

Letter from a past FS member - Shailesh Venkatesh

(dated: 16th Jan 2019, sent to Gowriben)

Today I received a bunch of photographs from my days at Friends Society from Gauri Aunty. Nostalgic memories!

I can't exactly remember how I got involved with FS. I remember meeting Ajay Rajendran for the first time in the queue for Engineering admissions in Ahmedabad, I think, he and I had the same PCMB score (400 / 450), so he was alongside me in the queue which goes in order of your score to pick the stream / college for your under-grad degree. He chose chemical engineering while I chose Electronics Engg. After that encounter, I must have met him again through Sandeep Dadlani who was my classmate in Electronic Engg and an ex-classmate of Ajay from Rosary School. After that, how exactly Ajay influenced me to join FS is totally blank in my memory. It is funny to think that not everyone is inclined to volunteer. None of our friends from my class of Engg or Ajay's joined FS. I can't claim I was very inclined to volunteer either, because to be honest, I did quite a poor job as a volunteer in those days. I remember reluctantly helping out in some blood donation camps, being very shy and tongue-tied at 'Cheer-Up' (what a lovely name for that activity!) and not very enterprising at getting things done. I did enjoy visiting Gowri Aunty's place and eating meals there quite often.

To my own surprise, I was inducted into the EC in my second year of FS as Editor, 'Involve', the FS newsletter. It was supposed to be a quarterly newsletter of FS activities. I was poor at delegating and securing content. Plus, in my free time, I procrastinated getting anything done. When the deadline was upon me, I usually had the deadline of exams in college staring at me as well and so gave up the newsletter. Eventually, only one newsletter got published for the whole year. 'Involve' was a tough ask in those days which is a shame because a good dedicated editor could have churned out a list of content given how much FS used to do.

In the third year at FS, I became Secretary with Sujit as Joint Secretary and Seema as 'Cheer-Up' in charge. I had one of the best teams. We did a lot of work. The EC meeting that year which we held somewhere outside Baroda, a train journey away, was very enjoyable. Herding all the EC members to ensure we had a good turnout was a challenge in itself. I recollect herding one girl whose name I can't recollect literally from her home to the railway station. I even watched over her packing her bags. In that year, we raised funds by selling firecrackers door-to-door for Deepavli. One Mr. Banjera, and entrepreneur and founder of PRPL Baroda was one of the biggest donors to that exercise. He bought a load of firecrackers from me very enthusiastically.

When I look back, I realize how lucky we were to have had such a wonderful foundation to do something useful for society. And the activities designed by the founding members like Sagun Desai and encouraged and continued by Gowri Rajendran, the Chairperson, during my time were so noble and uplifting not only to the beneficiaries but also the volunteers. In

fact, I would argue that the volunteers were the bigger beneficiaries. Of course, then, I did not have this appreciation and possibly squandered the opportunity to get more of it. But, nonetheless still feel proud of having been associated with something special.

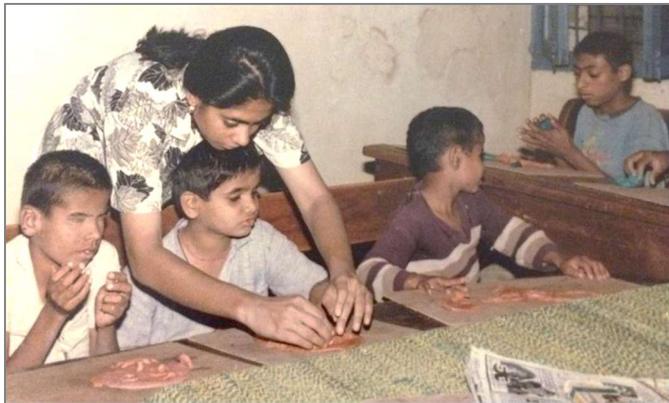
The photos from Gowriben today brought back these memories from 22 years ago so vividly. Looking back at those pictures and noticing how we (Ajay, Sujeet, Seema, Alpesh, Supreet, Tahreer, Das and myself) looked then is funny and surreal at the same time. The picture of Seema at 'Cheer-Up' is by far the best of the lot not the least because she is looking so pretty and also because it captures a lovely moment in an activity that was probably the best of the lot that FS used to carry out in those days.



Shailesh Venkatesh (in circle)



Today



Seema – "Cheer-Up" activity

