

Rev. Gretchen DeVries taken up to the Place of God

On February 24, 2005 Rev. Gretchen DeVries passed away in her hometown of Cortland, Nebraska, USA. She was 81 years old. Everyone at ARI would like to offer our deepest condolences to her family. "Our Lord is carrying out his plan beyond our knowledge. God sent us Gretchen when we needed her and He made maximum use of her skills and capacities."

Rev. Toshihiro Takami

Dear Gretchen,

Your life and your friendship were such a gift to our family when we were in Japan and afterwards when we would connect on this side of that big ocean.

So many sweet memories of being with you. The first one that comes to mind is when we got off some kind of conveyance on a trip to visit graduates in India and Father Ara, I think it was, hugged you and took your hand and off you walked together down the platform beginning to catch up on the years since you'd seen each other. Every graduate we met would react in the same way to you, with love and joy written all over their faces. And reflected back to them from yours.

And from the way you treated me whenever I came to ARI, it was so easy to understand why you

were so loved by the graduates — it's because you loved them when they came to ARI and Japan, when they were in a new and strange place and they felt like fish out of water. You were a living, breathing and caring hospitality center wherever you were.



Over the years at ARI you must have listened to thousands of heart stories with your caring ear and compassionate spirit. Whenever I was upset about anything and you were around,

I felt that you understood what I was feeling even when I couldn't express it in words. You brought God's love to me by responding to my immediate needs; you comforted me and did whatever you could to ease my agitated heart.

I know you did this for countless people who were participants, staff, or visitors to ARI. Gretchen, you mean so much to all of us who loved you and who felt loved by you. You gave so much encouragement, affection, warmth and quiet humor to us.

I'm glad that God let us meet each other and become friends, dear Gretchen. Knowing you was a really huge gift in my life, and I will never be able to thank you enough for loving me as if I were a younger sister. I will always thank God for the privilege of knowing you, and will look forward to seeing you again when my life on earth comes to a close.

Love,
Pam

Pam Hasegawa is a regular ARI volunteer who worked closely alongside Gretchen.

Thank you so much for continuing to support the mission that Gretchen dedicated her life to

By the time of this publication AFARI had received \$8,070 in the name of Gretchen DeVries. Additionally about \$500 has been donated by churches here in Japan. As promised these donations will be matched by one ARI supporter, bringing the total contribution to \$17,140 to be put toward the scholarships of two participants; Grace and Pricillia of Liberia.

Tsunami Summit Meeting of Indian Ocean Nations

On May 12, 2005 nine representatives gathered together to hold a discussion about the Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2005. This meeting however, did not take place in a fancy hotel in a big city like Hong Kong or Singapore. It did not involve important political figures or relief agencies. The meeting took place at the old shabby tables of the ARI conference room and its attendants were grassroots leaders who had themselves experienced these deadly waves and the devastation they caused to their own people.

ARI was in a position to hold such a meeting because ARI has *always* been a place where people of many nations gather together and share their experiences. Such a kind of meeting is commonplace here. The only difference between this meeting and others is that this one was formally called, whereas most meetings of this nature take place around the round tables of our Koinonia dining room as we share our food together. So in your imagination we invite you to join us. Pull up a chair and listen.

Sharada India

"December 26 is a very bad day for us, because many people lost their life in tsunami. Really it is a dark day, when we heard the news through television, really we surprised about it. Then we took into action. We sat with our community and discussed with them, then decided it and collected 25,000 Rupees and contributed through Karnataka Chief Minister's Relief Fund. We are working with

tribal people who are very much disadvantaged, but still these people could willingly contribute something for the benefit of the tsunami affected people."

Tumiari North Sumatra, Indonesia

"If any of my family were a victim of tsunami, I couldn't express it by words, from deepest heart I'm really sad. It is true what the former President of USA has told during his visit to Indonesia in January 2005 that, 'it is worse than a war I saw before'."

