

Magically, at the last minute, I found a magician who did all the usual things. The kids had fun climbing the trees in the garden and coming down with handfuls of mulberries. Each child had a cupcake with a candle, and everyone sang “Happy Birthday” as the child blew the candle out. I had brought small gifts from the US, after a few trips to the Dollar Stores. There was a good lunch, ice cream cones for dessert, and all went home happy and tired. We’ll do it again next year. 🌸



Look what I got for my birthday!

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How You Can Help

After many years of adding new programs and steadily increasing the number of children we help, such as Shiva, Deepa and Sushma, we find that for the first time we are a little short of our fundraising goal this fiscal year (July 1 – June 30). In addition, we are confronting inflation in Nepal of approximately 7% per annum and a drop of about 10% in the US – Nepal exchange rate over a year ago. As a result, in our planning for the coming fiscal year we have, for the first time in some years, forecast very little program growth. This comes at a time when we have in place a superb, all-Nepali staff with the capacity to serve even more children. So, more than ever, we need your generous help.

I wish that you, our donors, could be here to witness how your help has transformed the lives of so many children, and at a per child cost so low it is hard to believe. We were able to help Deepa and Shiva emerge from a life of slavery for \$100 – the price of a dinner for two or three at a good U.S. restaurant, and save Sushma’s life for \$250 at the NRH. It’s hard to imagine another charitable donation that would do so much for so little. Please give as generously as you can, and know that your donation will make transformative changes in the lives of some of the most impoverished, but promising, children anywhere.

Olga

Please visit our web site www.nyof.org

Special Opportunity for those over age 70-1/2, thanks to Congress!

There are some advantages to growing older – and one of them is the occasional tax benefit Congress doles out to those of us who receive retirement income.

Until the end of 2007, you can arrange for a transfer from your IRA directly to NYOF without paying taxes on the amount of the donation, without reducing your deductible medical expenses by 7.5% of the IRA distribution, and without further reducing your other itemized deductions because of the complicated phase-out rules. Even though the transfer is not included in your taxable income, it is counted in determining whether you have satisfied your minimum distribution requirement.

To qualify you must be age 70-1/2; the distribution must come directly from your IRA or Roth IRA custodian; and the maximum amount eligible for this special treatment is \$100,000 (we wish!). Additional rules apply if you have made nondeductible contributions to your IRA. Transfers from Simple IRAs and SEP IRAs are not eligible.

Please notify us if you feel moved to make a donation of this type. We will gladly send you a written acknowledgment that we have received your IRA donation for tax purposes. If you have any questions, please contact Janis Olson, NYOF’s Executive Director at (415) 331-8585 or jolson@nyof.org.

Just think – for every \$100 you donate, we can liberate a girl from slavery, compensate her parents for her lost wages, and pay her school costs for a year. Thank you for considering this opportunity.



Nepalese Youth Opportunity Foundation

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DEAR FRIENDS *It’s Spring again, and time for me to update you about the wonderful children of Nepal and our progress in liberating young girls from slavery, helping thousands of children to get an education, and saving those who are severely malnourished. Many of you have asked me to write about the lives of the children we have rescued or who have grown up under our care. I will do so, and also tell you about the first birthday party I have given in Nepal.*

First, let me tell you about three teen-aged girls, two of whom we rescued in our Indentured Daughters Program, and the other whose life we saved at our Nutritional Rehabilitation Home. I will begin each account by telling you about the programs that, with your support, have made such a difference in their lives.

Shiva and Deepa – Enslaved No More

Most of you know about our Indentured Daughters Program, which frees young girls from bonded labor, some of whom are only six years old when contracted away by their parents to work as servants in the homes of strangers far away. This bonding custom exists in the Tharu ethnic community in western Nepal. The father receives an average of \$50 for one year of his daughter’s labor. The girl receives nothing, and is forced to work from dawn to late at night washing clothes and dishes, fetching water, cooking and taking care of children. Neither the parents nor the girl know where she will be working as she leaves home for the first time in her life in the company of the labor contractor. Few of these girls go to school, and abuse of all kinds is common.

