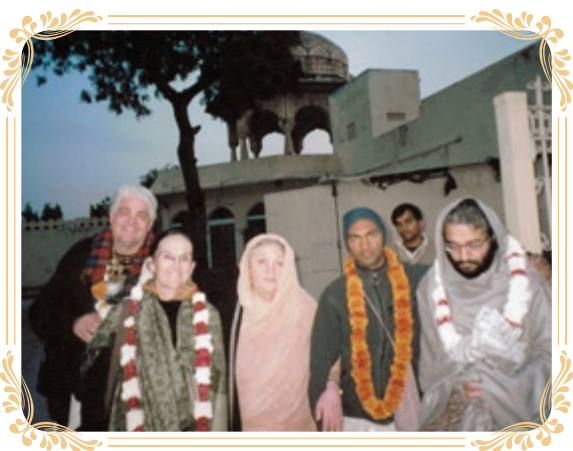
“It’s Not a Pilgrimage if There are No Challenges”

A two-day trip was planned to take *darshan* of the glorious Deities in Jaipur—Sri Sri Radha-Govindaji, Sri Sri Radha-Gopinatha, Sri Sri Radha-Damodara and Sri Sri Radha-Vinod. We rented two minivans and began the five-hour drive in the darkness of early morning. Unfortunately, one of the cars broke down two hours into the trip, and both drivers peremptorily got out and left us sitting on the side of the road with no explanation. We called the taxi service no less than ten times, and finally, two hours later, the drivers returned, again with no explanation, made some minor adjustments, and we spluttered on, only to have a flat tire further down the road. By the time we arrived in Jaipur twelve hours after our departure, our rooms had been rented to someone else, and we had to find other accommodation. While frustration clearly showed on some of our group’s faces, Yamuna, smiling sweetly, said, “It’s not a pilgrimage if there are no challenges.”

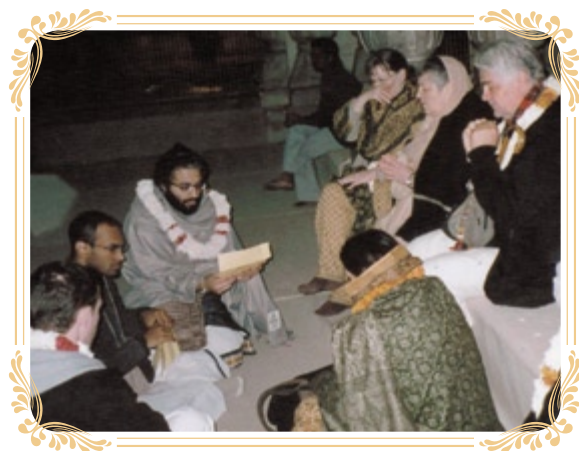
Needless to say, *malgal arati* at Radha-Govindaji Mandir made everyone forget any inconvenience. It is an unforgettable experience. After *arati*, we gathered together in the back of the temple and had a rousing Radha-Govinda kirtan, with each person leading for some time. The same schedule was followed at the other temples, and



Broken down on the side of the road



At Radha-Govindaji Mandir outside where
Srila Prabhupada stayed



Kirtan for Govindaji after *mangal arati*

everyone felt blissfully transported—a highlight for everyone on the pilgrimage. Fortunately, the return trip was relatively uneventful.

Yamuna: For us, we have been a month and a half in Sri Vrindavan, and we brought six devotees in our Saranagati kirtan party. We have tried to relish the holy *dhama* very deeply through many hours of kirtan a day, and going to holy places and begging for the mercy of our great Vaishnavas in the past and the great Vaishnavas in the present for their mercy to enter into the holy *dhama*. 🙏

The Long-Promised Chowpatty Visit Comes to Pass

Yamuna and I had spoken about the devotees of the Chowpatty Radha-Gopinatha Temple so often over the years that in a sense our young friends felt they knew them already. Yet, nothing can prepare one for the actual experience of being in the company of Radhanath Swami and the sincere and dedicated devotees there. We traveled by train, with the addition of Amala Harinama and Nadia to our group, and were received with such warmth and enthusiasm in Mumbai that it was both heartwarming and overwhelming. Because of her natural humility, Yamuna did not like to be distinguished or set apart from others, and she often commented that as much as she appreciated and respected the Chowpatty devotees, it was also difficult to be there because of how much they served and honored

her. Of course, they follow the example of Radhanath Swami, who regularly welcomes guests and Prabhupada disciples to the temple with lengthy encomiums. Yamuna could not exalt that quality of Radhanath Swami enough—that he exemplified the importance of respecting Vaishnavas and taught his followers by his example. Yet, when she was the object of that respect, she was uncomfortable with it. Though always reluctant to speak, Yamuna could not refuse a request of Radhanath Swami, and she eloquently expressed our appreciation to the assembled devotees.



Yamuna: It has been two years and eight months since being here with you in Radha-Gopinatha Mandir. And I can say that every day since I left, I have appreciated your company very deeply. And Radhanath Swami is so dear in our ashram. We live in a very tiny corner of Prabhupada's legacy, called Saranagati, British Columbia. And I always say that it is one of the most inhospitable places for pilgrims to visit; we are a full, 100% no-facility zone. It is the antithesis of what this glorious place is. But nonetheless, we feel deeply connected to you on another level that doesn't have anything to do with facility.

I don't know how many times we have shown the film *The Simple Temple* to pilgrims that come into our ashram. Last year we had only a thousand who came for various kirtans and programs, and a good number of those saw that film, and we glorify you so much by our words, and are inspired by you so much. So on this pilgrimage to India, we have so much gratitude that we were able to come here again. And as Bhakti-tirtha Maharaja said, we come here for the juice, to get the juice to spread this juice more in other places in the world. And that is in the form of each and every one of you, in terms of *sanga*.



The love that we have for the *brahmacharis* is just immense. When I am outside the temple and I see the *brahmachari*

laundry blowing in the wind, it looks like jewels to me, in the crown of Chowpatty. And the *grihasthas* here are like none in the world. And in the center of it all, under Srila Prabhupada's powerful presence, is Radhanath Swami. Everything here is Radhanath Swami's energy, his potency, his purity, and that is unique on the whole planet.

So because of our affection for him, he asked us to speak. Of course, I immediately said no, and gave many reasons why I wouldn't. But I have attended the last three classes here, and when you have a chance to listen to this kind of Krishna Consciousness, something has to change. All of the fear I have of public speaking has to take second place to honoring Radhanath's Swami's request. And the fact is that I don't speak in public. Even when I was with Srila Prabhupada, I begged him not to ask me to speak.... So Dinatarini prabhu and I, when we were thinking about what would be appropriate to share with you, we thought of mercy. Mercy is the embodiment of this temple. This is a place of mercy. 🙏

During the visit, Radhanath Swami kindly accompanied our group to the Bhaktivedanta Hospital—something Yamuna had wanted them all to experience. As expected, the youth were awe-inspired at seeing the *murti* of Srila Prabhupada, hearing his lectures and *bhajans* over the intercom, and seeing the genuine care and service mood of the Vaishnava doctors and staff. At the time, Jayapataka was recovering at the hospital, and we were invited to a kirtan and luncheon with him. It was a memorable experience.

Radhanath Swami: And [Yamuna devi] just appreciated everything so much and wrote so many beautiful emails about [the hospital]. After Jayapataka Maharaja had his stroke, he was at Bhaktivedanta Hospital. And



Yamuna devi, Dinatarini devi, they brought some of the youth of our society, Kartamasa and Radha, to sing for Jayapataka Maharaja. And she wanted all the young people, you know, in their teens or early twenties [to sing]. She was so proud of their singing. And everybody else asked her to sing. She said, “No, no. I will not sing. Let the children sing.” And the children sang so beautifully. “Yamuna devi, please sing.” “No, no. I will not sing. Let everyone else sing. They are all better than me.” And Jayapataka Maharaja looked at her and said, “Yamuna devi, you please sing.” And for Maharaja’s pleasure, she sang so wonderfully, and it just moved our hearts so much. ♡



“Are you ‘THE’ Yamuna Devi?” — Rishikesh

From Mumbai, Yamuna and I spent six weeks at an Ayurvedic clinic in Rishikesh. Although we did not know it beforehand, the director/owner of the clinic was a disciple of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, who had passed away the year before. Each day, we would gather with other patients of the clinic for Ayurvedic meals specialized to each person’s treatment regimen. Yamuna and I wore full *tilak*, and spoke freely among them about Krishna Consciousness and Srila Prabhupada. By the third week, some of the leaders of the Maharishi movement from Uttarkashi began arriving at the clinic on their way to a Disappearance observance in New Delhi.

One evening they joined us at the communal table and greeted us by asking our names. When Yamuna said, “My name is Yamuna devi,” there was a hush around the table. Then a senior Maharishi disciple, who had been his personal servant for many years and now acted as headmaster of their school in Uttarkashi, said, “Are you THE Yamuna devi, of *Lord Krishna’s Cuisine*?” When Yamuna answered in the affirmative, he literally prostrated himself in obeisance, and then brought his laptop computer to the table. He showed us that he had scanned every page of Yamuna’s massive cookbook into his computer, and explained that he used it to teach the children to cook. It was stunning to me to see how in this out-of-the-way environment, her impact was still felt. What was more telling was his revelation that Maharishi Mahesh Yogi held Srila Prabhupada in great esteem—that Maharishi had said unequivocally that Bhaktivedanta Swami was the greatest proponent of the path of *bhakti-yoga* on the planet.

We returned to Saranagati Village in March with renewed energy and

fell into our routine of ashram maintenance, group *Caitanya-caritamṛta* readings and Holy Name nights. Yamuna began sewing new Deity outfits and planning new garden beds.

Govardhan Academy Comes to Saranagati – 2009

The fundamental issue of educating children in Vaishnava culture was of paramount concern to Yamuna. She was unequivocal in voicing what she felt was our society's reluctance to implement a *gurukula* educational model that was devoid of the mistakes and abuses of the past. So when the local school district opened a school in our Saranagati community not long after we moved there, Yamuna was not enthusiastic. She felt that Saranagati's remoteness and its devotee population provided a perfect environment for educating the children in conformance with modern standards, yet with a Vaishnava-guided curriculum. However, our community, though rich in many ways, was generally cash-poor, and a government-funded school within the Saranagati community would not only be free, but it would allow the children to remain within the valley and be schooled together. Whatever private concerns the parents held regarding the education, it is fair to say that most felt its advantages outweighed the negatives.

While Yamuna and I may not have supported the concept of the school, we wholeheartedly supported Saranagati's young children. Yamuna cooked and served *prasadam* at some of the School Board meetings and other gatherings and both of us attended the children's functions and graduations. We were encouraged by the first teacher, a kind and respectful woman who, although a devout Catholic, came to temple programs and seemed to enjoy them. Yet, as time went on and more teachers came, Yamuna became more discouraged with the school. Returning from a visit to a friend one day, with tears cascading down her face, she described seeing a child doing math homework which involved counting hamburgers. In an email to Kartamasa in 2007, she voiced her concerns:

Yamuna: Our younger generation are being encouraged by their materially-motivated educators to become absorbed in mundane life. We have such sincere girls here in the valley, for instance—they are inspired, truly inspired in what Krishna Consciousness they get, and the education they receive must be confusing to them—what to accept and what to reject. I often find myself wishing you both could teach them. 🐾

In 2009, our prayers were answered when the school district withdrew funding, turned the buildings over to the community, and the renamed Govardhan Academy became Saranagati's Vaishnava-oriented school. Kartamasa moved from Alachua to become headmaster, his wife Radhakunda became a teacher, and the Deities, Krishna and Balarama, became the fulcrum of the children's training in devotional service. It was so powerful that although the students were still being taught online through a government program, their devotional training and creative activities created a rich and enlivening school environment that was Krishna Conscious, innovative and fun.

