

# COURAGE

By Alexandra Woodward



Coming to India I knew I would have to face myself. Such a departure from my normal life in quiet, comfortable, convenient Maryland would obviously challenge me mentally, spiritually, emotionally, and even physically, especially since it is my first trip to the homeland of my ancestors. It is only logical that my experience here should test me. But the nature of my struggles this year is something that only God knows, and for better or for worse, it is impossible to prepare. All I can do is maintain my peace and observe.

Here at the Mithra School there is so much room for creativity. Since I'm here for a relatively short amount of time and I speak fluent English, I am given first priority with the children; whenever I want time with them, all I have to do is ask and twenty minutes later I have a whole class for the afternoon. Ms. Bella and Dr. Joe have asked me to plan a garden and a pet corner, decide where to put the playground, teach and have reading times with the children, and my every suggestion is accepted immediately and with enthusiasm. I can do murals with the children on the whitewashed walls of the new school building, I can organize a reading corner and clubs, play games. But something inside of me stops short, afraid, and I find myself instead spending all of my time inside the school's little library, organizing books. It is a necessary task, true, because the government will come to check that the titles, authors, publishers, and price of at least 2000 books are catalogued, but by isolating myself in the dusty little room, I avoid what I have come here to do. I can see it happening, and I berate myself for not having the courage to take advantage of the incredible opportunities I have here.

Courage, yes. But what is courage? It is the power to overcome fears, I think. But what fears? What am I afraid of? No matter how I try, I cannot identify what could

possibly go wrong. So why am I so reluctant to take initiative? Perhaps it is a fear of responsibility. Maybe a fear of starting something I will never finish. But those seem so trivial; this is a chance to manage a project without feeling overwhelming pressure of approval and to give the children activities that develop creativity, social skills, and the belief in the improvement of their lives. It's also the opportunity I've been longing for to connect with them and become part of their lives. Courage, I decide, is the strength and commitment to follow one's inner nature. For better or for worse, it is not as straightforward as diving through a blazing fire to save a trapped toddler. It is overstepping fears, even hidden and unknown ones, to act upon that voice that comes from deep within – a voice which, if one is not careful, may easily be muffled by the power of the heart and mind.

And then I realize my block: I am afraid I don't have courage. Despairingly, I wonder how I can ever proceed without trusting myself to believe in myself. It seems a tight, impenetrable circle determined to keep me afraid and behind closed doors. But there is a satisfaction in knowing the source of my hesitance, and it becomes a challenge; in order to get past my fears, I must have complete and total trust. Not necessarily in my mind, but in my capacity and in my guidance. If I have a sincere intention and faith, things will automatically unfold – even things beyond what I could ever have constructed for myself.

But learning to trust is itself a process, and I must be careful to be patient. I have to believe that all will work out on its own.....