

## DEVI MAYA – A LITTLE BEGGAR TRANSFORMED

Over the many years I have been writing these letters, I have told you about a number of children under NYOF's care, and how we came upon them. Each child has his or her own story, almost always a terrible tale of neglect and abuse. But I have seldom had the space to tell you about how the kids have fared in the years following the time when NYOF took them under its wing. Since you, our donors, are fundamentally responsible for the changes in their lives, I will share in this and future letters a follow-up with some of these children.

Some of you will remember the story of Devi Maya. More than a decade ago, while walking the crowded streets of Kathmandu, we came upon a tiny girl of

about five dressed in rags, babbling to herself, and hitting up passers-by for money in a rather professional manner. She was blind. We knew that there must be an adult watching close by whose income probably depended on her, and we were right. A man who said he was her father watched carefully from a distance. Although the begging blind are a common sight on the streets of the city, something about this filthy, spirited little bundle of rags piqued our interest. A few days later, we were alarmed when we noticed that Devi Maya was wearing a homemade wooden splint on one arm tied up with a dirty cloth. We were not sure if this was a ploy by the "father" to garner sympathy from the crowds or if something had really happened to her.

After a number of encounters with her minder, we finally got permission to take her to the hospital and discovered that he had deliberately broken her arm in three places to improve her ability to beg. With the help of some Nepali friends, we were able to convince the man to release her into our care. One day, when we took her to the hospital for an x-ray, a woman in the waiting room recognized her as a beggar she had seen on the street and slipped some rupee notes into her hand. Devi Maya handed the money back, and in her little high, squeaky voice, said, "Thank you, but I'm not a beggar any more!"

We enrolled Devi Maya in a school, which had a program for the blind, and she learned Braille and proved to be an apt student. She is now a teenager, about to graduate from high school and studying for her college entrance exams.

Here she was, a few months after she entered our program as a child horribly abused to elicit more funds from strangers.



And here she is now a confident, educated, young lady on the threshold of a productive life she could not have imagined as a child. 🌸



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**DEAR FRIENDS** Hello again from Kathmandu. As the winter months approach in this noisy, crowded, polluted, but fascinating city, we are busier than ever expanding programs, giving scholarships, and enjoying our time with these wonderful children. And we still had time to party, party, party...

## THREE CHEERS FOR NYOF – AND ME – AND YOU!

This was a big year for NYOF – and for me. June was the 15th anniversary of the founding of NYOF and my 80th birthday. By the end of the month, I felt like the ultimate party animal.

Before I left Nepal in April, my friends and our Nepali staff threw a series of rip-roaring birthday celebrations that were a total surprise to me. The planning took several months and the hard work of lots of friends, all done on the sly. In this, the most gossipy of countries, where everybody knows everything, 500 people, half of them children, kept the secret. A lot of their success was due to my gullibility, and the kids' enjoyment was much enhanced by the fact that they had "fooled Olga Mommy."

In the morning, I was asked to attend an event in the neighborhood around J and K House, which turned out to be the dedication of a community library built in my name – The Olga Community Library. I thought that was the end of the celebration, but that evening there was a huge "The Lady's 80" party for about 500 in a colorful tent with dance performances by the kids and talks by friends, colleagues, and our children. The party was underwritten by my friends in Nepal.

Then, as many of you know, there was another party on June 3rd in San Francisco, which started out to be a

celebration of the 15th anniversary of NYOF's founding but somehow morphed into a birthday party for me. For those of you who made a special contribution to commemorate my birthday, thank you again. It was a smashing hit, thanks to the hard work of our Board and staff (particularly Janis Olson, our Executive Director).

