

Auroville International USA's Evolve Newsletter fosters the link between Auroville and it's friends in the USA

“Dance to Life's creation” – by June Maher

O Sing, sing to me a Song
 Holding in its golden cup of music form
 Bright rhythms
 Dance to Life's creation
 Poured at Her feet.
 The Song rising, rising,
 As together we build the City
 Of Love and Truth

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Auroville International USA's New Transition – Nilauro Markus reports

To the entire Auroville family in the USA,

Auroville International USA is transforming, and I want to share it with you. At the annual board meeting, we decided to focus on work which will strengthen the Auroville community in the USA. AVI-USA has initiated some programs with that aim in mind, including regional Auroville Gatherings, an Auroville travel network called Aurohost and an AVI-USA membership program.

The Auroville Gatherings had a very successful start with the First June Reunion at the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham in Lodi (see article in this issue.) Growth of the Auroville community is continuing with an East Coast Reunion at Matagiri, and quarterly Reunions at Lodi. We encourage you to create a gathering in your area.

Aurohost is intended as a world-wide network of Auroville and Integral Yoga related people who will host one another when traveling. Aurohost, still in its formative stages, will give its members an opportunity to strengthen old friendships and establish new friendships and collaborations in the global Auroville/Integral Yoga family. We encourage you to help develop Aurohost, and to become a host in this network.

We are developing an AVI-USA membership program which will serve to strengthen our Auroville community in the US. We welcome your suggestions and expertise in implementing our membership program.

Like many of you, AVI-USA has felt the effects of our economic downturn. Until the middle of last year, the office was funded by a Silicon Valley donor. When those funds dried up, we were suddenly faced with the problem of funding AVI-USA's operating expenses in new ways. We are reorganizing the way we operate to face this challenge. By the end of September 2004, the AVI-

USA office will be relocated to Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham, a Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Lodi, California. The functions of the office will be distributed among several part-time staff and volunteers. This move will transition the work that I, as Executive Director, have done over the years to being done by several other people. This move towards teamwork is in strong keeping with AVI-USA's new focus on family and teamwork. If you would like to become part of the AVI-USA team, please contact us. Geography is no longer a barrier for much of our work. These changes will in no way prevent us from providing you with the services that AVI-USA has provided for over 30 years.

We are continuing our work to become self-sustaining. In addition to focusing on getting larger grants, we anticipate that the membership program will help cover the rest of our operating expenses. We have also created a long-term planned giving program which encourages people to include Auroville's work in their wills and trusts. In the long term AVI-USA's overhead deduction from these legacies will also help to cover our

operating expenses.

We need your help in supporting Auroville's work in the USA – either by directly contributing your expertise towards the development of our new programs, by making use of them, or by supporting us in doing the work by becoming a member of Auroville International USA.

I would like to personally thank all of you who have shared in our work over the years, especially while I have been with AVI-USA. Thank you, also, to all of you who have responded to our appeal for operating funds, and to those who have already started supporting our work by becoming members of Auroville International USA.

It has been a deep honor working with you for Auroville.

Nilauro Markus

AVI-USA is moving!

Our new contact information is:

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Sharing from an Auro-family Gathering – *Melissa Sanders and others report*

Over the weekend of June 4th-5th, nearly 50 people affiliated with Auroville and the Integral Yoga came together for an Auro-family reunion. People from all over California gather at the Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham (SASP) Ashram in Lodi, California. This reunion was prompted by AVI-USA's new focus on bringing the Auro-family in the USA together, and was spearheaded by Ed Giordano, with the help of Bhavana, Kalpana and others.



Charles cracks us up with his animated stories.

The weekend opened with a meeting in the Sri Aurobindo symbol garden, where we began to know each other and to unite in a sense of community. Later on that first day, members of the SASP Ashram coordinated various karma yoga projects; teams to roof the old barn, to tear down a crumbling shed, to plant trees, to dismantle a defunct solar roof heater, to put up the fence, and to coordinate children's activities. Very important was Kalpana and her kitchen team, who prepared delicious dishes reminiscent of our Aurovilian origins. After refreshing drinks, many people still had energy for volleyball, and others cooled off in the pool. Before supper, we met in a field and planted three redwood trees for the dedication of "June's Grove." We shared thoughts and affection for June, acknowledging her life of service. It is wonderful to be able to express this gratitude while she is with us. In the evening we met around the fire that the kids had cheerfully prepared and decorated with mandalas.