Adikary Sri Lanka "the problem is now psychological. Some people try to commit suicide. Some have gone mad. So many children lost their parents, brothers and sisters and other relatives. Nature is a gift for human. We are fortunate to have such a beautiful gift, but to-

day it brought us pain and misery. We never thought such an incident would happen in our dreams. No one can bring back

to their parents the lives of children who passed away."

Madhu India "the world woke up with the devastating news of Earth Quake and terrible hungry Tsunami waves in the Indian Ocean. Despite this chaotic situation, everyone is working together to see another NEW DAY."

Laksiri Sri Lanka (Training Assistant) "when the tsunami occurred on 26th December 2004, I was in Japan working with the ARI training program and very much worried about the people of my country who were badly affected by these killer waves. However, when

I went back to Sri Lanka after completing training at ARI, I immediately rushed to some of the affected places and more importantly visited

one remote village where hardly any relief materials had reached. I could see in this village that, people are very much unorganized and advised them how to organize and share the materials coming to this particular camp where 106 families are living. The situation of children was also very heartbreaking for many had lost parents, their homes, and their schools.

Graduates: In addition to the participants of 2005, we heard from over 25 Graduates through letters and emails about their work and efforts to provide relief for their people. In many cases they were the ones to coordinate the sudden influx of supplies from relief agencies, ensuring it was distributed fairly and efficiently to the people of greatest need. They were able to do this because they are already working closely with the people and have the necessary local understanding and expertise that the incoming aid organizations need to rely on.

Thomas Mathews (1988) India

Religious bigotry often hampers unity and causes tension among communities, but there have been



Tsunami Summit Meeting – ARI



Destroyed church in India

occasions when certain sections of religious institutions rise above prejudices and unite for the service of the humanity. This happened tellingly in Nagapattinam district in the aftermath of the tsunami, when churches, mosques and temples broke with tradition to help the hapless people.

Raj (1982), Suresh(1990), Kumar (1988) India Loving greetings and

Why organic

Ariel De la Cruz

From the beginning of history, people gathered food through nomadic hunting and collected the food that grew naturally. Food was bountiful and could easily be taken from the land. As time went on, people changed their ways to sedentary farming in which people raised crops for their own food and also as feed for domestic animals. People depended only on nature for their harvest. For thousands of years people farmed in the traditional way using their own land for cultivation and generation after generation the soil remained rich and fertile.

In more recent times new ideas and discoveries emerged that have caused great change in our lives and especially in farming. In many ways people tried to develop new farming through their use of technology. The population of the world is growing rapidly and it is necessary to keep everyone fed. Consequently so-called modern and "scientific ways of farming" were discovered, this agricultural technology had a subtle way spreading all over the world. Experts and scientist conducted trials in dozens of countries, and the results were

many thanks for your kind letter and concern towards each one of the ARI graduates and the people in the Tsunami hit areas. By the grace of God we are keeping fine and thanks to the Almighty who has saved us in the difficult time since we are very near to the affected areas. We hope and pray to the Savior that the graduates of ARI who are working for the grass root level people in Indonesia,

good, convincing farmers to make big changes in their farming practices.

When the technology of the so-called "Green Revolution" was introduced to the Philippines, many farmers were excited to adopt it because they saw the "miracle rice" variety which could be harvested in only 120 days from planting, while the traditional rice variety needed 180-185 days. This made the big news to the country the farmer could harvest twice a year because of the short growing time, promising twice the yield as the traditional varieties. But these changes did not come without a price. The traditional culture of the farmer and the farming community was lost. The biodiversity of the soil was lost. The streams, rivers, and lakes became polluted and their fish died. The chemicals used for this agriculture posed a hazard to human health and the same to animals.