For most of us, the highlight of the evening was the speeches given by the kids brought up under NYOF's auspices who are now in the U.S. Nirmala – a brilliant blind girl who is on a Fulbright scholarship and is in college in Colorado, Santosh, who lost one arm in an accident and just graduated from college here in California, and Durga, who I brought here 12 years ago for reconstructive surgery and is now a sophomore at Mt. Holyoke College. Their confidence, grace and courage were something to behold. We were all moved by their expressions of gratitude to NYOF for the chance to make something of their lives.

How lucky can an old lady get? Not just for these blessings, but for the opportunity to do good work and to have in my life supporters and friends like you, our donors. You have come through for NYOF every time we needed you. The \$50,000 you contributed in matching funds for another NRH is just the latest example.

## FALL 2005



Nirmala, me, and Durga



Santosh, ever-smiling



With my old friend, Dr. Banskota at the Kathmandu party

### HOW YOU CAN HELP

Thank you again for your help in making all these good things possible. Your support, advice, and encouragement over the years have made NYOF into a solid, well-run organization and enabled us to help "throw-away" kids who would have lived lives of terrible deprivation without our aid. And at a cost that is astonishing by western standards – a little more than \$250 to save a child's life at the NRH and educate the mother, about \$50 a year to pay the school costs of a village child for a year, and \$100 to rescue a little girl from bondage, bring her home to live with her family, compensate her family for the lost income, and pay her school costs for a year while lending small sums for local enterprises to the mothers so this program can be self-sustaining.

We realize that the needs in our country are pressing and that the many disasters around the world also merit your support. Unfortunately, in Nepal there are no safety nets. No social security, no aid to the disabled, no one to come to the aid of these children. If NYOF had not stepped in, they would be (as one of our J House kids said) living "on the street extending (our) hands begging." But rescuing them from such a fate is only a first step - we are committed to their continued support until they are able to stand on their own feet. We take this commitment seriously, but we can fulfill this responsibility only with your help. We hope you will give as generously as you can to change the lives of these wonderful children.

Warm regards,  
*Olga*

## The Lady's 80 and NYOF Turns 15



Surprise, surprise...

A Mt. Everest-sized birthday cake



Haydi Sowerwine, master of ceremonies



Friends, kids, and staff at the Kathmandu party



"My" library



Kids wasting no time in exploring the new library



Board members and staff – Yale Jones, Mike Priess, Cheryl Parsons, me, Janis Olson (US Executive Director), Tot Hef-flefinger, and Lori Perlstadt



Som Paneru, Nepal Executive Director at the Kathmandu party

You may recall that in our last newsletter, we talked about the need for additional schoolrooms in the Dang area where, through our efforts, 1600 little girls have been brought home from their jobs as indentured servants to live with their families and go to school. As a result, the village schools are overcrowded to the point that many children are required to attend classes in the open, sitting on rice bags brought from home, in the searing heat and numbing cold. To the rescue – NYOF donors who contributed enough to build 26 new classrooms in the area to relieve the overcrowding.

Another example: Chris, a donor from the U.K., traveled to Nepal a couple of years ago and visited a model school we had established in the Dhading district. It is by far the best school in the area, with English language instruction from an early grade, very well trained teachers, instruction in hygiene, health, and environmental issues, and the only playground and library around. He has raised the money to expand the school to 10th grade (the end of high school in Nepal) and to fund a project which will render the school self-sustaining. It is "his" project, and he plans to come to Nepal this winter and see how the construction is proceeding.

Looking back on the last 15 years, I am pleased with what NYOF has accomplished. From a small mom-and-pop operation, we have grown exponentially, not only in the number of children we help but in the ways in which we help them. We have created innovative solutions to some of the most serious problems faced by the children of Nepal (malnutrition, child labor), while maintaining the personal involvement with the lives of the children under our care. Our greatest satisfaction comes from seeing the astonishing transformation of our kids when they are given the love and support that is every child's due. There is much left to do, but we have made a good start.



