1974

When I arrived in Auroville, it seemed very far from what I had expected. The brochures and articles had painted a different picture. I had already visited India some years before, and wrote off the whole country as hopeless. How wrong can you be?! Now, I was about to commit my life to Auroville because I had discovered Sri Aurobindo in the meantime.
Sri Aurobindo was overwhelming. He agreed with me on everything and more! His *Savitri* changed my life. He and the Mother offered me “the Sunlit Path.” If a city was going to be built to evolve humanity toward the Supramental, that’s where I had to go. **Of course, I found out why it had to be in India!**

To live in Auroville, I knew I had to change. How could I camp in such an inhospitable place with a bunch of foreigners who quarreled too often? I had to change inside. I had to build Auroville as a state of consciousness in myself.

In those days, everyone called me Bill. I worked on getting the “ill” out of “Bill”. I wanted to be called “B”, just to be, but when I had the guts years later to declare my new symbolic name, people just laughed. They thought I was making fun of all the people who change their names in Auroville. Now most people realize “being” is serious while smiling, metaphysically speaking.

Planting trees is so spontaneous and obvious when you’re living in a semi-desert. I joined the Matrimandir Nursery crew to plant the two million trees. Actually, many more got planted and the cows and goats ate at least a million.
We had a super production line in the nursery. I planted seeds in specially-made pots for maximum germination. The little seedlings were transplanted into plastic bags to grow for a year into plantables.
We had Lieske to do the transplanting because she had the touch and nearly all she transplanted lived. Most other people killed about half what they transplanted. Some people had told Lieske she was too old to join Auroville. She was a retired music teacher. Not only did she work every day all day into her nineties, but her pension supported the work.

As the nursery was part of Matrimandir, we participated in the concrete pours at the building site continually.

After a few years the tree and plant production line slowed as many nurseries sprung up in the Green Belt and people did their own propagation. I shifted to the Matrimandir Workers’ Camp to work full time in the construction. That was a major inexpressible blessing but I never forgot how much I received from the trees and flowers.

At one point, three of us were given an impossible task called the “ramp”. We had to build a bridge in the sky, a curved and ascending bridge, that is to say, twenty-two multi-ton sections that first had to be built on the ground and then welded together in the sky to make a walkway for people to reach the inner chamber from below.
On the ground was a huge pile of long straight steel pipes. Piero said to John, Armand and me: “We’re behind schedule, get this ramp started.” Peter, a welder who lived in Pondy, rode his bicycle out everyday and welded all day long.
While we were cutting, grinding, and fitting all those pipe sections, I could sense the thousands of people who would ascend and cross this "bridge" into the inner chamber of their soul and Auroville's. That intention got me through many long hot days. Three years later, we finished the ramp.

The building of Matrimandir took thirty-seven years. The gardens and lake are still going to take a few more ...

1976 - 1980

The attempted takeover of Auroville by the Sri Aurobindo Society because the Mother was no longer physically present became traumatic. The whole Community began to live in crisis mode. 1976 -1980 was a “battle" that I survived better than others because I had Marcia loving me. She was an angel from heaven and Brazil. I knew the death threat, even though the tip of the knife pressed against my chest was only for intimidation. But the beating by the SAS goondas did hurt.
No Aurovilian betrayed me to the police when they came to deport me. "We don't know where he is." So my canceled visa, deportation order, and illegal alien status, I could live with for the years that it took for the Parliament to pass the Auroville Act declaring that Auroville belonged legally to Humanity. Thank you India!!

1983

After nine years of uninterrupted stay in Auroville, my parents sent me a ticket to USA: “We want to see you.”

That was fine, but I didn’t realize my father didn’t want me to return. When his tricks to keep me there failed, he disowned me: “You’ll never get a penny from me.” He said I had disgraced the family, my country, my religion, and myself. After six years, he let go of that.

When he died, my mother sent me some money that I could put into Verité, a new community that Anamika, Dhanya, Wandana and I started.
Tency and I, at that time, began the Center for Scientific Research (CSR). We needed a legal organizational framework to receive grants to implement and promote renewable energy for the “emerging township” and for India.

Through a miracle, CSR received a 100% tax exemption from the government. We could be the umbrella for so many projects in Auroville including the Earth Institute, the construction of Quiet, Solar Kitchen, and Visitors’ Center. Windmills, solar, biogas, biological waste water treatment and appropriate building technologies like ferrocement and compressed earth blocks, all thrived from their CSR start.

Zero Waste Auroville gradually became a passion of mine as the plague of consumerism, plastic and other waste spread disastrously in India. Pollution is pushing us toward extinction. What could be done? Everywhere in the world there’s a housing shortage and a garbage abundance. Isn’t a solution to build houses out of garbage? Why waste and pollute with garbage and trash? We already have the technology to build with waste. I had to do it.
I finally got building permission for it because my old friends Andy and Gerard from the Matrimandir work happened to be in the Town Development Council. I collected trash for the house for two years. Finally Nandini, my wife, said: “Enough, build it now.”

We are now living happily ever after in the Trash Mahal.

Today, looking back, there’s that marvelous hindsight that longevity gives of all the amazing people who have built Auroville, who have contributed their lives to make our impossible dream manifest more and more.

And we are only at the beginning . . .

B, Auroville, April 2022

B zero-wasting - and still at work for Auroville as for the past 48 years!