All of these problems in farming have become global issues and because of these things many have begun to think more deeply and change their ways of farming again. The words "Organic Farming" have become the voice of the farmers who want to save the future of the soil and also the environment. In reality, nature be-

Thailand, Sri Lanka and India are safe. We are hereby proud to say that the training at ARI, Japan has motivated us and given strength for extending our help to the people who are in need in various difficult times. We thankfully remember our Beloved Dr. Toshihiro Takami and all the ARI family members in our prayers for their contributions in our achievements.

gan this way of farming millions of years ago that's why nature is so abundant.

The reason why organic farming is good is because this is the only way of farming that has concern for nature; respects and depends on the future of the soil, enhances biodiversity, and uses natural resources without depleting them. Organic material is recycled according to its maximum capacity and productivity. People develop skills to be self reliant and reduce the consumption of energy. Organic farming also emphasizes the importance of the health of people. If the health of the soil is poor, the health of people is poor because our food is taken from the soil. The simple logic is what we are putting in the nutrition of the soil into our own bodies and fertile soil produces nutritious food. Organic farming makes healthy people who understand nature and protect it for the future of our children's children.

Ariel De la Cruz – ARI Participant – Philippines

Ariel has been practicing organic farming on his family farm for many years. At ARI he is eager to learn new techniques as well as share his knowledge and experience with others.

A Time for Reflection

Anyone observing ARI for even a short period of time would probably say that it is constantly changing... and they would be right. With about 2/3 of its population turning over every year, and most of them coming from rural areas in Asia and Africa, it would be strange if ARI did not change from year to year.

These new people bring the entire world, with all of its rapid transformations, into ARI, renewing it each spring.

However, as I reflect back on my last 12 years,

I believe that now is an especially dynamic time for ARI. ARI is electing a new Board of Trustees Chairman and the search is on for our next Director. In the last 3 years ARI has had a turnover of 10 of its 15 full time staff members. And in the midst of these comings and goings we can see a number of promising developments.

In this article I would like to look at some of the major changes that have occurred over my time at ARI, focusing on four areas; 1) How graduates have transformed recruitment 2) Becoming a mission centered staff 3) Emerging curriculum focus 4) Staff community building. As I look at these changes I will show why I am extremely excited and optimistic about ARI's future.

The entire time I have been on staff I have coordinated the Admissions and Graduate Outreach

sections. But no staff member does just one, or three, or even ten things. I have served on a number of committees, taught classes, traveled overseas to attend graduate meetings and meet supporters, driven our buses all around Japan, managed volunteers and work campers, written publications, butchered chickens and cut acres and acres of grass for



The "early" years. JB with daughter Barbara Rose 1993

our cattle. In short I have been a typical ARI staff member. For the last 2 years I have served on the ARI Board of Councilors. Also I am proud to say that I am an ARISA member with dues fully paid. Having worked with so many different elements of the greater ARI community in so many ways has allowed me to see changes from a number of different perspectives.

Graduates Transform Admissions

During my first few years as Admissions Coordinator there were a lot of difficulties. Participants arrived late, sometimes by 2 or 3 months. Each year one or more of them would "disappear" into Japan's underground economy. Rarely was more than 1/3 of a class made up of women. And while all staff members were involved in selecting Participants, lack of relevant information about applicants did not allow staff to make very informed choices.

But all of these points have changed for the better. In the last five years, nearly all participants arrived by opening ceremony in early April. Not a single person has "disappeared." Nearly every class has been 1/2 or almost 1/2 made up of women. And now staff members have sufficient reliable information about applicants to make wise decisions. Most of these positive changes can be credited to involving our graduates as "Recruitment Agents."

Whenever possible graduates now interview applicants in their own countries, visit Sending Organizations, assist candidates with applying for their visas and making travel arrangements, and orienting candidates before they come to ARI as to what they can expect here. Furthermore, staff have observed more participants to be highly motivated to serve their people and serious about their



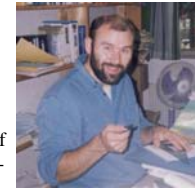
training. Although some credit must go to the improvements in the curriculum, which I will discuss later, one cannot gainsay the positive influ-

ence graduates have had on our recruitment, and the effect this has had on ARI's ability to carry out its mission.

