

LIFE'S SMALL WONDERS

Like someone so aptly said, "I have found that among its other benefits, giving liberates the soul of the giver." In hindsight, there is no way I could have foreseen this path in my life.

When I was just four years old, my sister and I were afflicted with whooping cough. In those days, there was no real cure for the disease. I survived unharmed but my little sister developed a severe infection in her kidneys. Her health issues left her frail and she struggled through the years. Seven years after she underwent a kidney transplant, my dad passed away and this deeply affected my sister. A counsellor recommended that she work with children afflicted with cerebral palsy so that she could look beyond her own issues. It worked wonders but, six months later, my sister tragically succumbed to her ill health.

The loss of my dad and sister in quick succession took a heavy toll on me and it took me a year to recover from the trauma. I had all these unanswered questions about life and death crowding my mind and was searching for something meaningful to root me back in the land of the living. It was then that I decided to pick up from where my sister had left; thus began my journey with the Bengaluru Spastics' Society in 1986. I found it immensely rewarding and, in 1987, I received a diploma in special education and learning disabilities from the Karnataka Parents' Association for Mentally Retarded Citizens. Then, in 1996,

Ramaiya: Value the little joys of life

I earned a government licence to practice. Apart from working on academic and vocational training, and helping the children develop functional literacy, we started working for inclusive education. We wanted to expose these children to the real world and talked to schools to make it part of their curriculum.

We managed to integrate seven children into the inclusive curriculum over two years and this was the most fulfilling point in my two decade-long association with the Spastics Society. Eventually, the inclusive education programme was scrapped because of resistance from the parents of other children. This was way back in 1992, when there was limited awareness on the subject. Today, when I see schools adopting inclusive education, I am thrilled our society has come a long way.

Working with these children has given me a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment I could have hardly imagined. It has taught me to appreciate life's small wonders and relinquish the bitter memories. I have also forged lifelong friendships through the years with other volunteers and parents, and we stay in touch and support each other through thick and thin.

In 2011, when I had to undergo major surgery, I believe the prayers of my friends and the wishes of these little angels helped me survive through it. I have learnt from these angels that life may not always give what you want, but if you are resilient and give it your best, you may end up discovering things you had never imagined.

—Jyothi Ramaiya, Bengaluru



Prasad Durga