After sunrise on Sunday, some joined the Ashram members in their morning Nama Japa, while others either woke up early for dream interpretation or continued to dream until breakfast called. There was a morning field trip to the Cosumnes River Preserve to walk along the levies and talk among the bulrushes, cattails and trees. We spontaneously came together again after lunch to finish up our karma yoga projects and made short work of cleaning up the pile of debris from the demolition projects.

During meetings throughout the weekend, we talked about Auroville, Unity and Diversity. Bhavana, who was instrumental in organizing the weekend, writes that:

"we found our commonalities especially in our spiritual awakenings. As we reported back to the big circle we could feel the high vital energy released by working physically on common projects all morning transforming into mutual understanding, and Love energy became palpable."

We expressed our gratitude for the opportunity to come together in the spirit of Auroville, and to the Lodi Ashram for providing a space for the gathering. Bhavana recalls:

"Many voices crystallized a collective wish to come together again in this way. Interest in other venues, such as camping, were expressed, while the opportunity to work together was very much appreciated... The special quality of an "Auroville" gathering was noted ... Surely, we'll do it again and let that energy gather momentum, to be directed toward the realization of Her Dream."

The weekend was a success on many levels: it created a palpable sense of Auroville community here in California, it created a light and fun atmosphere in which to interact, it provided an opportunity to build and work together physically, it helped the Auroville and Integral Yoga communities to become more aware and appreciative of each other, and it even established a closer collaboration between the Lodi Ashram and AVI-USA. When the AVI office moves in October, it will move to Lodi.

Our dream of encouraging more Auro-gatherings is taking shape. The first East Coast reunion is being held on September 10th, 11th and 12th at Matagiri in New York. The people at the Lodi gathering agreed to have four per year, and that each gathering will be organized by a different group of volunteers. The second Lodi gathering is being held on September 18th & 19th. We are encouraging and fostering frequent Auro-gatherings across the country. All that is needed is a small group of 3-5 who are willing to take on the organization in their local area. We feel that bringing Auro-related people together creates a wonderful dynamic that is appreciated by all, whether the gathering is an informal getting together for a picnic in the park, or is a full weekend of camping, meditating, hiking and meals in the wilderness or in a seminar center.

For more information on these regional gatherings, or to begin organizing one in your area, please write and email to info@aviusa.org or call the AVI-USA office at (831) 425-5620.



Some of us during our field trip to the Cosumnes River Preserve.

Coming Together to do Mother's Work - Vishnu reflects on SASP's work and the Auro-reunions

Greetings to those who participated in the first Auro-Family Reunion at Sri Aurobindo Sadhana Peetham, and to those who are yet to come.

I think I can speak for everyone here at SASP when I say that the outpouring of goodwill, generosity, and actual hard work that the Auroville pioneers offered during the planning and completion of the first reunion in June overwhelmed us. It was a real triumph, especially because of the many friendships that were formed or strengthened during the experience.

One of the works done was the demolition of a shed that was standing where our new addition will be built.



Demolishing the old to make way for the new

For over a year, we have been moving slowly towards the realization of a major building-addition (as large as the existing house) with a room for Sri Aurobindo's relics, an enlarged meditation hall, study rooms and bedrooms; never sure how to fund it, never fully confident that we could manage the work; yet somehow things kept moving.

An architect volunteered his time and expertise; the initial financing came together; a floor plan gelled. But it was still seen as something bigger than we five could manage. And we had minimal assurance that it was even part of our Auro-work: just some faith that help would come if the project was true and the aspiration sincere.

When I saw how the land and property were cared for and enjoyed by the Auro-family group, I felt that another of Mother's miracles had occurred, that it was another sign that Mother would provide the means if we acted in her will. Here may be a group of eager workers for this project.

