

## **MOORABBIN STANDARD**

**December 1, 1998**

### **How I got Ammachi's hug**

**by Mark Freeman**

"Have you met Mother"? Well, no I hadn't, but by the time I left the Moorabbin Town Hall last Thursday, I along with at least 600 others had been hugged by her.

And it's no ordinary hug. Sri Mata Amritanandamayi (Mother of Immortal Bliss), or Ammachi, as she is affectionately known, gives blessings along with hugs known as 'Darshan'.

With queues of people from all walks of life forming forward and square of where she sat, Ammachi received each person for the best part of a minute, whispering blessing in their ear and holding them tight to her before sprinkling rose petals over them.

It's a big job. Especially when you consider she tours the world performing Darshan day and night, and is estimated to have hugged more than 11 million people.

One of her disciples, Eugenie Knox, a member of the M.A. Foundation in South Melbourne, which organized the Australia-wide tour, said Ammachi's mission was to "take the sadness and suffering from the whole of humanity."

"By giving 'Darshan' she is taking darkness from the heart and replacing it with the seed of love, which will sprout in its own time", she said.

At times it was a human cauldron of emotions played out in the area immediately surrounding her, an area filled with smiles, laughter and tears. The sick and infirm had come to bathe in the warmth and energy of the spiritual leader to millions the world over.

Richmond resident, Melissa, 30, and her terminally ill five year-old daughter Ebony received Darshan on the recommendation of friends. Little Ebony, who will soon be off to Disneyland in Los Angeles courtesy of the Starlight Foundation, described Ammachi as "very nice", and her mother said she was "very cuddly".

The town hall was transformed into a makeshift temple with peaceful Bhajan (devotional music) filling the space, incense burning and pictures of Shiva and other Hindu Gods adorning the walls.

On the back wall above Ammachi hung brightly coloured saris, and at the opposite end her disciples sold all kinds of dolls, pens, lockets adorned with her image, as well as books, CD's, and videos about her.

Since there is no charge to attend her sessions and her hugs are also gratis, selling goods is a major source of fundraising for Ammachi's staggering amount of charity projects.

In her native India, she has built an 800-bed hospital, a hospice for cancer patients and free medical dispensaries all designed to provide free and affordable medical services for the poor and underprivileged.

**(Courtesy of Leader Community Newspapers)**