



MARCH 2008
KATHMANDU, NEPAL

Dear Friends,

Spring has sprung here in Kathmandu, I am glad to say. It's been a cold and messy winter, with shortages of petrol, cooking gas, and eight hours of electricity cutoff a day. The lines at the gas stations are literally miles long; I am astonished, as always, at the patience and good spirits of the Nepali people, who carry on cheerfully against all odds.

But not all is bad news. In west Nepal in January, we had a big celebration to mark the almost-eradication in the Dang District of the inhumane custom of bonding little girls away to work as servants for families in distant cities. We have been working in Dang since January 2000 to stamp out this terrible practice, and as many of you know, we have devised an ingenious method to do so. The not-so-secret weapons in this battle are a baby piglet and girl power.

Each family that agrees to allow its daughter to remain at home and not bond her away receives a piglet or a goat that they can sell at the end of the year for about the same amount as they received for their daughter's labor. NYOF enrolls the girls in school and pays all their education-related expenses. Simultaneously, we operate a vigorous awareness program to turn the community against this well-established practice. It is the liberated girls who are the most energetic and passionate in spreading the word against the custom and convincing parents not to send their daughters away.



“Stop bonding daughters – send them to school”



Liberated girl acting in street play to generate opposition to the bonding practice.

On January 15, the festival day on which the girls are bonded away, more than 2300 girls liberated by NYOF marched in a demonstration in opposition to the bonding practice, and to celebrate their freedom and the virtual eradication of the practice in Dang. I was among them, marching and chanting, with more enthusiasm than comprehension. True, a small number of girls are still bonded away, but this is done under the table and with a sense of shame. Our crusade has been so successful that labor contractors, who used to flood the villages on the festival day, no longer come openly to “buy” the girls. And politicians who used to arrange the bondage of a family's daughters for a few dollars as a favor to a constituent now do just the opposite – they offer to reunite the family and enroll their daughter in NYOF's program. As a result, whereas in prior years, in the Dang District, thousands of girls were sent off each year to the homes of strangers to work as virtual slaves, some of them weeping openly at the impending departure from their homes and families, now only a few are clandestinely contracted away.

Much of the credit goes to the liberated girls themselves, who have formed clubs, created and acted in street plays, and distributed posters and flyers to turn the community against the practice. Shiva, one of the first girls rescued under NYOF's program, is now a freshman in college and a leader in her community against the bonding custom. She and other girls

more...

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previously returned have created a “forum” to combat the custom. While I was in Dang in January for the celebration, they invited me to a meeting. I was given a rousing reception - covered with garlands and red paste on my forehead – the sign of welcome and respect in Nepal. I asked each of the girls to tell me their stories; the description of their suffering filled me with anger and pity in equal proportions. Their most emotional moments came when, their voices quavering, they expressed their resolve that their younger sisters would never, ever, be subjected to the same ordeal as they were.



Thanks to NYOF, I won't have to be bonded away.



Me and my girls - at the meeting of the club formed by liberated girls.

But the job of eradicating this custom is far from done in spite of our great success in Dang. About 10-15,000 girls, some as young as six or seven, are bonded away annually in five districts in west Nepal. In January, at the same time we were celebrating in Dang, we took the show on the road and started our eradication campaign in the adjoining district of Bardiya, where we estimate that about 2000 girls are indentured annually.

We need your help. Our goal is nothing more or less than to eradicate this appalling practice from Nepal, once and forever. We have the know-how, experienced local staff, and the zeal to make this happen. All we need is the financial support of people like you. It costs only \$100 to rescue a girl, bring her home to live with her family, provide them with incentives to make up for her lost wages, pay her school expenses for a year, and conduct our super-effective awareness campaign to turn the community against the practice.

Watch the **PBS documentary**, and you will see, live and in color, the stories of the children who are victims of this practice, hear their parents' heart-breaking reasons for sending them away, and learn how NYOF is working to make a better life for them.

Warm regards,

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NYOF'S SUCCESSFUL INDENTURED DAUGHTERS PROGRAM TO BE FEATURED ON PBS IN APRIL



NYOF's founder and president, Olga Murray, just returned from the Dang District in western Nepal, where the Nepalese Youth Opportunity Foundation has been operating its Indentured Daughters Program for the last eight years. It was a thrilling experience. NYOF rescued 400 girls in Dang who had been or were about to be sold into bonded servitude, thereby virtually eradicating the bonding custom in the Dang District (one of five districts in Nepal where it is prevalent).

To celebrate, a huge demonstration was organized – over 2,300 girls who had been rescued from bondage marched through the main town, chanting slogans against the practice and distributing flyers to onlookers. Olga, at 82 years old, was by their side, striding along and mouthing the slogans enthusiastically. This is the first stage in NYOF's long-term goal of eliminating this pernicious trade, which is estimated to affect 10-15,000 young girls every year.

Olga and her team were accompanied by a PBS film crew that has made a documentary about the bonding practice. This program is scheduled to appear on PBS's NOW series in early April (April 4 for those of you in the San Francisco Bay Area). For your local broadcasting dates and times, please visit:

<http://www.pbs.org/now/sched.html>

NYOF will send an email to those of you who have already provided us with your email address as a reminder (and give you an opportunity to forward it to others if you so choose). If you would like to be included in this and the wonderful dispatches from Olga while she is in Nepal, please send us your email address (info@nyof.org) or call NYOF (1-866-FOR-NYOF).

Please share this news with your family and friends – and thank you for helping to make this happen!

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