But later it occurred to me that it's even more profound. Because 35 years after the ground-breaking for Auroville, She sent the same people to break the ground here! And with the same openness, high aspiration and pioneering spirit they carried in India, they scratched the dirt under the hot sun here to plant trees, prepare the ground, and bring on another movement in her advance towards the Divinization of the earth.

I began feeling a deep connection to Auroville. I began to understand that we were not just an isolated spiritual group at a far off outpost in America, but that we were almost another form of Auroville Community, albeit a bit re-

mote from the center, and that all of Auroville - the beauty, the culture, the energy, the Matrimandir - all of it was as close as a scooter ride down the dusty road.

We're moving towards a period of hard work here, starting next March, of building and laboring till the addition is finished. We'll have to use professionals for much of the work, but in order to do it frugally we'll have to rely on those of you with experience and/or good will. And so I invite you to share this vision, to work with us and put your valuable experiences to use. Especially, in the endeavors where Auroville has led the way, such as alternative energy systems, we need help to find a harmonious balance between what's practical and what's possible. When it's finished, it will be a place for culture, for education, for beauty, for community and solitude and for those things that help fill our spiritual longing for Their action to materialize here, in the dirt and sunlight of earth.

I believe we will have built a special house for Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Perhaps even a place where a drop of nectar from the Matrimandir can begin its regenerative alchemy for the world.

This is how I have come to see it, and I wanted to share that sense with those who were here and with those who may want to come to the next reunion.

Thank you. My gratitude for you is beyond words,
Vishnu

AV Presentation in Ashland – Soleil Reports

On August 23 Nilauru, Wolfgang, Savitra and I collaborated in a presentation and group discussion on Auroville with a group of deeply involved community members of Ashland, Oregon. Several things made this event very special and touching for me. Nilauru had driven up from Santa Cruz - a full day journey - and Wolfgang was here from Berlin. Savitra and I both live in Ashland and are very involved with in the community. Each of us also represented a different type of relationship to Auroville. Nilauru was born and raised there. Savitra lived there for 21 years and did outreach work in the early years. Wolfgang brought his personal and AVI experience. I brought the 33 years of friend-of-AV perspective. This created a particularly rich resource of stories and insights for the audience.

From the Ashland side there was an incredible receptivity and openness. I felt particularly supported by 4 friends who accompanied me in a dance and instrumental opening invocation. My friend Autumn joined me in a ceremonial flower and candle dance. Duane, from The Will from the Heart Foundation, sang one of his own sacred songs. It began "In the Heart of The Mother, I am..."

I felt Auroville's international energy come through and touch the hearts' of Ashlanders. I am now having further discussions with people here and looking forward to the creation of exchange programs between this exceptional community here in America and Auroville.

With Gratitude to Her presence in our growing world community,
Soleil

A Brief History of Auroville International USA – by Constance

There is no single narrative that can tell the story of AVI-USA. Throughout the last 33 years, June Maher, of course, has been the heart and soul of this enterprise – and to her goes our gratitude and admiration. Perhaps one day June will write the history of AVI-USA (and what a story she has to tell!), but for now we will have to be satisfied with a brief sketch.

In one sense, AVI-USA had its roots in several events of the sixties. In the mid-sixties, Dietra (Claire Worden), who was living in Santa Cruz where she published the “Black Mountain Press,” became friends with Rod and Constance. Rod and Constance, who were reading Sri Aurobindo and knew Haridas Chaudhuri, moved to Auroville in 1968. A year later Dietra brought her family to Pondicherry. In 1971, during a return visit to Santa Cruz, Dietra organized and inspired the group that became the Auroville Association.

After Dietra returned to Pondicherry, it was left to June to cultivate and grow the Association. Initially the Auroville Association was primarily a study group that met in June’s home. Dietra had taken photos of everyone involved and sent them to Mother. In November of 1971, June took the next step and traveled to Pondy to have The Mother’s darshan. By 1972 she sensed that the group may have a greater role to play and asked Mother for guidance. The message that came in reply was: “No recruiting, but money may be obtained.” In order to operate as a channel for donations, it was decided to file an application for non-profit status. In early 1973 she made her second visit to Pondy and Auroville.

