



Nepalese Youth Opportunity Foundation

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DEAR FRIENDS *Spring means two things in my life – returning to California after my usual six-month sojourn in Nepal, and writing to update you on our programs and our children since I last wrote in November. This time, there is cheerful news to report on the political front in Nepal. The government and the leaders of the Maoist insurgency have agreed to a ceasefire, and peace talks have begun. Everyone is hopeful for an end to the enormous suffering of the Nepali people during the seven years of the insurgency. Some Nepalis are returning to their villages after fleeing the fighting, and there is a sense of optimism in the air.*

All of our projects are thriving. As of this year, we are educating more than 1,300 children throughout Nepal (we started with five); many of these receive full support. They range from kindergarten to medical school. We have saved from disability (or even death) 650 severely malnourished children at our unique Nutritional Rehabilitation Home. We are increasing educational opportunities for the most impoverished rural children by paying the school costs of 350 students in remote villages (at \$50 a year each) as well as the salaries of 70 teachers in schools that need them most. Our two excellent homes for children, J House (for boys) and K House (for girls), continue to provide a loving and supportive environment for the most destitute children in this destitute land. And last but by no means least, our Indentured Daughters program continues to grow as we save yet more little girls from childhoods of backbreaking toil as bonded laborers – and give them an education instead. They are generally the first females in their families to go to school.

FROM SERVANTS TO STUDENTS – PIGLET POWER!

Many of you know about our program to free young girls who are sold by their parents as bonded laborers. On a particular holiday in mid-January, labor contractors come to the villages in the remote western district of Dang to strike deals with families for the labor of their daughters. The family is paid about \$50 for a year of their daughter's services as a servant – a considerable sum in a country where the average income for a family is \$200 and families are very large.

The little girl receives nothing. She lives with strangers far from home, totally

unsupervised. Sometimes her parents do not even know where she is. The opportunity for abuse is obvious. She works from dawn to late at night at the most menial tasks, is sometimes beaten by her employer, and does not go to school.

Three years ago, determined to combat this practice, our staff went out to the Dang area and convinced 32 fathers to bring their daughters home for the holiday. We promised to send them to school and, somehow, to compensate the parents for their daughters' lost income. Our solution? We provided each family with a

SPRING 2003



Ishwor, a baby restored to health at NYOF's Nutritional Rehabilitation Home



Another child rejuvenated at NRH

piglet, which could be raised on kitchen scraps and sold at the end of the year for about the same amount the fathers received for their daughters' labor. (And sometimes more, since piglets have a tendency to produce little piglets.)

One little girl, Mayalu, was only six years old but had already been sold away. This darling, lively little girl worked as a babysitter for a family that lived 100 kilometers from her village. Her family was not paid anything for her labor but simply was relieved of the burden of feeding her.

That's how desperate they were – selling her in order that she could survive. Now, thanks to NYOF, Mayalu is living at home and attending school.

The girls we have placed in school are loving it. They value education so much that when we offered some of the older girls a chance to enter a vocational training program rather than regular school, they turned down the training. They wanted a “real” education.

In the three years since we began liberating young girls from bonded labor, the number of children rescued has increased from 32 to almost 400, thanks to the support of our donors. These kids, some very young, are now in school and living with their families again. It's hard to believe, but the cost to bring these children home, pay their school costs for a year and compensate their parents for their daughters' lost wages is only \$100.



Mina with her mother, home again after three years of labor in a distant village



Mayalu, bonded at five years old, rescued by NYOF after one year of labor



Sisters Sushila and Misri - happy to be home again



“Who wants to go to school?” All hands go up – and these little girls will no longer be forced to work as bonded laborers.

MAKING CHILDREN “PLUMPY”

“Plumpy” is a Nepali expression for – well, it's obvious. It is a good description of the transformation of 180 children a year from the most pitifully frail, weak, skin-and-bones little beings to robust, happy, healthy children. These miracles are accomplished at our Nutritional Rehabilitation Home in Kathmandu, a residential facility where severely malnourished kids come to live with their mothers and regain their health.