Becoming a Mission Centered Staff

ARI staff members have become increasingly mission focused during my time here. About 5 years ago, ARI re-wrote its mission statement to better reflect its vi-

sion for the world and how ARI works to achieve this vision. Two years ago, staff began an involved visioning process to translate our mission statement into Key Concepts that would then guide staff as we reflected upon our curriculum and other aspects of the training program. Last year staff completed these Key Concepts. Now all community members can clearly understand the meaning of such concepts as "Servant Leader" or "Dignity of Labor." Now, more than ever, I am impressed by the mission centeredness of our staff. They understand it. They are proud of it, and they are eager to spread it.



Emerging Curriculum Focus

No where is ARI's mission centeredness more clear than the dramatic changes in the curriculum, especially in the last two years. Participants are not just observing models of leaders or learning indirectly about leadership through participation in the program. Rather participants take on leadership roles in virtually all aspects of ARI life. This is especially noticeable in the shift from staff centered decision making in food production to participant centered decision making.

This year ARI divided up the vegetable and rice fields on campus into 8 parts. These parts are assigned to 8 groups. These groups, led by participants, decide what to plant and how to manage their fields. Although many have never done this before, they are given

just enough support from staff. ARI's Livestock have also been similarly divided up. Now all participants manage their own integrated mini-farm while also taking turns in the final part of the 'food life' cycle - preparing and serving meals. They reflect on their personal growth in regular meetings with their consultants and through writing a final paper that pulls together all their learning, and connects it with their work back in their countries and their dreams for the future. The results are amazing. Participants are engaged in work and take responsibility on a level that I have never seen before.



Rice Transplanting 2005

Staff Community Building

Although something as intangible as staff community is hard to discuss, I feel that this is the single most important element that encourages all the other positive changes. At the same time, without staff community, there can be no positive change or growth. ARI's great strength is in the synergy that comes when we work together as a community, and I feel that this must begin with the staff community.

In my observation, ARI's staff have never listened to one another more closely, or shared with each other more openly, than today. And this strong staff community atmosphere radiates out into the greater ARI community, encouraging participants, volunteers, graduates and supporters to listen and share with greater depth and creativity.

I have been extremely blessed to have had the chance to spend 12 years at ARI. To be able to live and work in this international community which makes an honest attempt to live a sustainable lifestyle, being involved in producing the food we eat, learning every day from our participants and graduates, working side by side extremely talented, supportive and committed fellow staff members and volunteers. All of this and

much more, has been life transforming - over and over again.

The first thing I will do after leaving ARI will be to attend the American Friends of ARI (AFARI) General Meeting, just 3 days after

my departure from Japan. At that time I will join AFARI and continue to be a jubilant supporter of ARI, and its mission through that organization.

Moving? Take 'Take My Hand' with you. Please email us your new address at ecu@ari-edu.org!

ARI Staff – Yoshitane ‘Tane’ Murao Visits Graduates in Bangladesh

“Seven villagers died because of cold!” I could not believe my own eyes, when I read the front page of the English newspaper in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Beyond my expectation, it was very cold in January in Bangladesh, especially in the northern rural areas which are very poor. Every year people die because of cold.

I visited several organizations of ARI graduates and they were busy preparing blankets for poor families. Thirty four years ago, Dr. Takami came to this country

with 50 young Japanese to offer aid after a serious cyclone. This activity



Shefaly (left) with villagers

provided the foundation of one of the first Japanese NGO’s. Since then, many Japanese NGO’s have been established to work for this country. And also the Japanese government has contributed a huge amount of money. ARI boasts 77 graduates from here. However, since independence in 1971, Bangladesh remains one of poorest countries in Asia. There is terror by religious fundamentalists, and corruption by politician is the worst in the world.