By 1973, the Auroville Association had assembled a board of directors and had drawn up its by-laws. That year it was officially registered as a non-profit organization. The original board members were June and Al Maher, Ida Cori, Ruth Villalobos, Kurt Paine and Dmitri Von Moreschildt. Dmitri, as will be remembered, was in later years to be instrumental in launching the Russian Pavilion in the International Zone. This cross-nationality (or supra-nationality) has continued to characterize the AVI-USA board, which today has two non-U.S. citizens as members. Current board member, Paula Murphy, also served on the board of the Auroville Association during this early period.

When the conflict with the Sri Aurobindo Society erupted in November 1975 with the declaration of Auroville’s independence, the Auroville Association was one of the first groups outside of Auroville to demonstrate its solidarity with the community. In 1983 the Association became a member of the newly created Auroville International, which was registered in Holland. The Association took an

active role in lobbying for and ensuring the community of Auroville’s active participation in the formation of the new organization, and in the revision of the by-laws to reflect AVI’s accountability to Auroville. That year, the name “Auroville Association” was changed to “Auroville International – USA”.

For the first fourteen years, the Auroville Association operated out of a spare room in June’s home – moving occasionally to Constance’s house in the early eighties when June was in Auroville. All expenses were met out-of-pocket. No percentage for overhead was taken out of donations. During those years, June approached the Ford Foundation, USAID and many other foundations and organizations seeking assistance for Auroville. AVI also established relations with the Indian Consulates and pursued links with the UN and UNESCO.

As anyone who has done this work knows, the network of interest in Auroville is immense. It is more than a full-time job to maintain the voluminous correspondence, respond to information requests, receive and transfer donations, apply for and administer grants, facilitate and develop projects and programs, explore and cultivate new resources – and respond to the needs and wishes of Aurovilians. June accomplished all this single-handedly for many years.

In the early eighties, it was decided that the board of directors should become

active participants in the organization. Some functions began to be distributed among the members in order to share the burden of work. In 1984 a grant from FWE allowed AVI-USA to hire Navaja as the first paid staff. This experiment made it clear that the scope of the work demanded an organized office. In 1985 Jack Alexander became president. He and Mary offered to establish an office in Sacramento. In order to cover the increased cost of overhead, a 10% deduction began to be taken from donations. Jack and Mary still did a lion’s share of the work – but this was supplemented with paid part-time staff. Fortunately, the salary of the staff-members was partially met by an internship program.

Two important events occurred during Jack’s tenure. In 1992, Jack organized a large – and first ever – gathering of Aurovilians at Mt. Madonna near Santa Cruz. Prior to this, there had never been such a meeting in the U.S. exclusively for and about Auroville. It is still talked about and still inspires us today. In 1995, AVI-USA hosted the meeting of the international AVI centers in Merriam Hill



Planting a redwood seedling in honor of June’s lifelong service to Auroville. It is great to acknowledge her while she is with us.

Center, New Hampshire. This also proved to be a significant event for Auroville work in the U.S.

At the beginning of 1996, the office moved briefly to Rabiya's house in Santa Rosa, then, with Megan Thomas as president, to a houseboat in Sausalito. At this time, board member Julian Lines opened the Auroville Information Office on the East Coast as a branch of AVI-USA. In September 1998, Larry Tepper became president and the AVI office moved to its present location in a donated space in Constance and Iris's business in Santa Cruz. A generous donation from Girish Mantry made it possible to hire Aurotaranti as part-time staff. In October 1999, current president Bill Leon was elected. At the end of '99, Aurotaranti left to attend school and Nilauro, AVI's Executive Director, took over the job on a full-time basis. Perhaps, the most important events of this "modern" period have been 1) the first phase construction of the U.S. Pavilion in the International Zone of Auroville, inaugurated on 2/28/01 (this is particularly noteworthy because it is the only project in Auroville that has been especially sponsored and administered by AVI-USA); and 2) the second hosting, in July 2002, of the meeting of the international AVI centers – this time near Santa Cruz, California.