The children usually come to us from hospitals where they have been admitted for tuberculosis, severe lung infections, or other diseases which their fragile immune systems could not fight off. The root cause is malnutrition. They are often discharged after the acute illness is controlled by antibiotics, even though they are as vulnerable to disease as when they entered the hospital because the underlying problem – malnutrition – is not eliminated. Some of them die after they return to their villages, or they develop significant disabilities.

We opened the NRH five years ago in response to this situation. While the children are being restored to health, we

train their mothers in good nutritional practice. Our staff of doctors, a nutritionist, nurses, and others show the mothers what to feed their children, how to cook food to retain its nutritional value, and how to combine certain grains and other foods for maximum nutritional effect. We also address other health problems of the child and mother and we provide training in general child care, family planning, and other matters mothers should know to raise healthy children. We use only food-stuffs commonly available in Nepal so that the mothers can follow the regimen once they return home. A field worker visits the families in their homes after discharge to be sure the children remain healthy and well nourished.

More than 650 children (mostly infants and toddlers) have regained their the health at the NRH since its inception. It takes only an average of six weeks to accomplish these miraculous changes. And it costs a little over \$200 for each mother/child pair – about the cost of a couple of visits to a doctor in the U.S.

There is no other facility like this in Nepal. In February, we celebrated the fifth anniversary of the NRH. The staff set up chairs in front of the NRH's vegetable garden and invited several "tulo manchhes" (big shots) to help commemorate the event. The Minister of Health of His Majesty's Government spoke, as did several other officials. For me, the highlight was a young mother named Usha Lama, who had been at NRH for some weeks with her child. Dressed in her village clothes, she walked briskly down to the microphone, but when she reached it she lost her nerve and turned back two or three times before she could



Mother and child - healthy and happy again after six weeks at NRH

be persuaded to say her piece. However, when she got started, she was full of confidence and passion. She told of coming to Kathmandu from her village, penniless, with her little son who was sick and acutely malnourished. She was afraid he would die, and did not know where to turn for help in this big city. Someone referred her to NRH, and she told the audience that at NRH her child was restored to health and she had learned how to cook nutritious food and to care for him in other ways. When she returned home, she would tell the other mothers in her village what she had learned. She is one of hundreds of mothers like her.

This program is so successful that the Ministry of Health is urging NYOF to establish satellite facilities in other parts of the country. Only a small number of mothers can come to Kathmandu with their malnourished children, so we are going to take this show on the road and bring the NRH to them. The first branch will open in west Nepal this year in an area where an estimated 68% of children are malnourished. The satellite NRH will be built on the grounds of a large area hospital so that the nurses and doctors will be available for help and consultation. NYOF will train the satellite staff at



Sersong at admission and two short months later



Nourishing the children, teaching the mothers

the Kathmandu facility and will support it for five years, after which the hospital has agreed to take full responsibility for running it. Next year, we hope to open another branch in eastern Nepal.

Though numbers tell part of the story, they pale in comparison to the experience of actually seeing the transformation of these children. If you could witness the difference the NRH makes in their lives, you would be astounded. We have hundreds of pictures taken of children at the time of admission and later at discharge. These photographs show their tiny, wasted bodies when they enter our home, and their evolution into sturdy, healthy, cheery children. Even health professionals and sometimes the mothers themselves cannot believe the transformation.

The mothers, too, are healthier and happier. Not only do they feel an enormous relief to see their children restored to health, but they themselves enjoy rest and replenishment. Like their children, they are often malnourished, and many suffer from other health problems. Women in Nepal lead lives of unremitting physical toil, and for most, the time they spend at the NRH is the longest period of leisure they have enjoyed in their adult lives. It is also the only opportunity they have had to focus totally on their child. Everybody wins – the child, the mother, and all of us at NYOF who are privileged to do such fulfilling work.

About half the children in Nepal under five years old are "stunted" – the term used by international agencies to refer to malnourishment of children so severe that they are damaged for life.