During my visit, I stayed at the PROSHIKA Dhaka office, and I visited ARI graduates who are working in rural areas. I got into a long distance bus bound for the

north together with Ms. Shefaley Begum (2004 ARI Graduate) who works as the organic farming training program coordinator in PROSHIKA. It was rice transplanting season, so I could see farmers cultivating paddy fields by water buffalo and children working with their fathers. Shefaley spent half of month to visit rural areas to collect information about the situation of the people there.

In Bangladesh, women’s position is low in society. So NGO’s often target women, and organize women’s group. NGO’s provide education programs or income generation programs for them.

One day, when I visited one village, suddenly I met a company marching and dancing with a loud drum and trumpet music. It was a marriage ceremony. The bride and groom had been marching through the village

together with relatives the whole day. That bride was 13 years old. By law people cannot marry before 18 years old, however early marriage is still practiced in rural areas. And also women have to pay huge amounts of money to get married. Early

marriage is one of the factors of women’s low position in society, because if women get married early, they have to work in the house, and cannot continue their education.

In rural areas, women are not allowed to go out. You can find only men shopping in the market or chatting in the café. Therefore the regular women’s group meetings held by NGO’s are



Early marriage

particularly important as they provide in most cases the only opportunity for women to share their lives with others. Furthermore micro-credit is an important activity of NGO’s in Bangladesh. It was started by Grammen Bank, and has become a world famous technique for development. Women use these small loans to rent land to produce farm products, to raise livestock like cattle or poultry, or to open a small shop. These activities help women gain independence and overcome the discrimination against them.

In Bangladesh, the economic gap between the city and the rural area is widening. Rich people become richer and richer and poor people become poorer and poorer. In such a situation, I strongly felt the need to train a rural leader who can work together with the people, like Ms. Shefaley Begum.



Local women’s group

ARI Family News

New Staff member

Hello! My name is Michiko Sugawara. I am working in ARI Admissions and Graduate Outreach, succeeding Mr. JB Hoover’s 12 year’s work in this section. I will be in contact with



Participants from the very beginning to long after their graduation from ARI. I would like

Tim Brunoehler, volunteer in 2003/2004 reflects on his time at ARI

When I arrived in ARI as a one-year volunteer to substitute my military service, I thought of it as my “working place” for the next year. But in the course of the following months, ARI became infinitely more to me: A home, a global family and a place for radically new experiences. In fact, I think I can now speak of ARI as my second birth place: Through all the things I have been confronted with in ARI, my life has changed its direction. It has made a 360 degree turn.

After leaving ARI, I felt homesick for the first time in my life, even though “distance” had never been a problem for me. It was rather the healthy, meaningful and in every regard “human” life in ARI, that I missed. I felt totally unlucky and misplaced in the metropolis. I chose for entering university. Suddenly being pulled out of a life highly valued by oneself and being pushed into a meaningless and anonymous city lifestyle hurt very much.

to contribute to developing stronger networks with ARI Graduates. With strong ties to Graduates, we can bring good students from the grassroots level. I enjoy working in the fields with all the members of the ARI community. I am very happy to work at ARI, to live together with ARI members, and to feel that we are connected to people all over the world.

Ishii san, ‘Mother’ of ARI says goodbye

I am really grateful to have spent 18 years at ARI. The first 6 years I worked in the kitchen to cook

food for participants. I was very moved when Takami-sensei said, “ARI Foodlife is a life which values food, which means living to provide for our own life.” Later I enjoyed working in General Affairs. When I look back my life in ARI, it seems that I was trained how to live, more than I was doing work for ARI. I would like to show my deep appreciation to all ARI community members.



I often think that I might be “happier” if I had never experienced life in ARI: I would not spend days and nights thinking about the state of the world and my contribution to it. I would be the ordinary young man of my society: uncritical, naïve, egoist, materialistic and worrisless.