Lilamrita devi: Towards the end of the first year at Govardhan Academy, I was talking to a few of the younger girls, and asked them if they were looking forward to the summer holidays. "Oh, no! We love school! We can't wait for it to start again!" I was pleasantly surprised at their answer. And it was confirmed a few days later at a school program, when the students were asked to speak about their school year. Their talks were very lively and full of positive enthusiasm for the Krishna Conscious activities they had been learning. They expressed their attachment and love for Krishna and Balarama, and their gratitude and appreciation for having Kar and Radha as their teachers. This was a testimony to the success of the Govardhan Academy—the students were learning to love learning and were enthused about devotional service 🐾

Yamuna and I took part in school activities whenever we were asked, as we were also enlivened to be in such company. Yamuna worked with Radhakunda to create a teaching kitchen and held cooking classes with all of the children, even the five- and six-year-olds.

Jayanti devi: I remember the last couple of years at Govardhan Academy were made extra-extra special by the contributions of Yamuna and Dina. Every Tuesday we had either cooking class with Yamuna or scroll saw class with Dinatarini. Yamuna taught us how to make different flavored *chapatis*, holy crackers, mango fool, rice, and simply wonderfals. Before we started



to cook, we would stand in a circle and recite the *Om ajnana* prayers. Then we would learn about what we were doing, cook, clean-up, offer and then sample what we cooked.



Dina taught us about scroll-sawing and helped us to make wooden parrots for the parrot festival. It was so wonderful to have these moments to share with Yamuna and Dina, and it meant a lot to me—not to mention all of the times they came to the school, such as Prabhupada's Appearance Day, and shared their mercy and devotion with us. 🙏

Yoginath das: So we had the great honor of [Yamuna] actually teaching cooking to the children in our little community....

She didn't really teach cooking—the whole class, the focus of the whole thing, was the attitude about cooking, and trying to explain to the younger people that this is what makes *prasadam*, *prasadam*. So she taught them the fine art of cooking without really much cooking. That was her focus—to really understand what is *prasadam* and what is devotion. And it wasn't just the young people; she shared that with the adults also. 🙏

Another Blissful Summer of Bhajan, Kirtan and Sanga

Yamuna used our spring Holy Name nights to prepare the Saranagati Rocks group to chant the *Kevalastakam* prayers for Rathayatra. Perhaps thirty of us crowded onto the stage chanting with rocks and sticks, and then followed it with the *mahamantra* in the same tune, with the audience joining in.

Our committed Bhaktivinoda *bhajan* group chanted the Thakur's *Gitavali* again that summer—this time with the Milkmaids, who had become expert by this time, providing instrumentals—Kalavati (Kava) on *mridanga*, Gopal on *kartals* and Haripriya or Kalindi on flute. As they had matured, their voices had also become resonant and melodious, and this added even more richness to the sessions.

Gopal Nandini devi: For me it was always super hard just sitting there and focusing on the *bhajans*. My attention would always slip away, until that

year when Haribhakti taught us to play *kartals* and *mridanga*. Then Kar asked me to play *kartals*. I was nervous the first time, I remember Kar telling me to play as quietly as you can, because we want to hear the voices more than the actual instruments. I remember looking at Kar, like, “Am I doing okay?” Kava played *mridanga*, too. And afterward Yamuna and Dina were the most encouraging. “Wow, you were just sizzling tonight. You were so good! Gopal, Kava—*szzz!* [sizzling]” And it just felt so good.

Also, I feel that because we got that opportunity, it put me on a different level of understanding of how to actually please by playing instruments. Not just for yourself—because it never was for yourself, because you were supposed to play quietly—just to keep it going. I remember just thinking in my head, “Please, Radha-Banabehari, please, Krishna-Balarama, please just help me play for the pleasure of the devotees, and for You—nothing else.” Pray every time—just pray. Just try to please. We were given such a wonderful opportunity, and I didn’t want to mess it up at all. I feel that because of that, because Yamuna and Dina were so encouraging—but encouraging in such a way that you didn’t feel puffed up—you just felt that you were making them happy; what I am doing is making them happy. And now, it has helped my mood in kirtan so much more. I felt like if I didn’t do that, I would have been just gone in my pride. But now, just remembering how they so much encouraged, I just so much wanted to please them. 🙏

Kalavati (Kava) devi (Milkmaid): I was regretting [playing *mridanga*] in the beginning. I really wanted to sing; I didn’t want to play the *mridanga*. But I knew that this was a service. I just felt that I wasn’t good enough, that I couldn’t sing, and that I would ruin it and wouldn’t please anybody. But Yamuna and Dina encouraged me so much. I realized that it is not the instruments that matter; it is the voices. For me, this whole new-age *gurukuli* thing is really about the instruments—but [Yamuna showed us] that good kirtan was if the people are praying to Krishna. And they taught us that really young, so we could understand that very strongly.

They taught us to think like that before they even encouraged us. So when they did encourage us, we knew how to take that encouragement. Honestly, I didn’t know anything about Yamuna’s past, the entire years when we were growing up. I didn’t know that she did this and did that, and that everyone knew her—that she played harmonium and *mridanga*, and she did that with the Beatles. It was just “our Yamuna.” 🙏

Rasa Mandala devi (Milkmaid): The first time it became crystal clear to



me that Yamuna was someone else other than just Yamuna to us was that Balarama festival that we had here. I realized that other people had traveled so far to come and meet with her. She was Yamuna prabhu, not just Yamuna, like she was to us. 🙏

The summer Bus Tour party visited again in August, and many of the youth came to the morning program. Having kirtan and honest discussions with them was always illuminating and enlivening for Yamuna.

Later that month, on August 28, with Yamuna's usual careful planning and attention to detail, a glorious Radhastami festival was held at Banabehari Mandir. Yamuna wrote afterward to Haribhakti:

Yamuna: So today is the day after Radhastami. Thought to share how it transpired this year. To call on a meditative mood of absorption for Sri Radha, we began to prepare for it by chanting eight beautiful Bhaktivinoda prayers from *Gita-Vali* describing the glories of Srimati Radharani; that happened on Monday and Tuesday of this week. Kar took us to an extraordinary level of meditation in chanting these prayers.

Then all day Wednesday a crew of twelve or so devotees came to Banabehari Mandir to engage in some direct devotional service to Srimati Radharani—cleaning, cooking, making flower garlands, making a flower dress for both Banabehari Krishna and Radharani, and decorating. This ended at 6 PM, and then we had our weekly evening *Caitanya-caritamṛta* reading.

Every year we make some different special arrangement for Radhastami, and this year we wished to go to Govardhan Hill and Radhakunda with Radha-Banabehari. To do this, three Banabehari Milkmaids collected and made about ten super-lovely flower arrangements. Two more helped me recreate the scene of Govardhan Hill and Radhakunda on the altar itself. Their Lordships resided in the back of the altar. In front of Them, we built a *kund* [lake] surrounded with rocks of varying sizes, Govardhan-style, with gravel paths that led from the lotus feet of both Radha and Krishna to the lake. Two more Milkmaids, plus Dina, Radhakunda and Lilamrita, made garlands and the flower dresses. All the silver temple animals—cows, peacocks, horses, bears, rhinos, elephants, monkeys and one giraffe—were arrayed on the Govardhan-like rocks (gravel) and paths (sand). Silver-cloisonne flying

parrots perched on flowers in the vases; and in the pond—silver turtles, fish and ducks.

On Radhastami morning, Their Lordships wore silk-lined satin night robes over thin white silk bathing clothes during *mangal arati*. They remained on the altar in this dress during the *tulasi puja* and the chanting of one *grantha* of *japa*. Their bathing tank was brought out of the *garbha griha* and placed in the temple room, and one at a time, each devotee got a chance to bathe Them in five sacred substances—warmed creamed honey with a touch of maple syrup; organic yogurt; organic milk; 1,008 holy waters, Ganga water, Radhakunda and Shyamakunda water and ghee with drops of cow urine. During and after the bathing, while They were being dressed in fragrant, artfully-crafted flower dresses, a nice kirtan was going on.

When at last situated on Their altar behind a curtain, along with the thunderous chanting of *Radhe Radhe Radhe Radhe Radhe Radhe*, and with the tumult of several blowing conchshells, the curtain opened to gasps of wonder and joy. We greeted Them by singing the *Govindam* prayers *a cappella*, then offered the gifts that devotees had brought, and then offered Their special festival *bhoga* of *rasa malai*. In this batch, the *malai* sauce was perfumed with crushed saffron threads, ground cardamom, screwpine water [*ke-wra*], vetiver water [*khus*], and rose water. Each sweet was placed in a pastry case for distribution, then topped with fragrant *malai* sauce and a small piece of fresh rose petal.

Then each devotee came up to the altar to take special *darshan* and light a floating candle in the *kund* [lake]. While lighting their candle, each offered a prayer begging to better serve Sri Radha in the coming year. Then Kar led us in chanting a wonderful prayer written by Krishnadas Kaviraja glorifying Srimati Radharani. Then we passed out twenty-five slips of paper to twenty-five devotees. Each of the twenty-five slips of paper had



a special quality that embodied one of Sri Radha's qualities. The devotees had to enact out that quality without speaking, and the attendees had to guess what that quality was. Children as young as eight did this. Then we read some of the glories of Sri Radha. In that way, we started the day by engaging all of our senses in the glorious realm of service to Sri Radha. In the late afternoon we went to Kulasekhara's temple for more Radhastami celebrations—*arati*, kirtan, *bhajans*, *katha*, and the offering of a huge feast to relish later as *prasadam*, all with the special feature of swinging the lovely Deities of Sri Sri Radha-Giridhari on a flower-laden swing. Their Lordships were magnificent, and swinging Them sublime. We returned to Radha-Banabehari Mandir when the half moon hung low over the western mountains in a dark blue sky, changed Their Lordships into night clothes, cleaned up some, and again relished the peace of ashram silence suffused with the Holy Name. I imagine when many devotees retired for the night, filled with much Radha *katha* and focus from the day, they had Radharani dreams as well. 🙏

Srila Prabhupada's Disappearance – 2009

Giriraja Swami: After Srila Prabhupada's Disappearance Day in 2009, Yamuna devi wrote me a letter that shows her deep absorption in Srila Prabhupada and in the Holy Names, and her intimate relationship with Srila Prabhupada. I think that she really did understand Srila Prabhupada and his mission. He gave her a lot of instruction. 🙏

Dear Giriraja Swami,

Pranam dandavats. Jaya Srila Prabhupada! I wanted to share a few thoughts and reflections on yesterday, Srila Prabhupada's thirty-second Disappearance Day. We observed the day first at Radha-Banabehari Mandir with our morning program, then at a mid-day program at Govardhan Academy [the school at Saranagati], introducing the students to the traditional way Srila Prabhupada instructed us to honor this day, and then in the evening at a program with adults in the community, who for convenience regularly meet in the evening for any kind of Vaishnava holy day.

Last night Yadubara showed his preliminary edited footage for DVD Eleven: "Srila Prabhupada's Final Pastimes." Though I had seen much of the footage before, it had been without comment, and not arranged in sequence to tell a visual story of Srila Prabhupada's final days and hours, the moment of his

passing, and the aftermath—the Vrindavan *parikrama* and the *sama-dhi* entombment.

