

MY SPECIAL FRIENDS

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They need nutrition, just like you and I. They breathe air, need sleep, and feel despair, joy, hurt, anger just like you and I. Then how are they different? They are special and in many ways better beings than you and I can ever be. I speak here of the mentally handicapped children of the Dar-ul-Sukoon, home run by the Nuns from Holland for over six decades. The building stands out prominently with its crimson colour on Kashmir Road. I worked with these children for several weeks and though my part in their well-being was negligible, it satisfied a craving in my soul. I feel they used to wait for me. They would be sitting on the floor looking outside the gate when I arrived. And as I opened the gate and entered they would get up and cling to me. They would hold onto my hands and arms and embrace me and pull me in different directions. My feelings at this point are indescribable. All they needed was a smile, a pat, a hug. Those children were starved for love and just a little dose of it would satisfy and please them to no end. All I had to do was play with them, talk to them, listen to them or push them on a wheel chair and a sweet smile would light up their innocent faces and their eyes would gleam with pure joy. They wanted both physical and emotional closeness and that made me feel so wanted and needed. They knew that I was different from them and I suppose that is why a smile or a pat from me meant so much to them. Feeding them was not as simple as I imagined it to be because they all ate in different rooms so first they had to be taken there. Sometimes they would refuse to eat and they would fuss, scream and cry and it would be quite a task to persuade them to eat even a little bit of food. Then they would have to be put to bed and we would have to leave. I always hated leaving my special friends and while the other workers would wait by the lonely gate for their transport, I would linger by their beds- talking to them, playing with them or just watching them. Simply watching those children was so fascinating. They would sit there, staring into space, oblivious of their surroundings, their eyes filled with wonder and suddenly they would laugh. They were so natural, so simple, so pure. They were devoid of any affectations or pretensions unlike the majority of us. And that is why! say they are special. Feeding and playing with those children of the Dar-ul-Sukoon was an experience I truly relish. The time I spent there was the few most gratifying moments of my life and it was an experience I would never trade for anything in the world. Because it was there that my being was enriched and it was there that formed many special bonds with some of the most beautiful beings of this world.

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