

## **Claire recalls about Simone (in 2011)**

Let me talk about Simone Liégeois who started the team with me and Hélène. She was more involved in the road side clinics and training of the rural leprosy workers. Being herself a very independent person, she found the team life with Dr. Hemerijckx very difficult. Although she liked her work, she found the focus of the work itself very limited in a narrow health programme. She realised that it was more important to get involved in a general health with greater community involvement. In 1966, after some commitment with the Catholic Nurses Association of India, she joined the Voluntary Health Association of India – an initiative that was being built up by Fr. James Tong, sj. She settled in Delhi, and travelled all over India for the next few years to study new health projects and monitoring their implementation.

Simone lived like a nomad and created teams with different women professionals. She was part of the larger movement in the country that developed community health programmes to which she made a substantial contribution. In 1982, she developed breast cancer, was treated surgically in Delhi and was referred for complementary treatment in Belgium. This disease was an occasion for her to realise how many friends she had in India. In 1984, she returned to India and joined me in North India, in a job for Damien Foundation, during 3 years (the years needed to qualify for a pension). In 1987 she settled in Belgium with Marie Madeleine and continued to get involved in the health related issues that were supported by the CNCD, the coordination of Belgian NGOs for development, and other organisations like Entraide et Fraternité.

*(Notes from Claire, written at Trivandrum in 2011, for a booklet coordinated by Nalini Nayak, "The story of AFI-MISH in India")*

## **Nalini writes about Simone (in 2012)**

Simone Liégeois was a woman I admired and was very close to. She was so much older than myself (25 years or more) but we interacted often and deeply as were also great friends. (...)

Simone certainly suffered from the hierarchical and patriarchal Indian mentality as she claimed she did not come from a bourgeois background and had the sensitivity of the working class. As Claire also writes, this hierarchical Indian context also made team life difficult as Claire was at the same time the "boss" at work and the team leader.

Simone was such a down to earth person, no-nonsense type and with her jocular smile could tell anybody off. But under that veneer there was the true ascetic who deeply cared – not that she would ever want to be referred to in this manner.

All the years she was in India, after Polambakkam, she travelled for her work to the remotest parts of India as a pioneer. (...) She was hired as a specialist in community health. She was based in Delhi and her job required to travel to various places to meet local groups and support them in planning, implementing and evaluating their projects. (...)

She created intimate friends with several nurses in India. Her work in community health put her in touch with young medical professionals whom she also inspired. Three of them, supported by her, put together an Indian version of the famous Book 'Where there is no Doctor'. This became a text for all those who later went into community health work.

Simone lived like a pilgrim – just the basics. For long, when not on a train, she shared a room with a friend's family in Delhi, and a small and dark room too. This was her way of living her commitment to insertion in community, to justice and the poor. She preferred to inform herself through reading historical novels as intellectual discussions bored her. Yet she was interested in everything and was keen to know the details of all that I was involved in. (...) She always read her little French Bible and loved to sing the psalms even when alone.

To me an Indian, I saw Simone as someone who was happy to live her *karma* and needed no props. She truly inspired me by her life and she needed no words to explain. (...)

She was very serious about the AFI group and in her time in Belgium was a regular carer for the older ones and even took responsibility for the exposure of the newer ones. She shared this with me when we met and, as she continued to write long hand written letters, I was kept abreast of what was happening among the AFI in Belgium. When Simone passed away I felt a deep sense of loss.

*(Notes from Nalini Nayak in 2012, for a booklet "The story of AFI-MISH in India")*