One evening, as I sat with my back to Srila Prabhupada’s front bucket seat as we rode in a van from Tittenhurst [John Lennon’s estate] to a Conway Hall lecture in London, Srila Prabhupada said loud enough for me to hear: “When I die, see that my body is taken on a palanquin around Vrindavan on *parikrama*.” Stunned, but immediately attentive to these words, I turned around and, on my knees, bent forward from the waist so that my head was even with his shoulder, I said, “Why have you told me to do this, Srila Prabhupada? Better that you tell Tamal Krishna. He has more access to seeing that this is done than I do.” He replied, “No, you can tell him.” He fell silent and said no more. I too fell silent and said no more.

Yadubara’s footage last night of the thickest pastime of Srila Prabhupada’s life with us—his passing—was poignant and moving. Though I was not there physically with Srila Prabhupada, I could not have felt closer to him or experienced more of his presence had I been so. Every moment of every day has been a meditation on Srila Prabhupada, and we have been engaged in constant kirtan. Perhaps it would have been difficult for me even to have been there at that time, for except Pishima, it is clear that women were not allowed close proximity to Srila Prabhupada, and that might have been almost unbearable for me after the closeness I experienced in previous years with him.

—EMAIL TO GIRIRAJA SWAMI, OCT. 22, 2009



Yamuna and Dina at Govardhan Academy
on Srila Prabhupada’s Disappearance Day

Yamuna Devi at the 40th Anniversary of Sri Sri Radha-Londonisvara

The affinity Yamuna held for Sri Sri Radha-Londonisvara, who had been so instrumental in her Krishna Conscious life, never wavered, and a large framed illustration of Them was prominently displayed on the wall above



Yamuna reunites with longtime friends from the UK

her room at Banabehari Mandir. When she was asked by her young friend Kapila to attend the 40th Anniversary celebrations of Their installation, she could not refuse, although she had been suffering from a severe bout of bronchitis for nearly a month. Not only would she attend the London Anniversary, but she wanted to take the same group of young friends to Mayapur on pilgrimage afterward. Along with our previous group, Guru Carana Padma devi, Jahnavi, Kapila, and his wife Ananda, would also join us, while others planned to meet us there. Our long-time

Saranagati friend Kapila, an organizer of the event, had the following email exchange with Yamuna:

Kapila das: Currently the devotees at Soho have a tentative schedule for the week, and they want to be flexible with you. Please take a look, but I'm also enclosing the main points.

A. That you will be able to give a presentation on Wednesday the 18th from 5:30 to 7:00 PM. Their theme that day is around the topics of Rathayatra, *harinam* and book distribution.

Yamuna: This I did chuckle at. I should not speak on these topics, for I am eminently unqualified to do so. No one from 1969 or 1970 would consider me speaking on these three topics. Aside from Apple recording, touring and promotion, I rarely left the inside of Bury Place temple. Why? I was cent percent engaged in cooking offerings, performing *aratis*, feeding devotees, sewing, cleaning and other internal temple services. I attended one UK Rathayatra; distributed perhaps a dozen magazines my whole time in London, and went on less *nagar* kirtan than almost any practicing devotee in 1969 and 1970. To best present these topics, I suggest you ferret out speakers that engaged in these activities—rendered service to numerous Rathayatra events, distributed books daily, and engaged in daily *harinam*. Here is where Tribhuvanath prabhu will be sorely missed. Have you notified the devotees who organized this roster that I do not wish to speak on this topic? If not, please do so.

Kapila das: B. Thursday is free, as you have other diary events they are familiar with. Friday the 20th, the theme is Deity history, and they have all four of the first devotees here in the UK from 5:30-7:00 PM.

Yamuna: Looking forward to being a part of this presentation and hearing from others also.

Kapila das: This is also the day when earlier, I hope we might be able to brainstorm with you on the idea of doing *Govindam* with As Kindred Spirits. Perhaps we can do it before this at Soho, or earlier even at your residence or at the Manor, etc. Please have a think what is best for you and let me know soon.

Saturday the 21st. We will aim to have some rehearsal ahead of time, but the main event starts at 5:30 PM, and you are scheduled at around 8:30 to speak for 2-3 minutes to share a little inspirational thought for the future 40 years.

Yamuna: Purity is the force; right—two or three minutes; will give it my best.

Kapila das: Sunday the 22nd at Soho temple, 9:00 AM to 12:30 PM—the group of original devotees; and then again 9:00 PM to 9:30 PM.

Yamuna: The Lotus Feet of Sri Sri Radha-Londonisvara ki jaya!

Kapila das: Just to reinforce, the devotees want to be very considerate with your time and health, so please give me any feedback and thoughts now.

Yamuna: It is only by the mercy and drawing power of Their Lordships that I considered trying to make it there for this event. I will do my best to be present, willing and able, as best I can. Know that for certain. Then whatever will be, will be.

Update on another front: For months, Kar, Radha, Neem (Nimesh), Haribhakti, Dina and I have prayed that one last time, our kirtan group from last year might be able to go on a Mayapur pilgrimage to chant together. As plans go, it's been touch and go, but today Kar, Radha, Dina and I confirmed tickets for India just to do this. Haribhakti is already in Mayapur; Neem is seriously working to join us as well. Here's an invite to you and Ananda: Please consider joining us. It will be a life-changing experience. Two short weeks, December 15 through the 30—try and join us. Radha is pregnant and understands the value of exposing her child in the womb to this powerful pilgrimage.



Know money and time is dear, but chances like this rarely manifest. Sweet Krishna dreams. 🙏

We were hosted in England (Yamuna, Malati and me) many miles from the temple and venue in London by a sincere family of disciples of Radhanath Swami. Each day we were ferried to the various programs and connected with many dear and ever-treasured friends from England. Though still sick with bronchitis, Yamuna was determined to reach out in her inimitable way and touch the hearts of all of the devotees there. Writing after the event to Kartamasa and Radhakunda, she synopsized the experience:

Yamuna: One thing that is very clear: If we speak of Krishna, churn the nectar of repeating His glories or the glories of His pastimes, entourage or devotees, it fosters more discussion amongst ourselves in conversation. This place is on fire with *katha*. For the last eight days, we were led from place to place by extraordinary devotees eager to serve and anxious for *sanga*. Some qualities that stood out: Intensity; Depth; Variegatedness; Exceptional *prasadam*—the cooking expertise is near 10 out of 10; Warmth; Appreciation; Strength; Success; Enthusiasm; Generosity; Presence. Hope you got a chance to hear and/or see the week’s activities on streaming [internet]; if not, or if you wish a disc, write Kapila for one. It was a global historic event in that, for seven days, so many took part in churning the ocean of Srila Prabhupada and London Yatra *katha*.

The Soho temple president is someone you would love. To know him is to really treasure him. He is the energy behind this whole event—his personal effulgence so bright you need shades. In his early thirties, he’s a ten year *brahmachari*—absolutely focused on direct, dynamic, genuine, exciting, creative, thoughtful Krishna Conscious activity; [he] loves chanting the Holy Name. In the eyes of many old-timers, his Krishna Conscious vision is ushering in a new generation of dynamism here in the UK Yatra.

Radhanath Swami was here, weaving his way in and out of devotee enclaves, encouraging as only he does so well. Today a carload of us [women] drove out to central Wales to visit our dear Godbrother Vicitravirya, who for nearly a decade played a key role in UK management here. He is in an advanced stage of Lou Gehrig’s disease, and though paralyzed from neck to toe, his handsome and effulgent face still radiates his intelligence and peaceful nature—more so now than ever before. He inspired us to the core with his thoughtful words of gratitude for all things Krishna Conscious, especially his love for Srila Prabhupada and his appreciation for devotee

company. We had an *a cappella* kirtan with him, and in the end, all present teared up in happiness.

Unknown devotee: I was in England three years ago, for the fortieth anniversary, and Yamuna was there. Of course, I got the privilege to hear her sing face to face. I was sitting and singing in the temple once and she was going to speak, and she sat next to me for maybe twenty minutes; and later she called me and said, “Oh, you are a very good singer. You trained.” I felt really embarrassed, “No, Mataji, we hear you every morning. We have been hearing you every morning since we were in *gurukula*.” You can find people who say, “Just be humble.” You find many people who say like that—it is part of the punch line. But she was very genuine. I felt an energy from her; she was very, very humble—the way she said, “Oh, I haven’t learned anything, I just sing.” I was very impressed by that. (RECORDED AT AUSTRALIAN MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR YAMUNA 2012) 🐦

A Last Mayapur Pilgrimage

Yamuna was still struggling with bronchitis and other health issues when we reached Mayapur, yet she was ecstatic to be back in the holy *dhama*. Our Godsister Sitala, who Yamuna appreciated for her keen intelligence and insight, secured an apartment for us to rent next door to her own. Despite her declining health, Yamuna kept up lengthy and illustrative correspondences with friends around the world, and her exuberance and otherworldly detachment from the bodily concept is obvious in her writing:

Yamuna: As promised, I wanted to send you an update on our travels. Please also write of your journey at this time in your lives. We miss and value each of you so much. The drive from Kolkata to Mayapur is about as long as the one from Vancouver to Saranagati, but it could not be more different. In Canada, after reaching Hope, you get to the Thompson River gorge and steep sloping mountains, and the remainder of the route is almost all nature, with only a sporadic population all the way to Saranagati.

Here, from Howrah train station in Kolkata, you drive through probably one of the densest populations on the planet for about a quarter of the way to Mayapur. Then slowly, concrete, brick, steel and buildings thin out, and some land is seen. This is a tropical location, where banana, date palm, mango and other fruit trees abound; then more and more fields of edibles, especially rice fields and mustard fields. You pass through smallish street villages where crops begin their wholesale route throughout Bengal—at

this time of the year, gigantic mountains and huge cartfuls of cauliflower, green bananas on long stalks, green-skinned guava and whitish to pinkish long *mouli* radishes are in season; and this goes on for perhaps two-thirds of the way to Mayapur.

Then when you get to Birnagar, where Thakur Bhaktivinoda was born in 1838 in a village [he] described as heavenly, you see the remnants of that world. Now on both sides of the road, small stalls sell goods to vehicle traffic, and off of that, winding paths through thick tropical vegetation reveal small hand-made dwellings of mud with thatched roofs. Animals and humans, from the youngest to the very old, are all moving about, active in a way that is very different from anything in the West. Almost everyone is rendering some kind of service to someone; no laziness here. Then it's pretty much open fields all the way to the turnoff that says ISKCON and Mayapur, and you are on Bhaktisiddhanta Road for 11 kilometers until you reach a long row of temples and holy pilgrimage sites so dear to Gaudiya Vaishnavas—so dear to anyone on the planet who values pure spiritual energy—and you have reached Mayapur *dhama*. The sides of the roads are now lined with many stalls selling something, and bicycle *rickshaws* abound as the pilgrims' transport, if they are not walking.

Sitala had arranged a reliable driver who ably met us on the Howrah station platform and delivered us to where we are staying. There are many many large buildings for *grihasthas* here—one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments, with tastefully designed red brick exteriors, inside spaces with wide interior staircases, and apartments with electricity, wireless Internet service, marble floors, fans and air conditioning. Each building has a brick-walled garden where all sorts of organic vegetables grow almost year around, as well as many scented flowers that can be collected for individual Deities in the *grihastha* ashrams. All in all, it's perhaps the best facility for *grihasthas* anywhere in ISKCON, and it's in the *dhama*.

Dina and I are staying in a two-bedroom apartment just across the stairway from Sitala and Hari Sauri—it has a sitting room, two bedrooms, a bathroom and kitchen, and a veranda. Kar and Radha will stay in their place



Yamuna and Dina instruct the pilgrims

when they come in a few days, as Sitala is going to Australia at that time. Kapila and Ananda are arriving from London when Kar and Radha arrive. Jahnvi and her mom, one of our oldest and dearest Godsisters, arrive at the same time. Haribhakti is here and wonderful company on all fronts. Within two days of our arrival, he arranged a cell phone for us and got us hooked up to the Internet. He is now working on making copies of *Gitavali* for our chanting sessions, which will begin hopefully on the 17th.