The Executive Director's position was initially enabled by donations from the AVI board members. This financial support has not been available since March 2003. However, AVI-USA - with indispensable help from its friends - has been able to meet this expense through September of this year.

When Aurotaranti came to work with AVI-USA at the end of 1998, it was during the Great Economic Bubble. Donations to Auroville began to rise. Since the salary of the staff was being met by a separate donation (and the flow-through of funds was increasing) AVI-USA lowered the percentage of its administrative deduction from 10% to 8.33% (symbolically 1/12th). At this level, the cost of operations has been covered – with the notable exception of salary and related expenses for staff. Although it is not possible to measure or characterize AVI's work in monetary terms, it is interesting to note that in the past six years ('98-'04), AVI-USA has received \$2,176,181 in donations for Auroville. In the six years prior to that ('92-'98), AVI took in \$911,896. (June recalls a time, in '73-'74, when the Auroville Association's bank balance was seven dollars.)

Looking back over the 33 years of Auroville International USA, one can truthfully say that its history is written in the lives of those who have been fortunate enough to participate in its activities, sharing this gift, this opportunity for service. It is written in the lives of all those individuals throughout the U.S. who - through this means - reached out to Auroville, to touch it, to offer some new resource for its growth, to be in touch with a wider community. And it is written in the lives of all Aurovilians who have been nurtured, strengthened, supported and acknowledged by this beautiful power and emissary of Auroville.

Auroville International USA's Board Members – Here's how our Board members feel about being involved with Auroville's work in the USA. Board Member profiles are at http://www.aviusa.org/about_board.html.

Paula Murphy, Board Member

I have been involved with AVI/USA from before its birth, when it was called Auroville Association. I was captured by June Maher to add my signature to documents needed for a tax exempt status. We also did fun things like readings of Sri Aurobindo and Mother, potlucks, meditations and presentations by very interesting people such as Jyoti Priya from the East West Cultural Center. When I moved from California to Wisconsin in 1976, I had to drop off the Board. I rejoined several years later when the office was in Sacramento under the care of Mary and Jack Alexander. That lasted for a few years then I dropped off to pursue my Masters' Degree in midwifery. Then, a couple of years ago, Nilauro asked at the AUM if there were people interested in joining the board of AVI-USA.. It felt like the right time to get involved again. Being on the board is a great way to feel connected to the work of Mother and Sri Aurobindo while living in the US. My life is very full with my work as a midwife and other responsibilities but the time I take to focus on the shared dream of Auroville is always a reminder of the great blessing of having Mother and Sri Aurobindo in my life. I feel a responsibility to continue this work, face the challenges and grow towards what Mother envisioned as the



US role in the world. Now, more than ever, I want to keep AVI-USA a vibrant, bright channel for the positive energies that are here so energy can flow out to the future that Auroville represents. Shine on!

Renu Neogy, Board Member

I have appreciated being an AVI-USA board member. It has kept me linked to people who are my soul mates and who suffer from the same ailment that I do, despite my being in Auroville; that is, to be close to Auroville and to be so far away at the same time. I struggle to bridge the logical/organized thinking of the west with the illogical realities of Auroville. This is further aggravated by our lofty ideals that clash with the very basic business of survival, and that clash with the social structures that are disintegrating with modernization. It is slow and hard to implement anything here, yet part of the battle seems to be to remain optimistic and hopeful of the future and to carry on as best as possible in the meantime.



If life is a learning process then this position, together with my other work in Auroville, has been an accelerated stint. I think AVI-USA could do with some grant-writing and reporting help. I hope to develop these skills someday, but for now I am happy to continue to serve the board to the best of my abilities.

Julian Lines, Board Member

My basic premise is that this yoga is about evolution. We are all participants in Nature's evolution, like it or not! The question is whether we consciously collaborate and make an effort to hasten our progress. Auroville is the living laboratory of this effort.



I've always felt each person who shares this vision should be an AVI-USA liaison. There should be a brochure or card or something in their wallet that shows a photo of the Banyan Tree and urn and Matrimandir. In such a big country each region should have an AVI-USA branch office.