We started our program to free these children from bondage in 2000, with 32 girls. We were able to accomplish this without giving a single rupee to the parents, though they needed the income their daughter earned. Instead, we offered the family a piglet or a goat if they would bring their daughter home or refrain from selling her to the labor contractor. They then raised the animal on kitchen scraps and earned as much by selling it as they received for their daughter’s labor – or more, if, as often happened, they bred the

animal. We enrolled all the girls in school, paying all education related expenses, and we continue to do so to this day. Since we began the project the number of girls rescued by this method has grown to 3,000, of whom approximately half were rescued by another aid organization that is assisting NYOF by replicating our program.

Our success is measured not only by the number of girls rescued but by our sensational awareness program that has turned this community against a well-entrenched practice.

We have organized the community to distribute posters and handouts opposing the practice, and each year during the festival at which the girls are sold, hundreds of liberated girls march in their school uniforms, carrying banners and chanting slogans against the bonding practice. We also sponsor a 15 minute radio program every Sunday night in which returned girls talk about their suffering during their labors, and we file lawsuits against employers who will not release their servants from bondage. We make sure that the returned girls are educated about their rights. I tell you, it is thrilling to watch them progress from timid children who acquiesce in their own enslavement to empowered young women aware of their rights.

We have had tremendous success in

SPRING 2007



Ram and the piglet that saved her from bondage



Cutie pie restored to health at NYOF’s Nutritional Rehabilitation Home



A few of the thousands of kids on NYOF scholarships in their new school uniforms

defeating this inhumane practice in our target area. It is now considered a shameful thing for parents to sell their daughters in the villages where we have been working, whereas when we started our program seven years ago, no one thought twice about bonding away their children. We estimate that there remain 20,000–25,000 young girls enslaved in this way in five western districts of Nepal. Our goal is to eradicate this pernicious practice.

Outstanding among our rescued girls are Shiva and Deepa, whom we rescued several years ago.

Shiva, now a beautiful 17 year old girl, was bonded away by her parents at the age of ten. She slaved away for the family to whom she was indentured for four long years. She was one of the few fortunate girls whose “master” allowed her to attend school if she performed all the household chores assigned to her. When she was 14, the son of her employer tried to sexually abuse her. She fought him off and told her mother about the matter. Her mother knew of our Indentured Daughters Program, came to us, and begged us to help. We did so.

In addition to placing Shiva in school, we recognized that she had a flair for drama and sent her with a few other rescued



Shiva

girls for training to perform street plays. She helped to write and direct plays about the bonding custom, and she has been performing these dramas throughout the area, and even in a theater in Kathmandu, to generate opposition to the practice. Shiva has just appeared for her college entrance examinations. If she passes, there

will be a NYOF scholarship waiting for her. Her ambition is to be a social worker so that she can prevent young girls like herself in the Tharu community from being bonded away. In the months before the examination results are published, she is volunteering for NYOF, tutoring other returned girls and convincing parents not to bond their daughters away.



Deepa

Deepa has a similar story. She was one of the very first girls rescued from bonded labor when our program began in 2000. Like the other girls, we liberated her and placed her in school; she was an excellent student and was always at the top of her class. She, too, was trained in street drama and appeared with Shiva in many plays against the bonding practice. Like Shiva, she has just taken her college entrance examinations and is tutoring returned girls as a volunteer. She wants to be a lawyer so that she can use her skills to eradicate the practice of bondage. ✿



Shiva acting the part of a bonded girl in a street play

Sushma – A Nutritional Rehabilitation Home Miracle

Though most of us think of miracles as extraordinary events that happen very rarely in the course of a lifetime, they are a common occurrence at NYOF’s Nutritional Rehabilitation Homes (NRH). In Nepal, half the children under five years old are malnourished, which is one of the principal causes of death for children in that age range. The root of the problem is as much ignorance as poverty. At the NRHs, while the children are being restored to normal weight and health, a team of nurses, doctors, and nutritionists teach illiterate young mothers about proper nutrition and other health related matters.