Since arriving here, both of us are up at 1:30 AM to chant *japa*, where the night is quiet save for outbursts of great drama from jackals, who whine with loud intensity. Then at 4 AM, *arati* in Srila Prabhupada's *samadhi*, then *arati* in the temple. The morning program goes on until 9 AM. Dina has been going to both *aratis*; we watch class online in our apartment, something that is a godsend for me, as the temple is a bit of a walk away. Even at night, the heat remains strong for my liking. As you know, yesterday was Sri Sri

Radha-Banabeharaji's thirty-fourth birthday, falling on Srila Bhaktisiddhanta's Disappearance Day. Dina went to his *samadhi* at the Chaitanya Math and spent several hours there chanting. At noon, here in our ISKCON temple, devotees observed the classic *pushpa samadhi* as is traditional, with a wonderful offering of *bhoga*. I stayed back and made my first offering here in Mayapur: cauliflower, potato, tomato *panir* veg, and basmati rice salad with apples—a simple feast, but a most relishable pastime. Today Dina also purchased the three-volume book on the life and times of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur. We all find it a powerful study—a thoughtful and scholarly set of books full of insightful information. In the afternoon we read aloud Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati's favorite dishes. One of them was a soup made from cooked and blended green papaya and eaten daily (our Srila Prabhupada very much favored a *louki* squash veg

in a broth). Bhaktisiddhanta also liked *urad dal*, *puspanna*, *laphra vyanjana*, fried chickpeas tossed in savory *masala*, fried peanuts in *hing* and salt, and *rasam* soup, South Indian style. *Rasgulla* was his favorite sweet, and he liked lots of salt—so much that many found his *maha* way too salty. If any of you do not know what these dishes are, most are found in *Lord Krishna's Cuisine*, so you can look them up.

The Deities in this temple are perhaps the most beautiful in the world.



At Srila Bhaktisiddhanta's *samadhi*

Every Deity face is simply magnificent. The dressing is flawless, beautifully designed and elegantly clothed—the dresses fitting precisely to show off each individual Deity form. Both night and day *sringar* is exceptional; there is always something special going on in and around the service of these Deities in this temple. Yesterday was Saturday, and each Saturday evening the small Radha-Madhava Deities are brought around the entire compound on the back of a small elephant who resides here. Nice youth kirtan accompanies that entourage. This morning so many guests from Kolkata were here, there was no room in the temple to even get *darshan* of Madhava's altar. Ramadevi, an old and dear Scottish-born Godsister from the UK, who served Sri Sri Radha-Gokulananda as *pujari* for over 20 years, now resides here in Mayapur. When Dina and I lived in the UK from 1980 through 1984, Sri Sri Radha-Banabehari resided on the altar at the Manor for one of those years, and Ramadevi made them three sets of clothes. Among her other services here in Mayapur, Ramadevi works with the twin head *pujaris* on festival *sringar*, and also occasionally designs and stitches outfits for the presiding Deities on all three altars. Yesterday she explained that every December 31, Their Lordships are offered one of several yearly outfits of flower dress *sringar*; at this time of year, garden flowers are abundant. She kindly extended the invitation that we six female pilgrims—Radhakunda, Jahnavi, Ananda, Guru Carana Padma, Dina and I—design and make the flower dress for small Radha-Madhava for this festival. They are the original *archa vigraha* of this entire Mayapur temple project, and I have not had the opportunity to serve Them directly since the Magh Mela in Allahabad in January 1971—thirty-eight years ago! We gladly accepted the offer and look forward to executing that service.



Making flower outfit for
Sri Sri Radha-Madhava

How enlivening and appropriate that here in the *dhama*, Vaishnava devotees place the Holy Name and the *archa vigraha* in the center of New Year festivities. How could any other kind of New Year celebration top that for sheer joy, auspiciousness and all-around good *sanga*? Time to get back to chanting now. This is a glimpse of our world here in Mayapur *dhama*. It is beyond description, individually sampled and relished, rich in quality *sanga*, with old devotee friends visiting here from around the world and

newly established friendships with saintly souls who reside here. We are so fortunate—all of us connected together by our ISKCON Founder-Acharya A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Srila Prabhupada. (EMAIL TO FRIENDS DEC. 5, 2009) 🙏

As some of our young pilgrimage group would not arrive until three weeks after us, Yamuna encouraged them from afar.

Dear Kar and Radha and *choti*—Good morning dandavats to you! From inside the still foggy dawn of Mayapur: the sound of the gardener's broom brushing his earthen domain; bicycle wheels bouncing on the uneven brick paths; the compound's screeching birds in various kinds of play along with the intermittent *kooh-kooh-ko* pigeon warble; and lorry horns and chanting reverb from across the river filtering this way. From inside this Mayapur-longing heart, words from a favorite prayer tendered your way to soothe the separation.

Gauranga bolite habe, pulaka sarira, hari hari bolite, nayane babe nera...

—EMAIL TO KARTAMASA AND RADHAKUNDA,
JAN. 10, 2009

It is difficult to find words to express how compelling and joyful Yamuna's last Mayapur pilgrimage was for many of us. Each day would find us immersed in another holy *tirtha* that was touched by the all-merciful glance of Lord Chaitanya, one of His dear associates, or our *parama* gurus. As the other youth arrived, we made our way to Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur's residence, Svananda Sukhada Kunja, in Godrumadvipa, and had a soulful kirtan abounding with our deep gratitude for his prayers and legacy; we prayed for his blessings for our upcoming *Gitavali bhajans*. We went by boat down Mother Ganga to Mamagachi to take *darshan* of the Sripat of Sri Vrindavan das Thakur and Vasudeva Datta. We embraced the tree under which Lord Nityananda married Sri Jahnava Mata and Sri Vasudha in Ambika Kalna, and ecstatically jumped and shouted before the Deities of Gauridas Pandit. We went on *parikrama* of the Govardhan Hill that Srila Saraswati Thakur had constructed at the Chaitanya Math, chanted *japa* on the banks of Sri Radhakunda, and held kirtan at his *samadhi*. We gathered at Srila Prabhupada's *samadhi*, and after kirtan, Yamuna asked each devotee to express their realizations:



On the boat to Mamagachi



Govardhan parikrama at Chaitanya Math

Nadia devi: I don't know what I did in my past lives to somehow be able to be in Yamuna's presence so much in the last few years of my life. I didn't even try to do all of those things. I just happened to be in India every time she was there, and she extended her hand and wanted me to come with her, and it just happened. She would be like, "Come! Come; it's great!" Being with her in Mayapur and seeing her there in the *samadhi* walking up to where [Prabhupada's] *murti* is—it is quite high. But she just went there, and she just started crying.... [Then] before we started kirtan at the *samadhi*, she asked what were some realizations that we had. And I told her that I saw how much love she had for Srila Prabhupada. It was just so obvious, so tangible. That was really amazing to see, like to see Srila Prabhupada in his kirtans or in his pictures, but to actually be able to feel his presence in her. When I was around her I could feel Srila Prabhupada coming through her when she would talk and sing. And to be there when she would chant her *japa*—you could feel that she was literally tasting the Holy Name. This was something I can't even describe, to see the tears just stream—not like she was crying, but they just flowed. 🙏

Haribhakti das: For me, I think [there was] just so much love, compassion and most of all, I think, forgiveness. I did so



At Srila Prabhupada's *samadhi*



Yamuna with Vraja-lila and Ekavira

many silly things. And still, they didn't reject me. So that left an impression on me. In Mayapur, one time we got a flatbed *rickshaw* for Yamuna, and then she invited somebody else to sit on the *rickshaw*, and the *rickshaw walla* started complaining; he didn't want to move—didn't want to go anywhere unless we gave him three times the price. So I got really frazzled. And in my frustration, I said to Yamuna prabhu, "I wish you would have told me that it was going to be more than one person, and then I could have negotiated." As soon as the words came out of my mouth, I knew

that this isn't proper etiquette to speak to somebody in this way. This isn't how I should be speaking to Yamuna. So an hour or two later, when we were back at their apartment, I walked in and apologized. I said I was so sorry that I spoke like that. And she just smiled and said, "No, you were just expressing yourself." And she smiled. Even though I had actually made an offense, she didn't take it like that. That is what I mean when I say such pure love. 🐾

Jananivasa das: I think Yamuna devi is the longest-standing *pujari*. She is actually my guru. She told me to worship the Deities in Mayapur when I got initiation in Mayapur. So she was my first guru, and I have always respected her as such. To be in Yamuna devi's presence is just like being in Prabhupada's presence; it was like you had to talk about Prabhupada. That was it. There was no question of any other subject matter; you just had to talk about Prabhupada, like they were inseparable—Srila Prabhupada and Yamuna.

The last time I saw her, she started offering prayers. I can't repeat the humility she had, what she said in her prayer, how she was describing herself in humility. And I was smiling and offering. And then she walked away—like in the middle of saying something, she just walked off. And when I looked, she was doing a little dance—something strange, but funky dance. And she started circumambulating me, and I was turning around, "Where is she going?" and then she came back again. She said, "You know, we don't have to share those old memories and affections. You know we can, just by seeing in the eye, seeing in your eye, we can understand that—it's summarized. We

didn't have to go back and say how we met and things like that. She had such a loving glance, and she was looking at me. We didn't have to say anything.

When she came after she had left India with Prabhupada, she didn't come back for many, many years. And then finally she came to Mayapur, and she said, "I have to tell you a story. When I was in Vrindavan with Guru das, we were making the Krishna-Balarama Temple. And I went to Bombay to see Srila Prabhupada to ask him some instructions." So she started to explain: and Srila Prabhupada said, "So you can make Radha-Shyamasundara, and They can be life-size." And Yamuna said, "But Srila Prabhupada, They are already made." "You can't make life-size?" "No, Srila Prabhupada." "You can get the Astha Sakhi then. You can make Astha Sakhi life-size." Yamuna said, "But, Prabhupada, the Deities have already been made; the altar has been made and [it is too small]...." "Visakha and Lalita, you can make life-size?" "No, Prabhupada, everything has already been made, and it's all small size." Then Prabhupada didn't say anything else about this. Then Yamuna told me, "Here look; there is Radha-Madhava and the Astha Sakhis. This is what Prabhupada was talking about. This is what Prabhupada was visualizing, because Vrindavan and Mayapur are non-different." She said, "This is exactly what Prabhupada told me he wanted, life-size Radha-Krishna and Astha Sakhi." 🐾



Each evening in Mayapur, as we gathered to chant the prayers of *Gitavali*, so many eager chanters came that they spilled out the doors and down the stairs. Kartamasa das led with harmonium, his resonant voice and deep immersion in the prayers inspiring everyone else; Haribhakti played *mridanga* in perfect rhythm to the changes in Kar's meter and voice; Nadia played *kartals*; Jahnavi played her violin in such synchronicity with Kar that we were stunned; and I played a borrowed large tamboura. Yet it was the combined voices raised in glorification of prayer which truly transformed each person in the room—amazing, rich





voices deeply immersed in prayer. It was simply magical, or as Yamuna would say, “the Krishna Magic.” After each program, Kapila’s lovely wife, Ananda, would bring in a huge plate of fruit *prasadam* she had painstakingly prepared, and serve each attendee. We could not wait for each evening session, and I believe every devotee who came could speak volumes on the transformative potency of those sessions.



