

Double Rescue of a Bonded Child

Reeta's story is a tearjerker – but have no fear, it all ends well. Her father and grandfather were both bonded laborers, working as sharecroppers and living on the landlord's property. About five years ago, to the credit of the Nepali government, the system of bonded labor for men was abolished, and the debts they had incurred over generations were wiped out. Many of these formerly bonded laborers were forced off the land on which they had worked for generations. As a result, their economic circumstances worsened. This is what happened to Reeta's family.

About one year after their liberation, Reeta's mother died, leaving five year old Reeta and her two younger sisters to be cared for by their father. He is an irresponsible alcoholic and totally neglected his three little daughters. In order to avoid starvation, they were forced to wait outside the village homes at mealtime to beg for leftovers. If they returned empty-handed, he would beat them.

When Reeta was six years old, her father sold her for \$54 to a labor contractor for a year's labor, and she went off to live with a family in another village. She lived and worked under abusive conditions in virtual slavery for four years, agonizing over the welfare of her two tiny sisters.

Last year, the members of the anti-bonding youth club we helped to form in the area heard about her plight and informed us. With great difficulty, we rescued her from her labors in June. At first, she resisted liberation because she feared that if she did not work and earn money, her sisters would starve. Finally, we convinced her to join the program. She attended the literacy classes our girls join as soon as they are rescued, but each day, she would leave in the middle of class and run off to be sure her sisters were getting their meals. Sometimes they did not eat for two days at a time, and Reeta begged for food around the village for them.

When our staff and some of the kids in the youth club visited the hovel Reeta and her sisters lived in and spoke to the neighbors, they realized that these three little girls could not survive at home. We asked permission of the father to bring them to K House, and he readily agreed.

At K House, they are quiet and shy so far. The little one, about four years old, is a compulsive lap-sitter who is on your lap almost before you sit down, her middle sister is quiet and reserved, and Reeta is sweet and happy. She smiles a lot – and no wonder. These kids feel secure for the first time in their lives. Reeta knows we will take care of her and her sisters until



Reeta and her sisters in front of their hovel in the village...



...and here they are later, thriving at K House.

they can stand on their own feet. In the meantime, they have all the food they need, nice clothes, and support from a loving new family. And they attend one of the very best schools in Nepal – the CEO of which is Dinesh, who lived under equally desperate circumstances when he was a child. 🌸



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DEAR FRIENDS *Well, I'm back in my second home in Kathmandu. I love being with the kids again. Peace has descended upon this beautiful country at last. The absence of strikes, demonstrations, and bitter violence has made life easier for everyone. The insurgent Maoists and the political parties are engaged in peace talks, and there is a mood of optimism all around. That optimism applies not only to the Nepali public in general, but to NYOF and its programs as well. The children at J and K House continue to thrive, and the kids at our six Nutritional Rehabilitation centers continue to evolve into healthy little beings in an astonishingly short time. The formerly indentured girls we have liberated continue to live at home and go to school, and our graduates continue to do us proud.*

As You Sow, So Shall You Reap

This sober Biblical admonition is commonly used to explain an unfortunate outcome, but in the case of NYOF graduates, the message is far more upbeat. Many of you have asked us to tell you about what happens to the J and K House children when they leave our homes, so here are stories about two of these youngsters – from the bottom of the barrel to – well, you'll see.

Dinesh lived on the street with his infant sister when he was about five or six years old, after their parents died and there were no relatives to take them in. They were eventually admitted to a not-very-good government orphanage, where they spent their early years. Dinesh was a sharp, attractive and ambitious kid, fiercely protective of his little sister. When a wealthy European came to the orphanage and offered to adopt him, take him to Germany, and give him an excellent Western education, he jumped at the chance. There was only one hitch – he would have to leave his sister behind at the orphanage. He refused, giving up an opportunity that most Nepali youngsters could only dream of.

It was at about this time that we met him. The government orphanage itself asked us to admit him to J House because he

was so talented, and it did not sponsor the education of children beyond the 7th grade. Dinesh proved to be an ideal J House boy – responsible, kind to the other kids, and a very good student. We ultimately sent him to an excellent college, where his performance was outstanding. Upon graduation, he had no difficulty finding work (in a country where the unemployment rate is about 50%), and he excelled at his job.