The teaching techniques vary, from singing songs about the benefits of Vitamin A (I doubt if they will make the Top Ten on the hip-hop chart) to demonstrating cooking techniques that retain the nutritional value of food, using vegetables from our own organic garden. The foodstuffs used are locally available and inexpensive so that the mother can follow the regimen after she returns to her village. She is also trained to teach other mothers in her community what she has learned. After the child is discharged, field workers follow up, often walking days over rugged mountain trails, to see if the child has stayed healthy. It’s truly amazing.

The result – a 93% success rate – tells only part of the story. You have to see it to believe it. Kids, who come in crying and miserable, or almost catatonic, looking as though they can’t survive another day, leave an average of five weeks later healthy, bouncy, happy little beings.

Sushma is one of these miracles. She was one of the first patients to be admitted when the first NRH opened its doors, and at twelve, she was somewhat older than the usual child (mostly infants or toddlers). Nevertheless, her story was typical. She had become severely malnourished, her immune system was compromised, and as a result she had contracted tuberculosis. As you can see from the first picture, she was so emaciated that it was hard to tell whether she was a girl or a

boy. At discharge, 55 days later, Sushma had regained her health and increased her weight by two-thirds from 15 kg to 25 kg. In the second photo you can see Shushma today, a beautiful young girl who works at a medical clinic and smiles a lot. She visits the NRH occasionally, bringing small gifts of fruit and flowers to the staff there.



Sushma at admission



And Sushma today

The cost to save Sushma’s life was \$250! We have many similar “before” and “after” pictures in our files, representing the approximately 2500 children who have been restored to health to date. For good measure, here is a photo of another kid recently restored to health who, like Sushma, owes his life to our dedicated and creative NRH staff.

There are no other facilities like these in Nepal. At the urging of the Ministry of Health, we have been establishing NRH’s in different parts of the country, so that mothers who cannot come to Kathmandu

with their sick children can receive help locally. We just opened our sixth facility in a remote area of west Nepal, where malnourishment of children is endemic. A seventh may follow soon. ✿



Olga throws a birthday party!

Most of you are familiar with our two children’s homes in Kathmandu, J House (for boys) and K House (for girls). These children come from the most appalling backgrounds – abandoned on the street, living in jail with a parent, begging at temples, and worse. At our houses, they find the love and support of a family as well as excellent facilities – a nice house, decent clothing, good food, and an outstanding education in good private schools. The bonds these children have developed are our most outstanding achievement. They view each other as sisters and brothers, and when they leave the homes to go to college, their relationships continue.

In Nepal, many children do not know exactly when they were born, but their parents usually estimate an approximate date that is roughly accurate. In the case of the kids at J House and K House, seldom are there family members we can turn to for help in estimating their ages. So, because schools require a birth date on the application for admission, we make the best guess we can and assign each child a birth date. They adopt this as their own. Over the years, the children have come to me and whispered in my ear that it is their birthday. My response is

usually a hug and birthday wish. We can’t afford a big celebration for every child at the houses, and I am not in Nepal during half of the year, so the celebration usually consists of a bag of sweets that the child passes around.



Magic, magic



Shock and awe – watching magic tricks

When I thought of the lavish birthday parties of many American kids, I always felt that I was a grump by not doing something more. So, this year I decided to have a joint birthday party for all the kids at the houses. I had planned to invite to the party an elephant from the zoo, which is just down the street from my house, paint “Happy Birthday” on its rump, and have the kids retrieve their gifts from a basket held aloft by the elephant’s trunk. (Ya gotta love a country where you can rent an elephant for \$20 an hour, including the mahout!) Alas, it was not to be. When the mahout (the elephant driver) came to inspect the premises, he declared that the elephant could not fit through my garden gate unless I cut down the decades-old bougainvillea arch over it. I was not about to do this, so I had to make alternate plans.