Dinatarini, Siddhi, Yamuna and Ekavira

Ekavira das: Bhakti-tirtha Maharaja gave me an instruction to go to the holy *dhama* and take shelter of the Holy Name. And so we were in Sridham Mayapur, Vrajalila and I, in 2010. And I remember paying *dandavats* in front of Bhakti-tirtha Maharaja’s *samadhi*; and I prayed to him to actually help me to follow this instruction and take shelter of the Holy Name in a way that is pleasing to him. As I got up off of the ground, there was a devotee standing there, and [he] said, “Are you Ekavira?” And I said, “Yes.” And he said, “I have a message for you from Yamuna.

She has a kirtan group, and she would like you and Vrajalila to come and participate. And it starts in two days.” And I said, “Wow. This is really quick. I just made this prayer, and as soon as I got up, this devotee was standing here.” And so we participated in this group.

Yamuna expressed how Srila Prabhupada emphasized how she should learn and study the prayers of Bhaktivinoda Thakur. And then she gave certain pastimes with Prabhupada and how he expressed that no one writes

prayers like Narottama das Thakur and Bhaktivinoda Thakur. And she talked about how he used to just sit on the porch and just chant a line over and over and over again. And so she said for years she didn't really take that instruction very seriously. But then she started to take it seriously, and she started to study the prayers. And then she started encouraging other devotees to study the prayers....

But there was one particular devotee who was leading, and he had such a subtle voice. And I was talking to Mother Yamuna after the program one time when we were in Mamagachi, and she was expressing that his name was Kartamasa prabhu. She said that he has a very simple voice, nothing special, but he does something that is quite unique: he chants without the ego. "And therefore, that is the reason why he is the leader of our kirtan group." So when she addressed the gathering, she said, "I would like you to make a few commitments. One is to be here—if you are starting today, to be here throughout the duration of this program. It will last at least two weeks, and we will chant from 6:30 until 9 P.M. And we would like you to be on time—to be punctual. All of the devotees' time here is valuable, and we want to start on time and end on time. And we would like you to chant from your heart—to fully participate and give your all while you are here."

[She added that] the kirtan leader is very important; but even more important ... are those who are actually participating in the kirtan and responding to the leader. And then she said, "We would also like you to leave your shoes and egos at the door." And she just had the amazing combination of the love of a mother, the gravity of a warrior and the simplicity and ease of a child. And that simplicity was such that it encouraged people to approach her. She was so approachable and so loving.... She just had an amazing relationship in relishing the Holy Name. 🐾

Jahnvi devi: When my mum and I left Mayapur after the *Gitavali* retreat, we went to say a final goodbye to Yamuna and Dina. It was early in the morning, and Yamuna had been bedridden for days with what seemed like bronchitis as well as a potential kidney infection. She welcomed us eagerly and conversed with love, but was clearly unwell, a little feverish still, and coughing. We shared reflections of gratitude for the time spent together in service of the Holy Name, and then got ready to leave. Before walking out the door, she got up with great difficulty and went to the kitchen. I was stunned when she came out with a stack of foil wrapped dal *puris*—"Srila Prabhupada says good for traveling," she announced. She'd obviously been making them since much earlier in the morning. We were bowled over by

her love and care, and when we ate them I had a deep experience of how that love was actually invested in the *prasadam* itself. Unlike any other time I had tasted her cooking, when it was always flawlessly prepared, this time the *puris* were not fully cooked through. I knew this would've usually been unacceptable to her, and I could understand that perhaps her ill health was the reason. But far from making them inedible, the devotion we could taste in every doughy bite carried us on a cloud on our journey home. We relished every morsel and made them last for several meals. 🙏

Vraja Sevaki devi: In seeing Yamuna, we could see actually what it was we were trying to attain, and not how easy it was, but how simple. She was very simple in her loving affection. When she was last in Mayapur, in the mornings, Dinatarini would take everyone to some different pilgrimage places, and we would chant. We went to Bhaktivinoda Thakur's house one day, and Yamuna was also not very well at that time. So we would go on a *rickshaw*. Haribhakti would arrange one of the flatbed *rickshaws*, and Yamuna and I would go together. "The disabled vehicle," we called it. When we went there, everybody was riding their bikes and crossing the river separately, not all coming together. Somehow, Yamuna and I ended up there together, quite

ahead of the pack. And we went into the *mandir*, and it was empty, and we just sat down and started chanting *japa*. It was very quiet there. I was watching Yamuna, and again, tears were coming from her eyes, and her eyes were closed and she was chanting. And I watched her for a little while and thought, "I wish I could chant like that. She is very fortunate. She is very lucky." And she would always lean into me and rest her head on my shoulder, which was the sweetest thing, and she said, "Vraji, you know what?" I said, "What?" She said, "That was the most ecstatic Krishna Conscious day I have ever had in my life." And for her it was like she meant it. And I am sure she said that many times. 🙏



As our *bhajan* evenings progressed, the devotees from Mayapur TV asked if they could film them because so many devotees were unable to attend; so some of those memorable *bhajans* can still be seen and felt through the wonders of modern technology. Before we left to return to Canada, Yamuna spoke to a large gathering at the community center about the importance of prayerful immersion in the Holy Name—one of her favorite topics.

Yamuna: We chanted all the time. We would walk around chanting. We chanted when we cooked. There was never talk in the kitchen, only chanting. Prabhupada infused us to chant a lot. And then I suppose one of the most profound kirtans of that time was on Memorial Day. As you know, Srila Prabhupada had a stroke on the East Coast, and he was paralyzed. We didn't think Prabhupada was going to live. And we had just met him. Even before he left, one night Prabhupada sat on his *vyasasana*, and his first disciple Ravindra Svarupa decided he couldn't stay. He was the first, what we called, blooped devotee. And he crawled on his hands and knees in the front door through a very crowded temple room, up the stairs to Prabhupada's *vyasasana*, and put his head in Srila Prabhupada's lap. Prabhupada stroked his head, and this man said, "I have to leave; I can't stay." Prabhupada was very gentle. He said, "Please don't go. This Krishna Consciousness is such a nice thing. You won't find any other lifestyle that can come near this Krishna Consciousness. We have the best philosophy, the best food, the best music and the best books." But he had to go, and after that boy left, Prabhupada said, "I am an old man; I may die at any moment." And that just struck terrible fear into our hearts. So I think we were more attached to chanting after he said that. Our attachment to Srila Prabhupada grew because he was our Spiritual Master; he was our best well-wisher.... When we talk about love of God—my goodness, the love that Srila Prabhupada showered on his devotees was unbelievable. He was so loving and encouraging. You can tell that if you study his letters. Before I came here to Mayapur, I read the letters, I have read them six or seven times, and I am stunned at how Prabhupada encouraged us—just one letter after another, encouraging.

So afterward, the devotees sent us an instruction from New York [requesting us] to "Pray to Lord Nrsimhadeva for Prabhupada's life;" and if Lord Nrsimhadeva hears your prayers, Prabhupada will live. So that was a new complete high period of kirtan. We had our first twelve-hour kirtan in front of Lord Jagannatha. Then again, we prayed for Prabhupada. And then he came back. The more you chant the Holy Name, the more you will love chanting the Holy Name. "[There is] nothing higher than the Holy Name; nothing greater than the Holy Name." [This is] a wonderful prayer by Bhaktivinoda Thakur. The Holy Name is the cynosure of so many devotees' lives, and as the decades pass, the devotees are more and more realizing that sharing the Holy Name with others is some of the best kind of activity you can do.

You know it's a miracle I am here. I don't take it lightly that I got here—totally a miracle to me. I always understand that you don't get to the *dhama*

with a ticket—not to the real *dhama*. We can sightsee maybe, but I am very, very grateful for this stay in Mayapur by Srila Prabhupada’s kindness.... This year, in January, we brought a kirtan party of devotees from the West to chant in Vrindavan, go on *parikrama* to holy places and visit the *samadhis*, and to beg the mercy of great saintly persons who came before—who brought Srila Prabhupada. We went there to chant these prayers, and then because of the engagement in London, we got the idea to do it here in Mayapur. So again a group of devotees from different parts of the world gathered every night



for three weeks relishing *Gitavali*. So that was one of the main reasons we wanted to come to Mayapur this time, and now this is finished—relishing another level: Mayapur. But to chant these prayers here was just indescribably powerful, wasn’t it? For those of you who experienced that, you will never forget it. It was really special.... Devotees are all packed up together by following these instructions. That is the wonderful thing. And everything becomes so positive and so hopeful and so glorious. 🐦

From Mayapur, Yamuna and I spent a few days in New Delhi at ISKCON’s Guesthouse, meeting wonderful devotees and old friends, and being inspired by the book distribution programs there. We were warmly received by Gopal Krishna Maharaja, and as usual, our needs were cared for by Madhava Mangala, Kanai Priya and his family, and many others. In their company, it was easy to forget that we were in the middle of such a metropolis—as different from our rural Saranagati as a place can be. Then we spent another two glorious weeks in Vrindavan. Yamuna wrote a summary of her realizations from our pilgrimage to the residents of Saranagati Village:

Dear resident and out-of station Saranagati-ites;
Pranam dandavats; Jaya Srila Prabhupada!

I pray your New Year is unfolding auspiciously, both individually and as appreciators of Saranagati. For us, pilgrimage travel has been both educational and inspirational, affording us a chance to see how other devotees practice Krishna Consciousness together. Although we are counting down the last seventeen days until our

return to Saranagati, still I felt inspired to send off a final few words.

Reflections on internal and external discord and harmony: Just before we left Mayapur, a twenty-year old devotee man jumped off the roof of the six-story Lotus Building; miraculously, he lived, as he landed on soft ground, but [suffered] severe injuries. The community rallied around the family with well wishes, service, and love. It also caused many to reflect on the why of such action. What problems led to this action? How can we create healthy devotee environments to ward off unwanted quarrel and frustration, depression, and discontent in our ranks? One enduring Srila Prabhupada theme evident on this trip is that the only real problem in this world is a lack of Krishna Consciousness. How to solve this global world problem? Srila Prabhupada's solution: put Krishna in the center of our lives and exchanges, share the nine-fold processes of devotional service and be happy. This may sound simplistic, but it is not; rather, it is a profound and far-reaching solution. And wow, the fantastic ways we have seen this work wonders when done in a real and genuine way. How to do this may be elusive to many of us, but when it is done right, it works. We heard this testimonial again and again: when Krishna is in the center, family and devotee conflicts recede, and loving exchanges and harmony increase; quarrel and confusion recede, and self worth and faith increase; and so on. The farther Krishna is from our center, the more the propensity is to feel frustration and/or depressed, quarrel and argue, form positions and defend positions, and criticize and undermine others. But we have also witnessed on this pilgrimage that when Krishna was factually placed in the center, individual selfishness and egos were less evident—both in leaders and followers—and harmony and balance followed suit. This success formula of Srila Prabhupada works. The more we become examples of its efficacy, the more we can truly change the hearts of the innocent and ignorant. How bright our future if we but try!

Reflections on accessing Vrindavan *dhama*: More than ever, pilgrims and residents must learn to see Vrindavan with hearts and ears, and not externally with the eyes, nose and other senses. Though there are still pockets of old Vrindavan fairly intact, *maya* continues to blanket much of the *dhama* with her illusory

energy, so that externally it continues to look more like a tourist destination than spiritual *dhama*.

- The open fields, towering trees, soft shimmering Raman Reti sands and forests seen in film taken 30 years ago are in rapid decline.
- The once earthen *parikrama* path is now a near solid band of traffic on concrete, with solid rows of buildings and strewn garbage on both sides.
- The new four-lane highway connecting the trunk road to Vrindavan village will soon be wall-to-wall buildings—with numerous vacation flats and apartment complexes already built and many more under construction; many new temples, rows of shops, and so forth.
- On some days traffic is back-to-back stalled, or barely crawling—cars, coaches, lorries, motorcycle and bicycle horns in constant use—for mile upon mile on end.
- Strewn garbage is on virtually every lane, alley and street.