J AND K HOUSE AND THE STORY OF DORJE

Our two outstanding homes for children, J House for boys and K House for girls, located just outside Kathmandu, are havens for children who need the family atmosphere, comfort, and support that these homes provide. These children were bottom-of-the-barrel kids that no one wanted. Some were abandoned on the street by families too poor to support them. Others (especially little girls) were child beggars or laborers, or they lived in jail with a parent because they had no place else to go. They now have excellent opportunities for education and development. They attend good private schools, have decent clothes, art lessons, outings, and enjoy other amenities and opportunities far beyond those available to the large majority of Nepali kids. Most important, they are part of a warm and loving family of "brothers" and "sisters" who support and help one another.

The houses are small (less than 30 children in each), so that the family environment can be maintained. The children live there until they finish high school and enter college. As the older "brothers" and "sisters" leave, we admit new children to take their place. This year, several new kids have come to live at J and K House.

Let me tell you about one of them. His



Dorje, left, and one of his new brothers

name is Dorje. He was living in a remote village with his parents until his father died and his mother abandoned him. Dorje went to live with his uncle, but he was very poor and could hardly feed his own children.

A couple of months ago, a woman from Kathmandu called a friend in Dorje's village and asked him to bring a "kanchha" – a boy servant – to the city for work. Dorje's uncle jumped at the chance and brought him to Kathmandu by bus. But on seeing Dorje, the prospective employer almost laughed at the thought that the tiny boy standing before her could be a servant. He is about seven years old but the size of an American four-year-old. The uncle was about to look for another

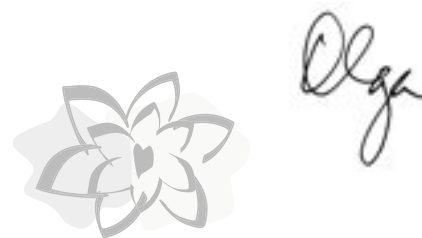
job for Dorje when the prospective employer remembered NYOF and called our office. I went over to meet him and found the most adorable, bright, loving little child. He herded cows for his uncle, but when he had time he would sit in on classes at the village school. In spite of his young age and intermittent attendance, he was already in third grade. Someone at our office gave him a newspaper, and he rattled off the text easily. Amazing.

We brought him to J House straightaway, and the other boys took over in their usual loving and assuring way. This kid didn't need much assurance, however. He adapted almost instantaneously to life at the house. A couple of days after his arrival, he ran up to me, threw his arms around me, and recited the English alphabet perfectly and counted to 200! We have enrolled him in the good private school many of the other J House children attend, and the teachers are already talking about promoting him.

Please visit our web site
www.nyof.org
for more pictures and the
latest on our programs.

There is much more work to do and many more children who need the help that NYOF has learned to deliver efficiently and effectively. Dollars go far in Nepal, and you can do so much good with a donation. Enclosed is a response envelope for your use if you would like to continue to help NYOF improve the lives of children in Nepal. Thank you once again for your loyal support.

warm regards,



The King and I - NYOF wins an award

NYOF RECOGNIZED BY NEPAL'S KING

Late last year, NYOF was awarded a singular honor. The King of Nepal presented me with a medal in recognition of the many years of outstanding service that NYOF has rendered to the children of Nepal. I wish you could have been there by my side at this lavish and exuberant ceremony. Inside the palace, our names were called out and we proceeded one-by-one to a dais where the King, dressed in his Army uniform, shook our hands, bestowed the medal, and exchanged a few pleasantries.

If I had been allowed to make a speech at the medal ceremony a la the Academy Awards,

I would have talked about our excellent staff in Nepal whose hard work and dedication to our cause made all the good work possible and our wonderful kids who make it all worthwhile. And I would have paid tribute to you, our donors, without whose generosity, advice, sympathy and support none of the good things NYOF has accomplished over the years would have happened. My one frustration is that you cannot be there to see the magical changes in the babies at the NRH, the joy of little girls when they learn they will no longer have to be sold to work far from home, and the exuberance of a little Dorje - and other kids like him - when he realizes he has reached a place of safety and love at J House. You deserve much of the credit for these transformations.