Last year, he married a wonderful young woman (the post-wedding celebrations were held in my garden). Shortly thereafter, he was recruited as the CEO of an excellent new school founded by an organization that works closely with NYOF. It is a prestigious, high-profile position that requires smarts, tact, and dedicated, hard work. And – it is the school that the J and K House kids now

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Dinesh and his bride

attend. A full circle – the former street child overseeing the education of kids at the home where he grew up and which gave him the opportunity to evolve into a whole, happy, and successful adult.

The second story is a success story in the making. Raju was born with a condition called extrophy – he had no bladder, his intestines were exposed, and his hip bones were not joined. The result was a tiny little boy, bent over like an old man, with a urine-soaked towel around his waist, dripping, dripping, dripping urine all the time. He was a total outcast, could



Raju and his million dollar smile

How You Can Help

Thanks to our donors for all these sensational outcomes. Everywhere we turn in Nepal, we are faced with the acute needs of Nepalese children – education, health, and release from bondage. The upside is that money goes so far in Nepal that for the cost of a good meal at a restaurant in San Francisco you can educate a child for a year or even save his or her life. And the results of our efforts are astonishingly swift and successful. If I were confined to two words to describe our work here, they would be “instant gratification.”

We are grateful to you, our donors, for all your help over the years – not only cash donations, but also advice and encouragement. So many of you have not only donated your own money, but raised funds for NYOF as well. We must have the most imaginative fund-raiser-donors anywhere. Here's the most recent example: A British donor is raising money for vaccinations for the children at the NRH (we provide the basics, but such costly vaccinations as Hepatitis B are beyond our reach). For her latest caper – she plans to spend 24 hours in the local jail, refrain from smoking for that period (she's a chain-smoker), and keep her silence (she is a chatty sort). She will urge her friends to reward her handsomely for these sacrifices – by donating to NYOF!

We are not asking you to do likewise – but please give as generously as you can. Your contributions will be used to help some of the most impoverished but promising children on the planet.

Warm regards,

not go to school, and had to be kept at home with an uncle because he was from a remote area and his mother could not afford to support him.

I will never forget my first sight of Raju. He was about nine years old, a dark little being, thin as a rail, lying in a hospital bed. He was connected to various tubes and drips, his huge, luminous brown eyes brimming with tears. We came prepared with a couple of little cars and motorcycles, which we raced up and down the windowsill near his bed. He rewarded us with a smile so overpowering and brilliant and joyous that it lit up the whole room. "We've just gotta take this kid to J House," I thought to myself. We did – and for the first time in his life, he basked in the friendship and kindness of other kids.

A couple of years later, we brought him to the U.S. for an almost miraculous surgery. The doctors at California Pacific Hospital in San Francisco built him a bladder out of his own intestines in a long

and complex surgical procedure. (The hospital and medical personnel donated their services.) He returned to Nepal after six months and took up the life of a normal little boy – he could ride a bike, play basketball – and attend school. Like Dinesh, he was an excellent student, with a special talent for languages. In fact, in his six months in the U.S. he learned excellent, idiomatic English.

Now here comes the good part – one that makes this former lawyer's heart sing: Three years ago, Raju entered law school. On one of our trips to the Dang District, where we operate our program for indentured girls, we invited him and one of his law school buddies to come along. What they saw there – little girls being sold to labor contractors against their will, daughters and mothers weeping at their impending separation – a total violation of the humanity of these little girls – got them fired up.

On their return, they organized a group of four students at their school – two

women and two men, and (with some help from NYOF's Nepalese lawyer), they filed a case in the Supreme Court of Nepal. It sought an order compelling the Nepali government to enforce its own laws against child labor, with particular reference to bonded children. In October, the court issued its preliminary decision granting the remedy they sought. Raju and the other students were interviewed by the media, and several newspapers highlighted the court's decision as a triumph for the rights of children in Nepal. A total victory.

Well, at least on paper – because it is doubtful if the government can enforce the decision effectively in a country where the annual income is slightly over \$200 and a child's labor is often necessary for the family to survive. Still, it's a step in the right direction, and it will make our job of freeing these bonded girls easier since we can wave the decision under the noses of labor contractors who "buy" the girls and the parents who are tempted to enter into the deal. 🌸

Liberating Girls From Bonded Labor

I have often written about the young girls we rescue from bonded labor in the Dang District. We bring these girls home to live with their families and compensate their parents with a piglet or a goat to make up for the lost wages. Some of you may have seen the CNN broadcast in September after a TV crew and reporter came out to west Nepal to learn about our program.