Without access to pure Krishna Consciousness, these intense material [diversions] could boggle the mind. So how to access the real Vrindavan? The same way we must in other Krishna Conscious temples around the world—by watering the root of the *bhakti* tree by chanting the Holy Names and purifying our hearts. Hear nicely from the right source, follow Srila Prabhupada’s instructions, serve the guru and Vaishnavas, and put Krishna in the center. Appreciate you all, and looking forward to our best year ever together. *Hari hari biphale*. (EMAIL TO SARANAGATI DEVOTEES, JAN. 10, 2009) 🙏

“My Body is Finished, but My Spirit is Soaring”—Saranagati—2010

It was clear to me that as 2009 ended and 2010 began, Yamuna’s health was continuing to decline. Of course, she pushed on through each obstacle, and her consciousness remained firmly focused on her devotional service. She was unafraid of death—even nonchalant—and felt that when it was time for her to leave this body, she was ready—and even welcomed it. She

would humbly remark, “I have made little advancement in this life, but I have tried, and my only prayer is that Srila Prabhupada may bless me with his association again.” We would have long discussions regarding each of our wishes when the inevitable occurred; and she could be intransigent regarding doctors and hospitals and her desire to avoid them. Yet as the year progressed and activities like walking, sleeping and breathing became major undertakings, I began gently encouraging her to go to the Bhaktivedanta Hospital where she could be cared for by devotee physicians. Still, for most of the year, she resisted and remained upbeat. Writing to a friend in March, she said, “My body is finished, but my spirit is soaring.” There could not be a more descriptive statement about Yamuna’s consciousness.

Nimesh das: I was just wondering if you could tell me something, about anything...

Yamuna: Well, first off, there is the subject matter about this and that stuff. Most people go through life telling each other mostly about that: shared trivia about life as experienced under the influence of various modes of nature. That’s an eternally colossal mixed bag to tell each other about. Then secondly, there is [what] the speaker is focused on in his or her life, and just wants to share with anyone who will listen, maybe uplifting or noteworthy or compelling—and on and on that goes. For you today, from me today—that something about anything. Never feel disconnected from us. Always know that despite the miles, we are here for you on any level of company, friendship, support and association, and that when we connect together, the result is good.

Please keep close, as inspired that is, and let the potency and presence of Krishna in our lives unfold—sweet, sweeter, sweetest, and on and on. Thank you so much. Your *pishima* and friend.

(EMAIL TO NIMESH, JUNE 14, 2010) 🍌

Yamuna’s Inspiring Talk on Devotional Life to the Students at Govardhan Academy

When Yamuna and I were invited to speak to the children at the Govardhan Academy later that spring, Yamuna eloquently spoke about her devotional journey. The entire presentation will be available on the website, but some poignant and instructive extracts are included here:

Yamuna: Srila Prabhupada had a little apartment; the temple was at 518 Frederick Street, and next to the Chinese laundry was the entrance to an apartment building at 512 Frederick, and Prabhupada was on the third floor—Number 35. Janaki and Mukunda were two doors down. So they were the seniormost people in the group, and they were hosting Srila Prabhupada. So I asked Mukunda, “I would like to talk to Swamiji,” and he arranged for me to go. Srila Prabhupada had a rocking chair ... and he would sit by his bay window and chant.... So I came in. His eyes got big: “Oh, you are back.” “Yes, Swamiji.” He said, “So what do you have planned next?” “Swamiji, I would like to go to the highest place. I think Tibet is the highest place.” He was really sober, and he was looking. You know how devotees sometimes describe being in Srila Prabhupada’s presence—that he was able to look at you, but he looked through you; he saw inside of you. He could see your heart; he could see your soul; he could see your thoughts. It was a very powerful experience. It wasn’t as if he was just glancing; it was full presence. Full presence.

So he was up in this rocking chair, and I was on the ground; and I remember his eyes at that point were half open, and he was looking down, and they were little gray slits of illumination. His eyes became very intense, and he said in a very quiet voice, “I can take you to a place much higher than Tibet. Just see. Just see.” And I got goose bumps, and my hair stood on end. And I said, “Okay, I’ll see. I’d like to see.” And that was the moment I decided to commit myself to trying to relish the process of Krishna Consciousness with Srila Prabhupada as my Spiritual Master. I may have become a little dull in that respect—some of my Godbrothers and Godsisters were much faster in coming to that—but I wanted to try to be sure that I could do it before I said I could, because I thought it was a very serious choice. Becoming a devotee wasn’t something that we took lightly. It was actually a very sober decision.

So we all come to that point where we say, “Oh, this is a short life. I have had so many lives. I’ve been conditioned in the material world for so many births, and now I am in the human birth; let me give just this one life to seriously take to this process of Krishna Consciousness.”

When my sister had trouble with her Krishna Consciousness in 1969 and actually came and said to Srila Prabhupada, “I’m leaving,” Prabhupada got big tears in his eyes. He cried. And he looked at her and said, “You will not find a better philosophy in this whole world.” There is nothing like the knowledge that we have in Krishna Consciousness. And every morning that

we read *Bhagavatam*, we come to the same conclusion. There is nothing like the potency of *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. Just over and over we can read the same chapters, *Bhagavad-gita*, *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, *Nectar of Devotion* and the *Caitanya-caritamṛta*....

And the Holy Name is the way in this age. To try to understand what pure chanting is. Now Aindra has just now passed, and he was somebody who stayed in Vrindavan for twenty-five years, really focusing at the lotus feet of the Lord, not leaving Vrindavan, and chanting. So what are the different kinds of chanting—offensive, shallow chanting, pure chanting; that journey of understanding and relishing Krishna as the Holy Name—there is nothing like that.

So Prabhupada said, “There is nothing like our philosophy; it is the best philosophy. There is nothing like our food. You won’t find any other kind of nourishment like Krishna Consciousness ... Please don’t go.” But when the false ego comes in, and we become covered over by not following the process, it just happens quickly, doesn’t it? Forgetting Krishna can happen really quickly; we know it in a day. And if you look at yourself in a twenty-four-hour day, where your mind goes, it’s amazing; it can go all kinds of places, can’t it? So when we don’t follow the process that Prabhupada gave us, then we become a little dull, and our ideas become very prominent, and we get a little weak and tend to forget Krishna. So he gave us this process. He said, “It is glorious, please take it. Make it your life.” This life goes by so quickly. I know you are teenagers; it seems like forever between one year and the next, but you know. Even for you, who are in your mid-thirties now, the years go by fast. 🐞



Yamuna, Jahnvi and baby Ghanashyam

Too Much “Gitavali” Nectar in Mayapur — Let’s Chant it Again

Yamuna was so inspired by the chanting of *Gitavali* in Mayapur that she wanted to share it again with the devotees in Saranagati, so that summer we again began the Thakur’s songbook. Many guests were also able to experience the abundant joy of the Thakur’s Holy Name-saturated prayers in his *Gitavali*, along with the dedicated “regulars” from Saranagati. Yamuna

felt blessed by their enthusiastic and prayerful chanting before the Deities of Radha-Banabehari, and eagerly looked forward to each and every session. Her exuberance, encouragement (“That was the best *kartal* playing ever!”) and enthusiasm can readily be heard in the recordings.



Jahnavi devi: During a stay in Saranagati in the summer of 2010, I got to join in with one *Gitavali* chanting session. My time there was a brief pause from traveling around the country, presenting kirtan to a wider community of yoga practitioners and spiritualists. In that context, I was usually on a stage, presenting a “performance-style” kirtan designed to be eye catching and lively for those not so familiar with the practice yet. It had left me feeling a little weary of the constant battle between the ego and the spiritual intelligence when in the public eye, and I was eagerly looking forward to taking part in a more simple, sweet kirtan experience. At the insistence of others, I was to play my violin in the kirtan. I usually did, especially because I was regularly in front of large audiences where we used many instruments.

This was something that Yamuna never failed to encourage, though she cautioned me on many occasions about the subtle dangers of being in front of appreciative crowds. We began this kirtan as they usually did, with a reading from the autobiography of Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur. This was something that everyone loved, and we laughed and fell silent in turn at the profound and deeply personal revelations that were shared in the Thakur’s own voice. This set the mood perfectly for the kirtan. Yamuna was expert in curating and guiding an event to create just the right tone and atmosphere for personal realization. We began to chant, responding to Kartamasa’s beautiful and sincere singing, and as I usually did, I would pick up my violin to accompany, playing in and around the melody line. But in the all pervasive atmosphere of humility and devotion, I suddenly felt a creeping discomfort. My violin felt cumbersome, and when I sang, I noticed my voice in a different way than before. I realized that the presence of such advanced devotees was forcing me to look my pride right in the face. I realized how attached I was to being recognized as a good singer and musician, and how far I was from true humility. I put my violin down and

lowered the volume of my voice, trying to process these feelings and remain focused on chanting.

Yamuna had shared with me many stories of her times leading kirtan with Srila Prabhupada, and I was always struck by her total disinterest in recognition of her talent. Every occasion that she begged or instructed me to sing *mangal arati* for the Deities came flooding to my mind, and I recalled how much I had relished the chance to show that “I could do it.” I felt totally crushed in the understanding that her encouragement was not in any way a mundane appreciation of my talent, but was all about nurturing my offering of my abilities in devotional service. Foolishly, I had accepted it otherwise. In that moment I tried to follow her example and offer my heart to Srila Prabhupada—praying for service and detachment from the desire for honor. Later, she said, “You didn’t play your fiddle much tonight Janbee. What happened?” I felt embarrassed to share my realization with her, afraid of sounding too pompous or like I was fishing for encouragement. “I wasn’t feeling so well,” I said. “I have a headache.” She immediately began offering remedies and urged me to go and rest. In this way, I learned how the Holy Name, combined with the presence and atmosphere surrounding a great devotee, can evoke heartfelt realization without any further exchange of words. Here at Radha-Banabehari Mandir, I find sanctuary—devotion, depth, humor and love. 🐦

Yamuna’s Saranagati Parrot Festival

Many Saranagati residents had approached Yamuna that spring to schedule a date for the “Parrot Festival” she had conceived over a year previously. Exhilarated at the prospect, Yamuna began its planning by setting up sewing circles at the Govardhan Academy and personally sewing the outfits of some of our sewing-impaired devotees. In an email to Kartamasa, Yamuna expanded on her idea:

Yamuna: I had one idea for a festival around the theme of our parrot *sringar* this year—have adult resident devotees, including the Milkmaids, draw chits from the nine processes of devotional service. Then members of the nine groups can make presentations on the process of devotional service they drew. Each of the nine groups of devotees might also take the responsibility of organizing one *prasadam* meal for the festival as well. Depending on the number of participants, we would have four or five in each group. In this way, we can have a one-, two- or three-day festival directly glorifying

the Deities in the valley in a glorious fashion. (EMAIL TO KARTAMASA, APR. 9, 2009) 🐾

Yamuna organized each facet of the elaborate festival, where all of the Deities in Saranagati would be showcased and worshiped in the community temple, and which included interactive presentations by individuals and groups of devotees around the nine processes of devotional service. Her desire to honor each contribution is beautifully illustrated in her email to friends on the eve of the festival:

Dear Devotees, Hare Krishna.

This is a special missive to you, our valley residents who are far away at the moment, and not able to be here to relish this event tomorrow—Yogi, Yami and Lilamrita in malls, Bala Krishna studying health care in some distant place, Lalasamayi and Hanif in far Eastern Canada, and Bhava and Lalita, unable to attend for health reasons.