I have finally accepted the fact that my way of thinking can be a burden. But I take pride in claim-

ing to be one of the few people who at least make an attempt to fully understand the mechanisms of today’s world in order to make a change. All the motivation for this I owe to ARI.

My year in ARI was one of the very rare experiences of which one instantly knows that they will change one’s life forever. I am deeply thankful for having had this indescribable precious opportunity.

Morning Gathering

Toshihiro Takami - April 18, 2005

(Bible Reading: Mark 4: 31-34)
“Jesus Christ always spoke in parables which means that he fully participated in the lives of the people. To speak in parables needs much concentration and requires you to know well the people you are talking to. He often spoke to the people in their way so people could understand. But to his disciples he spoke in parables so they could understand the real meaning of his talking through the truth which the parables contain. So Jesus was maybe the best participant in the life of ARI [...]

Each cm of our campus was a gift of God. And since ARI has been founded more than 1000 graduates have worked on it and improved it. And you also, in the time you are here, will work for improving it further. All the staff members are here to support you.”

This is an excerpt from a morning gathering held by Dr. Takami. We have started to send sharings such as this once a week to all who want to keep in touch with this meaningful, spiritual side of ARI. To join the mailing list, just send an email to “Asian-Rural-Institute-subscribe@yahoo.com”

ARI Graduate SPEAKS in North America!!

Invite him to your church

Laksiri Peiris (ARI Graduate Laksiri 1995 and Training Assistant 2005) will travel to North America between from Dec 2005 to Feb 2006 to speak about his experiences in ARI and his work with his people in the rural areas of Sri Lanka. If you would like to invite him to your church please contact:

Steven Cutting
Ecumenical Relations ecu@ari-edu.org

Greetings. I am Fr Laksiri Peiris, Anglican Priest from Sri Lanka, Diocese of Kurunegala. I am in charge of eight rural parishes. I am a Graduate of the Asian Rural Institute in 1995. After my ARI training I went back to my community and used



my new knowledge about community organizing to empower my people through the initiation of several community development activities. I was invited back to ARI after 10 years, to share my experience as a Training Assistant with the new participants of 2005. I am very happy to come back to my 'home,' my second seminary where I learned "Theology in Action."

'ARI Folk' – Join our Mailing List – Keep up with the work of ARI Graduates

I'm sure that all who have visited the ARI campus would agree that something special is happening here. People from 15+ countries, living and working side by side, sharing together, learning from each other; and all of them are committed to improving themselves so they may improve the lives of their own people. Yet this campus and this training program is only a small portion of the pic-

ture. The truly special thing is what happens when participants return home. It is the work of our graduates that gives meaning and value to ARI training. And ARI keeps abreast of this work and maintains long relationships graduates. If you are interested in receiving periodic reports from our graduates throughout Asia and Africa you are welcome to join our 'ARI Folk' list.

To join the list, please send a request to Steven Cutting at ecu@ari-edu.org



Watch Out!!

Our Postal, Email, and Website addresses have all changed. The new addresses are:

Asian Rural Institute
442-1 Tsukinokizawa
Nasushiobara-shi, Tochigi-ken
JAPAN 329-2703

Email: info@ari-edu.org
Website: www.ari-edu.org

How to donate to ARI - Your donations are essential for ARI to continue to fulfill its mission. We thank each and every one of you for your contributions.

In the USA, and for American citizens living anywhere in the world, tax deductible gifts may be made to ARI through:

American Friends of ARI (AFARI)

Mr. Don Tarr, Treasurer, 905 Ivanhoe Drive, Northfield MN 55057 USA

In Canada tax deductible gifts may be made to ARI by writing a check to "The United Church of Canada," and marking it "Super Gift for Asian Rural Institute." Mail it to

Division of World Outreach, 3250 Bloor Street West, Etobicoke, Ontario M8X2Y4