So I'm just trying to follow my own advice and do some small part to help manifest Auroville. Woodstock is still a place of pilgrimage for people in search of "Peace, Love and Music". Since the original Woodstock Festival started on Sri Aurobindo's birthday in 1969, I don't find it a "mere coincidence". Just yesterday I was describing the Matrimandir to someone and they were amazed that such a place existed on the planet. It's good for people to know positive models are being attempted.

Bill Leon, President

Being on the Board, I'm never board, and I'm always learning something new about Auroville, about managing a nonprofit, and about myself. I have been on the Board since 1993 or so. I connected with AVI-USA shortly after visiting Auroville for the first time in 1991. I had studied the community and met many people before going. I was studying Sri Aurobindo's Yoga too.



I had planned the 1991 trip for six months of my sabbatical but it was shortened to one month. At the time, I knew no one in Auroville to ask for help and I was arriving just before Sri Aurobindo's birthday so all lodging was full in Pondicherry. Someone suggested that I call Jack Alexander who was then president of AVI-USA. He and I talked a bit and then he asked me when I was going. Then he asked me which flight. Then he said, "No problem, I'm on the same flight and I have it all arranged for Toine to meet us, a place to stay in Madras, and I'll arrange a place for you in Auroville." Naturally, Mother had it all arranged.

Now I am the President of AVI-USA...because I chew slowly. When, on one of our phone meetings in 1999, Larry Tepper left the post and someone said we needed a new president, everyone else quickly said, "Not me!" But I was eating my dinner and had my mouth full and then someone noticed my silence and said, "What about Bill?"

I was too late. But it was sweetened by the promise that I would not have to imitate Larry's yeoman efforts because all Board members would help equally. And thus it happened...at least until Nilauro was hired and did most of the work we were doing and more.

But the collective work is the real joy of the Board - even when we are dealing with complex decisions. We

work by consensus and often discuss and wait until the clearer path is discerned. It may seem slow at times, but we seldom backtrack. This too, is yoga.

Chandresh Patel, Secretary

Q: *What does it mean to you to be on the Board of AVI-USA, how are you involved?*

A: Ok. What it means is one and what I do is another. Means and actions don't add up as effectively as I would like them to.



I don't know why I came on board, perhaps the zeal to engage in the Mother's work, but why do I continue to stay?

The only meaningful work is to create the environment, means, processes and activities so people in the USA would get a chance to feel privileged to work towards Human Unity and Peace. Research on these topics, through sharing each one's latent and inherent specialties, qualities and abilities, will enhance the manifestation of the Dream.

Ed Giordano, Vice President

AVI-USA offers me a unique possibility to continue with and deepen my relationship to Auroville and all that it stands for. Being a karma yoga type of guy I'm always busy. But working to further Auroville's evolution is genuinely a tonic for me. Also, not physically being in the pot and part of the soup which is constantly cooking on the hot fire called Auroville, I have discovered a more detached perspective from which to view the progress of Her "soup". It's been a tremendous learning experience being part of a larger Auroville while not actually living there. We live Auroville here.



Constance, Treasurer

I joined the board of AVI-USA in 1980 after living in Auroville from '68 to '78, then in Taos, then Santa Cruz. AVI is, for me, simply an extension of the Auroville experiment. I am from the extremist wing of Auroville. From my perspective, the mission of AVI and Auroville is illuminated in the larger context of the lives of an eternal family streaming enthusiastically into incarnation to live and work with Sri Aurobindo and Mother on earth. We come here from the future, and it seems almost a divine absurdity to attempt to bind that vast experience to a town. And yet there it is. A universal town on the Coromandel Coast of India - somehow finite and yet with no boundaries at all.



In my experience, the work of AVI is triune in nature:

It is, foremost, a gift of service. One seems to find oneself thrown into the world with a burning question: What is the thing that must be done? Namas used to say that, if he knew nothing else, he knew there are two things that Mother wanted him to do: build the Matrimandir and plant trees. She said so. The Aurovilian lives and grows through meaningful action - meaningful because it serves the future. For me, AVI is a gift of service, a gift of life, a gift of meaning. And I am profoundly thankful.