It's also for you far away, in the UK and Alachua and India, and the devotees not able to make it here today for various reasons. I felt inspired to share some observations from activity today, the eve before the Festival of Saranagati tomorrow. This is quite a statement, but not an exaggeration. In all my Krishna Consciousness years, rarely have I witnessed such joyous, heart-felt, spontaneous, generous—especially generous—direct devotional service shared together. How wonderful to witness Srila Prabhupada's presence in the service mood of his multi-generational followers.



The Deities worshiped in ISKCON's Saranagati temple were dressed in new clothes, designed and stitched by Mahojvala for Kulasekhara, and Their Lordships looked stunning. Twenty-two sets of individual Deities will attend the festivities tomorrow, and represent an astounding three hundred and twenty-four years of *archana* worship by Saranagati residents—quite remarkable for a community this size. Nearly every resident was here today engaging in some kind of preparation service.

Jaisacinandana was senior visionary today on decoration, and along with his mostly Milkmaid crew, just went over the top decorating with the last available seasonal deciduous branches of fall leaves. Jai and crew picked many types of greens, and Harilila robbed her garden of her remaining greenables. They are turning the temple room into Vrindavan. If this was not enough, Jai had the vision to pull off a Vrindavan fall harvest theme, as is classically done in Vrindavan, and purchased seven or eight full-case boxes of multicolored fall apples to decorate with. When Dina and I left the temple at 5 PM this afternoon, mounds (closer to hillocks) of apples were everywhere—a beautiful vision of opulent service for the pleasure of all the visiting Lordships who will be present tomorrow. What else? Uttama shopped in Vancouver on Main Street to purchase cloth for all three altars and, with her flair and gift for style and taste, laid down the basis for three glorious altars. Devahuti and family (Wow! Is this family talented or what?) made scores of miniature, finely-detailed baby origami parrots in multicolors, with tiny feet that attached to things.



Vases of greens were made for the altars, with these little parrots perched on vase leaves.

Treasured Lilamrita and Yami, though out of station, were clearly present in spirit with their tangible contribution to the festivities. Two years ago, Lila, Yami and KC purchased many sets of Oriyan-style parrot and bird art in Jagannatha Puri just for this event. In their absence, and in honor of this purchase, Visakha placed all the colorfully-painted birds around the Deity bases that Dina made for each set of Deities to stand on.

At Govardhan Academy, in Dina's scroll saw class, twelve truly professional-looking parrots were cut and hand-painted by the students to hang in fresh tree branches behind the altars. Hard to describe just how vibrant and alive these wooden parrots turned out; just suffice it to say, they are gloriously beautiful.



Further, Govardhan Academy students made a beautiful banner commemorating the event saying: First Annual Festival of Saranagati. So nicely executed, made with detailed care, love and devotion. For many hours, the team of Jayanti, Chaya and Narangi worked stringing up crepe decorations, with a little help from some elders, and did an amazingly good job. Hanging amongst these streamers were many colored paper parrots with flapping wings,

made by Uttama, making the temple sky inside the temple room come alive with vibrant movement. Udara, Dina and Yamuna worked on the altars, doing background service. Beautiful Bhava and dad Ghosh Thakur drove up from Vancouver to attend, as did Nimesh, Luiza and Lila. Tomorrow Mahasringa will drive down from Logan Lake to attend as well.

Kar and Radha do so many things to serve devotees here that it is near impossible to list them. Rasamrita and Shyam Kishore are falling into place with a similar serving mood, making the atmosphere charged with good will, sharing and open hearts. Yadubara and Rasaraja set up the sound system, quietly rendering service to all. Kulasekhara das, for the last three weeks, stained

the entire outside of the temple building to make it look fresh and new. Off for now. Sweet Krishna dreams to you all. Your festival scribe and servant, Yamuna. 🐦

The Milkmaids: Yamuna was always creating fresh new ways to serve the Lord. Our Saranagati Parrot Festival was the highlight. It was a very special event that united the community and melted our hearts in love for Krishna and for each other. It is deeply embedded in my heart and shall never be forgotten. 🐦

The following day, Yamuna sent a report on the festival to devotees worldwide:

Dear Devotees, Pranam Dandavats; Sri Sri Guru Gauranga Jayate! I wanted to send off a last scribe missive, mostly directed to those of you who live here in Saranagati who could not be present yesterday and asked to be kept in the loop. This Festival of Saranagati is a little unique, as it is not so much an “attend a seminar, attend a lecture or workshop, network out cum kirtan event,” but more a devotee “happening” to glorify Srila Prabhupada’s stress on executing direct devotional service. Its purpose was to gather together to directly glorify the *archa vigraha* we individually but collectively worship here. The intent is to strengthen our devotional commitment to serving these *vigraha*, to soften our hearts in *sanga* by engaging the community in direct devotional service; and to relish joy, connection, strength and appreciation for each other. And this all happened, with an intensity as glorious as the participants who took part in this process. Here are some glimpses into what made the event memorable.

Dina and I arrived to establish Sri Sri Radha-Banabehari on Their altar space at 7:00 AM. It was still dark outside, the nearly full moon just setting behind the western mountain ridge; clear sky and not so cold. The altar and temple room were aglow with soft candlelight. Magical.





All on time, each valley resident arrived between 7:30 and 8:10 AM to establish Their Deities on the previously decorated three altars. With each new arrival, the altars became more resplendent, each effulgent Deity dazzling with Their special mercy and potency. Even visiting Mayapur resident Madan Mohan, familiar with the grandeur of Mayapur events, said he had never experienced the majesty of so many Deities present at one time. Each of

the forty-three *archa vigraha* present was dressed in new clothes with a parrot theme. This sight is simply indescribable. After a group recitation of the *Om ajnana* prayers, the event began with Mahidhar leading the guru *pūja* prayer and Kulasekhara performing *arati*.

At 9:00 AM, the first group presentation on the nine processes began: *Sravanam*—Hearing. Partha das led off with a slide show of Srila Prabhupada and book quotes on the glories of hearing. Then team members Uttama, Rasaraja and Dadhiharta, with Partha behind a screen directing the parrot in various ways, performed a fine costumed play. The theme was about how Suka the parrot heard *Srimad-Bhagavatam* and became Sukadeva Goswami—all colorfully illustrating the glories and potency of hearing. A super-excellent presentation.

At 9:30 AM, the second group presentation began: *Kirtanam*—Chanting. The youngest group member, Jayanti, age 10, played harmonium and led her first ever temple kirtan, along with *kartals* and drum back-up from mom Narayani and dad Sthanur—sweet, sincere and beautiful.

Then Trilokanath read illuminating quotes from *shastra* on the glories of hearing. The presentation ended with Mahojvala and Ashcroft devotees chanting a sweet guitar Hare Krishna kirtan with Srila Prabhupada's 1966 Hare Krishna tune—sweet and superexcellent.

At 10:00 AM, the third group presentation: *Smaranam*—Remembering. Girija, Kalindi, Gopal and Bhava took us on a

journey of spiritual charades by giving different groups of devotees papers to remember and act out pastime stories. Two groups tied as winners, and as a winning prize, each got half of one of Girija's famously-delicious baked pumpkin pies. An engaging and very much enjoyed experience in using memory in the service of the Lord.

At 10:30 AM, the group four presentation on *Pada Sevanam*—Serving the Lotus Feet of the Lord. This was a family presentation headed up by parents Jaisaci and Devahuti, along with their eldest daughter, Vana, twins Giri and Shyama, and daughter Ani. First, Jai explained that this aspect of devotion covers much ground and, to illustrate some of its depth, took us all on a journey to relish it. Tulasi devi was placed before the Deities, and Deva laid down colorful footprints of Vrindavan residents to indicate we should go on our journey, first to circumambulate Tulasi, and then elsewhere. So each devotee group was read a nice pastime, and we began our journey getting holy water sprinkled on our heads and watering Srimati Tulasi devi.

Next the footprints directed us to their twin *gopi* and *gopa* daughter and son, who offered us *tulasi* leaves and freshly ground *chandan* to offer to any Deity on the altar. Then the footprints directed us to the Deity altars. On the other side of the temple room, ten-year-old Vana led a most wonderful kirtan, accompanied by the elder Milkmaids. This quality presentation was yet another superexcellent devotional experience.

At 11:00 AM, the final group presentation of the morning—*Archanam* or Deity worship. Harilila, Dinatarini and Yamuna explained a bit about the history of Deity worship standards over the years, the glories of devotees' personal relationships with the *archa vigraha*, and easy methods of atonement for any offenses in executing Deity worship. Then all of the Deities present were introduced to the assembly, representing an astounding three hundred and twenty-four years of Deity service! It ended



Yamuna and Dinatarini presenting *Archanam*

with a skit about the appearance of the Radha-Raman Deity to Gopal Bhatta Goswami. Our resident teenager, Radha Raman das, assumed the role of the Radha-Raman Deity, and when Dina went to worship Gopal Bhatta's *shilas*, there stood Radha Raman, saying with great feeling, "I am Radha-Raman, and I have come because you asked Me to." This warmed all of our hearts.

What followed was a most enlivening *raj bhoga* kirtan experience led by Yadubara das, inspired by a chanting style he relished on a recent trip to Hungary. He divided voices into two melodies of Hare Krishna, and then the devotees simultaneously recited the names of the Deities present. This was yet another high point in an already high series of experiences. This went on both before and through the *raj bhoga arati*.

Lunch *prasadam* followed—the menu elegant in its simplicity—nutritious, satisfying, and nicely served, with an efficient clean-up crew experience:

Carrot Rice prepared by Damodar Priya

Whole Mung Dal *Makrani* prepared by Rasamrita and Radhakunda

Savory Corn Bread prepared by Udarakirti

Organic Gujarati-Style Corn with Coconut prepared by Visakha and Yadubara

Vegetable *Kadhi* and Jam Rolls prepared by Karunamayai

At 1:30 PM, the afternoon presentations resumed with group six: *Vandanam*—Prayers. Here Udarakirti, Rasa, Kava and Narangi placed about sixteen different instances of famous prayers, and engaged devotees in matching the speaker with the prayer. In this case, it was men against women present. The women won by one prayer; close, thought provoking and devotional.

At 2:00 PM, the group seven presentation on *Dasyam*—Service. First presenter, Sanat Kumar, read from a series of beautiful quotes from *Nectar of Devotion* on the subject. Next, Sridham lead us chanting the prayer *Sarvasva tomar* from the *Saranagati* by Thakur Bhaktivinoda, reading the translation aloud in English. Finally the group led a wonderful kirtan, with Sridham playing harmonium, Chaya playing drum, and five-year-old Lala on *kar-tals*; heart-warming and enlivening.

At 2:30 PM, group eight presented the aspect *Sakyam*—To become friends with the Lord. Yadubara, Visakha, Haripriya

and Shyam Kishore presented the story of Sudhama Brahmana in play form. Shyam was the narrator of the story, Yadubara was Sudhama Brahmana, Visakha was the wife and Rukmini, and Haripriya was Krishna. This brought tears to the eyes of some; another superexcellent presentation.

At 3:00 PM, the last group presentation of *Atma Nivedanam*—Full Surrender. Kartamasa, Radhakunda, Shyam Kishore, Rasamrita, Nimesh and Mahasringa—this powerful group covered much ground in a short time. It began with a duet by Kartamasa and Radhakunda singing a childhood prayer about Ambarish Maharaja—Kar on harmonium, Shyam Kishore on sarod, Nimesh on drum and Mahasringa on guitar. Next was a group chanting of the *Atma Nivedanam* prayer from *Saranagati* to sooth the soul. Mahasringa sang a soulful rendition in English of Bhaktivinoda's prayer, *Manasa Deho Geho*. With Shyam Kishore leading us off on voice and concert-quality sarod playing, the whole group led various verses of the *Damodarastakam* verses. All present were now able to offer a candle in a glass container to each of the Deities present on this sacred occasion. The three altars were aglow with soft candlelight.