## SITA – THE INSPIRATION BEHIND THE NRH

Our Nutritional Rehabilitation Homes continue to thrive and expand. Here, we transform severely malnourished kids, mostly babies and toddlers, from listless, frail, sometimes almost catatonic kids into healthy, active, delightful little creatures, in an average of five weeks. The NRHs are like small hospitals dedicated to the survival of malnourished children. We have on staff doctors, nurses, a nutritionist and others, who educate the mothers in the care and feeding of their children and teach them to spread the word about good health practices among other mothers when they return to their villages. We use food readily available throughout the country to perform these miracles, as our nutritionists show the mothers how to combine foods readily available locally for maximum nutritional value. At our Kathmandu facility, we have an organic vegetable garden where the mothers learn how to grow and prepare vegetables to retain their nutritional benefit. Two field workers follow up after the children return to their villages to assure that they are maintaining the weight and health they gained at the NRH.

This project, the only one of its kind we know of, came about not from some theoretical need cooked up in somebody's office in a high rise far away, but from an on-the-ground, urgent need that we actually experienced among the most vulnerable, poverty-stricken, downtrodden population in Nepal: starving children and their mothers.

Here is what happened: Several years ago, we made regular visits to Kanti Children's Hospital, the only general children's hospital in the country. We provided funds for medicines or tests beyond the means of parents who had brought their sick children to the hospital. One day, we visited a little girl (I'll call her Sita), five years old, who was suffering from a severe lung infection brought about by the fact that she was severely malnourished and her immune system was seriously compromised, leaving her vulnerable to all kinds of infections. She was five years



Little Sita

old and weighed only 22 pounds. She lay there shriveled, breathing with great difficulty, a sight so pitiful as to move the most hard-hearted person to tears. Her father stood by her bedside looking devastated.

Sita needed an anti-biotic that the hospital could not provide without cost, and which her family could not afford. So we provided the funds, and her infection cleared up. A few days later, when we returned to visit her – the bed was empty. She had been discharged in spite of the fact that she had gained only 8 ounces, and was so weak that she could not stand or walk or talk. The hospital explained that her infections had been successfully treated and it needed the bed for acutely ill patients and could not afford to keep a child whose only problem was that she was malnourished. (Keep in mind that more than half the children under five years old in Nepal are malnourished, and that this is one of the leading causes of death in this age group.)

Later, we discovered that Sita died after her return home. We heard of two other children who died under the same circumstances, and we felt we just had to do something about it. So we came up with the concept of the NRH – a facility dedicated to the survival of severely malnourished children.

The first NRH in Kathmandu opened its doors in February 1998. It was a

simple room with ten beds, but from the beginning our goal was to develop the best method to restore the health of these kids and educate their mothers or caregivers in the best way to care for them.

A few years ago, we moved to an attractive building within walking distance of Kanti Hospital, where two-thirds of the NRH children originate. It has a level compound, big trees, an organic vegetable garden, and a teaching hall/dining room where the mothers learn to feed the children the right things in the right way under the watchful eyes of our staff.

About 1300 children have been restored to health at the Kathmandu NRH since then and their mothers educated in childcare. The average cost is a little over \$250 per mother/child pair. We are very grateful to the dZi Foundation for their loyal support of this project.

But that's not all. His Majesty's Government has urged us to establish these facilities all over the country so that mothers who cannot come to Kathmandu with their sick children can also receive the benefits of the NRH. In response, we have opened a facility in west Nepal and one in east Nepal. This month, a fourth NRH will be dedicated in Bhadrapur, in the south of the country, close to the Indian border, where malnourishment of children is endemic. These NRHs are built on the grounds of one of the 12 zonal hospitals in the country, which have contracted to take over operation and support of the project after five years.

We plan to open two more NRHs in remote areas within the next year. (One of these new facilities is financed by matching funds you, our generous donors, contributed this past year in response to a matching grant offer made by a contributor. Thanks to you all.) My personal contribution to this project is a playground on the premises of each of the NRHs.

Sita, you did not die in vain. 🌸