It is a homecoming. Mother spoke of Auroville as a "universal town" where one can "live freely as a citizen of the world." Wherever the work of Auroville and AVI is being done, one sheds easily the small false identities and is lifted out of suffocating social, ethnic and political bonds to breathe freely again the open air. The Aurovilian is home anywhere - because one's feet are always firmly planted on the whole earth.

It is the experience of a living reality. Here is the great secret. When we join in solidarity of action, we gradually become aware of a solidarity of being. There is a common life in the earth. We call it "Auroville", but it can be given other names. It is conscious - we are conscious with it. It breathes - we breathe with it. Soon we stop asking "what?" to the world and begin asking "who?"

The first is, of course, the opportunity to be of service.

The second is the experience of sharing the extended sense of home.

The third is, more parochially, being able to feel the life of Auroville, the pulse.

Larry Tepper, Previous President

The best moments of my time with AVI-USA, and throughout my personal yoga, have always been when I've finally achieved an openness and permitted myself to do what was necessary.



It happened at the first Monte Toyan All-USA Meeting (AUM) in 1987. June Maher had mentioned at an early session that AVI-USA was seeking new board members. It was then that the Divine insistence began. Quietly, in the back of my mind, "Well, you do have the time, you know ... and it would be good for you." So after a day of that I walked up to June and volunteered.

My first big task was organizing the next year's AUM, to be held on the University of Colorado campus. Lynda Lester, Julian Lines, Suzanne MacDonald and I worked on putting it together, collaborating via teleconference every few weeks. Suzanne's amazing organizing skills and Julian's network of contacts (is anyone more connected?) made Lynda's and my logistical work in Boulder fall together easily. Before we knew it, AUM was upon us and we were swept away.

I remember a board meeting at June and Al's cabin at Yosemite. We were discussing what we needed to do. I can only remember that I started to speak, and the words just came out, powerful and right. When I stopped, Constance spoke forcefully: "Don't forget what you said!" I was dumbfounded because it wasn't me that was speaking. Moments after the words escaped me, I couldn't remember because they weren't mine. About a month afterwards, the great Yosemite fire swept through and burned the cabin down.

At about that time, e-mail was becoming generally available. First I set up a list for friends of AVI-USA - just a handful of people. Then another list for board members only (with grumblings about conspiratorial exclusivity). Then another for discussion of the yoga, and the

snowball was on its way to becoming an avalanche. Now and again you'll still hear long-timers call them the "com-pats lists". Do any of you recall Sambochess or the agent provocateur disciple of Patrizia?

And now, to switch gears a bit... I consider my time working for AVI-USA as one of service. But that (just being sort of high-class worker bees) is not all we are called to do. Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's vision is one of both astounding breadth and immense depth. Each of us needs to look into our hearts to discover the ways we can say "yes" when the Divine calls us, to stick to the most fundamental issues that face us and find a way to bring about the Divine Life on earth.

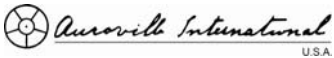
Jack Alexander, Previous President, Mary Alexander, Previous Treasurer

Mary and I came back to California in 1982 after several years being in the proverbial desert, for several lifetimes. With a huge relief, we returned to our connection with AVI and family. Almost immediately, we set up in Sacramento and the office shifted to our home and later to an office. Mary as the treasurer and me as the president. What a delight! What a fulfillment! What a huge task! What energy we got to imbibe! It was a non-stop rush of connection and privilege. People asking for information, or asking for assistance in going to Auroville, or asking assistance in applying to live in Auroville, or getting information in the process of writing a term paper on Auroville; people sending money to Auroville, books to Auroville, seeds to Auroville, tools to Auroville, questions to Auroville.

It was always uplifting, always captivating, always challenging - always involving every part of the being. Ten years of hard work and Bliss.



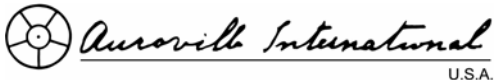
Jack plays a tune for June during the Auro-Family Reunion.



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