After the *Damodarastaka* prayer, this group continued leading, then handed the microphone to others in the room to lead a round-robin-style kirtan that went on for a good half hour more.

This final presentation was stunning in potency, devotion, expertise, sentiment and presence—like a cluster of *tulasi* leaves resting atop of a tray of eight-layered *sandesh* of excellent quality.

At 4:30 PM, Banabehari's Milkmaids, so treasured by valley residents here, led one of their famous five-voice *arati* kirtans. The devotion and pure clarity of their chanting is stunning. Guests always comment on their expertise, but it is their purity that shines through most.

At 5:00 PM, Dinner *prasadam* was served, with another memorable menu:

Creamy Squash Bisque with Vegetables prepared by Yamuna
Fall Harvest Soup prepared by Mahojvala and Narayani devis
Herbed Foccacia prepared by Girija devi

Organic Leafy Green Salad Mix and Trimmings prepared by Devahuti

Caramelized Rich Rice *Khir* prepared by Rasaraja das

Between 6 PM and 7 PM, devotees spoke something about the experience, and what it meant to them. Each was brief—barely a minute long—but so full of richness.

Saranagati kirtan sessions start soon. This took longer than I expected. It is not nicely edited, but you get the drift. Neither does it do justice to the event, and is limited in information and with likely mistakes. Please forgive that. Wishing you well wherever you may be. Treasure you all; Your departing scribe servant, Yamuna devi. (EMAIL TO FRIENDS, OCT. 25, 2010) 🙏

In an after-event email to the teachers and students of Govardhan Academy, Yamuna was effusive in her glorification of their qualities:

An Open letter of Appreciation to Govardhan Academy:

Headmaster Kartamasa, Headmistress Radhakunda, Kindergarten mistress Rasamrita and Every Student at the Govardhan Academy,

Hare Krishna. Sri Sri Krishna-Balarama ki jaya! The first words of Appreciation and Gratitude go to you, the Academy teachers—Kar, Radha and Rasamrita—for all that you do to make Govardhan Academy the glorious thing it is. Your wisdom is a gift; your dedication is a gift; your application of both—a gift. As teachers, you are setting the standard for all of ISKCON to follow—to put Krishna in the center, teach students how to be genuine devotees, teach students to love what they do for Krishna, and do what they love for Krishna, to be happy and help others. We in Saranagati are all deeply grateful for you three, doing all that you do at the Academy.

The next round of Appreciation and Gratitude goes to the seniormost students, Banabehari's Milkmaids. You five are treasures in this community. As we watch you mature from mid to late teens, and into young adult years, there is an increasing sense of joy in your company. You are learning to work for Krishna in wonderfully creative ways, of course, but also you are more and more assuming big and responsible services to render to Krishna. In other words, you are being trained to be preachers and teachers and leaders yourselves in future years. This would please Srila Prabhupada so much. We treasure your devotional creepers and your example like anything.

Sridham das and Radha Raman das, you are both maturing so well at the school. Growing, speaking and realizing with increasing depth and sincerity. Everyone in the community appreciates you like anything.

To every other student—Chaya, Narangi, Jayanti, Vanamali, and little one, Lala—we shower you with encouragement and appreciation. You are increasingly becoming more expert in learning devotional arts, learning how to focus on service to Krishna, and doing it very, very well. How wonderful! Lots and lots of appreciation to you all. What to speak of [twins] Giri and Shyama; how bright your future is at the Academy. You were so good at the festival handing out *tulasi* leaves and *chandan* paste to offer the Deities. Really wonderful.

All this is to Thank You on behalf of the whole community for the contribution that all of you at Govardhan Academy made to the themed parrot festival this year—your giant blue banner marking the event, all the parrots you made, the decorations, the serving and cleanup, and your participation in group presentations on the nine processes of devotional service. All these things made the parrot festival as wonderful as it was.

Last of all: Realize that these teachers are a special gift from Krishna to you, for they are so much more than teachers, but truly your life role models of ideal devotees and special human beings. You students are immensely fortunate to have the company of such elders. Every minute you have their company, please explore more and more gratitude for this opportunity. Thank you, teachers. Hari Haribol, Lots of love, Your well-wishing aunts and friends, Dina and Yamuna. (EMAIL TO GOVARDHAN ACADEMY, OCT. 26, 2010) 🐦

Kanai Priya das: Hare Krishna Mataji, Please accept my most respectful obeisances unto your lotus feet. All glories to Srila Prabhupada. All glories to the Saranagati devotee community. What a stunning and heart-melting description of one of the most extraordinary festivals! Never heard about such kind of festival! Most unique presentation about the ninefold [processes] of devotional service. We are relishing your newsletter. It's so wonderful to hear about this festival. While reading your wonderful newsletter, I was transported to the festival and visualized the whole festival. Very grateful for sending astounding news about this remarkable festival. Longing to

unite with the amazing devotees of Saranagati next spring, hopefully, and to learn from them various aspects of devotional service—to serve them and beg for their mercy! (EMAIL TO YAMUNA, OCT. 27, 2010) 🐦



The organizational efforts Yamuna expended on the Saranagati parrot festival, and her outpourings of respect and gratitude for even the slightest contributions of the devotees, as shown in her own descriptions, speak volumes about Yamuna's devotional qualities. As many devotees have testified, she glorified and magnified the devotional endeavors of others with genuine and heartfelt gratitude, seeing their efforts, great or small, as Srila Prabhupada's all-embracing mercy. This quality seemed to expand over the years

to encompass nearly everyone she met. "Thank you for your sincere service to Srila Prabhupada" or "This is the best [program, *prasadam*, temple, etc.] I have ever seen" were spontaneous greetings to others, and not only did she express these sentiments with genuine sincerity, but they were felt as such by those receiving them.

Unfortunately, the Saranagati festival took a toll on Yamuna's rapidly failing health. While she soldiered on through much of the twelve hour program, late in the day she whispered to me, "Take me home; I can't stay anymore."

"I Don't Want to be a Burden to Anyone"

It is not necessary to detail the litany of physical problems Yamuna was facing by the fall of 2010. While she remained equipoised and adamant in refusing my requests to travel to Bhaktivedanta Hospital, I became increasingly alarmed by her deteriorating condition. The most immediate concern to me was her sleep apnea, which caused me to lie awake in my room at night listening as she struggled to breathe. And, just as she had noted in Srila Prabhupada before her, the swelling in her legs and feet now made walking difficult.

By the time a Saranagati resident had organized a large festival that fall, attended by Radhanath Swami and many young *kirtaniyas*, such as As Kindred Spirits and the Mayapuris, Yamuna found walking across a room

a challenge, what to speak of attending outside programs. Yet somehow, through no effort of our own, many festival attendees found their way to Banabehari Mandir for Yamuna's association; and stoically pushing on, she welcomed everyone with her usual warmth and graciousness. *Mangal aratī*s, though scheduled to take place elsewhere, were attended by at least fifty enthusiastic guests at Banabehari Mandir. We held wonderful kirtans and poignant discussions with the visiting and resident Saranagati youth, and especially shared the rare and coveted association of Radhanath Swami. Perhaps Krishna, in His infinite kindness, knowing Yamuna's physical limitations, brought the festival to her. She tried valiantly to hide her infirmity, but by this time, I was determined to somehow get her to the devotee physicians at Bhaktivedanta Hospital. Still, despite everything, Yamuna was reaching out, teaching and caring for others:

[I'm] going through some old-age purification.... Symptoms that could never be pondered before a week ago. Though will not attend kirtan, will listen to it. Jaya jaya Giri Govardhan! Jaya jaya Thakur Bhaktivinoda! Jaya jaya Srila Prabhupada! We are so, so, so fortunate!

— EMAIL TO KARTAMASA, NOV. 8, 2010

I just wanted to touch base with a heartfelt Haribol to you all. This last physical thing is fresh and challenging. Dina is doing some amazing caregiving, and I am learning how to tolerate ever new tests sent by the Lord. I felt so excited to hear what you have been doing with the students, bringing them on a journey of discovery to Govardhan. I wanted to jump in and introduce the children to many artful forms of sweets traditionally offered at this time—take the traditional and bring it into art just for your Govardhan celebration. The truth is I do not know if I can do any of it. Day by day, no steady progress of getting better. Going up and down, side to side, and new vistas of physical strangeness. But the plan was for me to make two foundation sweets—*rasgulla* balls and



chum chum almond-base shapes—then split each in half and turn these into a variety of artistic and creative double-layered sweets. Flavored toppings could be: brownish (carob) *sandesh*; sandy-hued ginger *sandesh*; pale and rich rose-hued rose *sandesh*; pale lemon-hued lemon *sandesh*; pale orange-hued orange *sandesh*; or pale green mint *sandesh*. Or if you have favorite flavors of *burfi* to use as toppings: almond, nut, etc. I think the children would love to do this; it surely would be a first experience for many in the school, what to speak of the potency of doing this as an offering for such a transcendental meditation. Still, right now it is very iffy that I will be up to it. If I cannot do this, Dina says she will do her best to engage them in making *sandesh*, if that is the direction you wish to go.... So know I am there with you in spirit all week, and I will do my best to attend. Wished to connect with you and express my appreciation for all that you are doing.

—EMAIL TO KARTAMASA AND RADHAKUNDA,
NOV. 14, 2010

Chant chant chant chant the Holy Name.

All will be revealed; year by year; month by month; day by day;
lava by lava.

There is no end to the glories of all forms of chanting the Holy Name.

We are packed up together chanting the Holy Name.

We are receiving mercy from previous travelers who have taken the shelter of the Holy Name.

All glories to the Holy Name!

Your out-of-breath at the moment, but long-term relisher and servant of chanting the Holy Name,

Harer namer eva kevalam

—EMAIL TO KARTAMASA AND RADHAKUNDA,
DEC. 2, 2010

I believe that Yamuna would not have finally agreed to my appeals that she receive treatment at the Bhaktivedanta Hospital had she not seen my increasing anxiety and consequent faltering health due to lack of sleep and other factors. In her humility she repeatedly said, “I don’t want to be a burden on anyone; and especially I don’t want to be a burden on you.” Although I repeatedly reassured her (I had been the health “burden” for

years in the late 70's and early 80's when she unfailingly and lovingly cared for me), she never wanted to accept service from anyone—even me. It was simply anathema to her.

Through the kind intervention of Malati devi, funds were raised to get Yamuna to Mumbai in relative comfort. As I had to remain behind for some time to deal with financial commitments, make Deity arrangements and winterproof and close the ashram, Yamuna assured me that because devotees would meet her at each stop, she would be fine traveling on her own. Unfortunately, when she arrived in Mumbai, somehow a mix-up in arrival times meant that no one was there to meet her; so she hired a taxi and showed up at the Bhaktivedanta Hospital, much to the horrified shock of the staff, who by then were frantically searching high and low for her. Later, Dwarakadish das, the Chief Physician at Bhaktivedanta Hospital, told me that her condition was so poor, he did not know if they could do anything for her; but I felt like I could exhale again, because now she was in the care of dedicated and respectful devotee doctors and hospital staff who would reach beyond all personal and medical boundaries to assist her.

Dear Srila Prabhupada, I pray that one day in the future I may see you face to face again. This vision may be many lifetimes in front of me, but I do not see any other goal worth achieving, however slow or difficult, or impossible this task may seem from my fallen position. There is nothing else more appealing. Please bless me with the perseverance to continue on the path to meet you. 🙏