We have now brought home to live with their families 1300 young girls who had been contracted away by their parents to work as servants far from home. (And another 1200 have been rescued by an organization that we trained in our methods.) These girls now attend school at NYOF's expense. After we have provided them with a few months of training about their rights, they are no longer the timid and compliant little girls who acquiesced to their own bondage, but assertive young women who will not easily be forced by their parents into servitude again. These returned girls are our best advocates. They have formed clubs in the villages which campaign against the practice, and if they hear that a father is about to "sell" his daughter, they visit the family in a team to urge

him not to do so. In mid-January, when most of the contracts for the girls' services are made, the club members station themselves at transit points around the area to intercept vehicles that might be carrying newly bonded girls away. While we have just about eradicated the practice in our target area, the girls act as our eyes and ears to be sure none of the village girls are trafficked.

We have now moved on to an area adjoining the one where we have worked for six years to try to eliminate the practice there. We estimate that there are between 20–25,000 young girls bonded in five western districts in Nepal, so we have our work cut out for us if we want to reach our goal of eradicating the custom altogether.



Girls as young as these are bonded away.

Man Bahadur Chhetri, our genius of a community worker, who is largely responsible for the success of this program, has just been granted a prestigious award. He was chosen to be an Ashoka Fellow for his dedicated and creative work in defeating the practice of bonding children. The fellowship is reserved for those who demonstrate extraordinary innovation in tackling social problems. Hundreds around the world have qualified for the award over several decades, all of them either founders of organizations or members of their boards. Man Bahadur is the first employee of a non-profit to receive the award. We are proud of him and his achievements. 🌸

Touching the "Untouchables"

Some of you may have received our summer letter about our new program to educate Dalit ("untouchable" caste) girls, but those who have not might be interested in a brief description of this outstanding project.



About 20% of the Nepali population, or about 5 million people, are members of the Dalit caste. These occupation-based groups (metal and leather workers, sweepers, tailors, etc.) are among the most oppressed and exploited people on earth. Socially, those of a higher caste are reluctant to mix with them. They are often excluded from participating in public affairs, from attending the same temples as others, and from using the same wells because of the fear that their presence will pollute the water

and therefore the higher castes. In some communities, they are even required to bring their own plates and eating utensils if they want to have a meal outside their homes. About 70% live below the poverty line, and it is estimated that 60% of a Dalit family's income is drawn from the labor of children under 12. The literacy rate for women is only 12%.

The only way they can liberate themselves from this social and economic oppression is to get an education and, hopefully, a good job. We are educating 400 Dalit girls in the lower grades, but we are impatient to help this community to shake off its shackles, so we have created this new program. Its goal is to provide an excellent education for young Dalit women who scored well on the college entrance examination and whom we judge are dedicated to the advancement of their people.

After interviewing 175 girls throughout the country, we selected 20 for these special scholarships. We have brought them to Kathmandu and placed them in excellent private colleges. They are being offered not only a formal education, but enrichment programs such as special leadership, communication and language training, to prepare them to be leaders and advocates for their communities.

I have had a chance to spend time with



Dalit girls in NYOF's scholarship program

these girls, and I'm blown away by their dynamism, smarts, charm and beauty. It's hard to believe that these young women have emerged from a community so subjugated and oppressed. A couple of weeks ago, we visited the immaculate hostel where they live together (most landlords won't rent a room to persons of the Dalit caste). They are from remote villages in different parts of the country, but they seem to have adjusted well to life in the big city. They are very supportive of one another, and they laugh a lot. They danced for us, and a few of them expressed their gratitude to NYOF and assured us with great earnestness that we would not be disappointed in their academic performance or their devotion to the communities they left behind. These young women are going places, and it will be thrilling to watch their journey as they emerge into adulthood.

If you would like to help one of these sensational young women to get an education, we would welcome your donation. 🌸



"My wife, Barbara, my two adult children and I were in Nepal for most of October and, as always, we visited some of our programs and children. For me, the most exciting aspect of this was seeing the Dalit Girls' Hostel and meeting many of the remarkable young women to whom we are now providing five-year scholarships and leadership training. Despite their underprivileged backgrounds, they are as bright, articulate and energetic as any young people anywhere. Some are emphasizing sciences and mathematics in their studies, others humanities. They all have goals. Every young woman with whom I spoke was very composed, and every one is extremely grateful for the opportunity that NYOF and our partner NGO's in Nepal are providing. There is every reason to believe they will succeed and have a real impact on their country."

– Yale Jones, a member of NYOF's board of directors