



From untouchable to college graduate

Growing up amid poverty and exclusion, Sita never dared to dream that life could be otherwise. When she was informed of her selection for the EDD program (out of 150 aspiring applicants), she promised herself that she would make the most of this important opportunity. After working very hard to master English, and participating actively in leadership training, she received a Bachelor's degree in sociology from a good private college. She is now working for the American Embassy in Kathmandu and is a hero in her community.

"I feel happy that back in my village the people now respect me and my family. They come to me to ask for advice about their own daughters. Working for the US Embassy is a great honor in itself but this is not all for me; I have a lot more to do for myself, my family and my community. I hope to contribute to the campaign against untouchability and all forms of discrimination."

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How you can help

The crucial ingredient in our success is you, our faithful donors. Without your advice, your encouragement, and your hard-earned money, none of these good results would be possible. My one regret is that you cannot witness the tremendous difference your donations make in the lives of these children. Your contribution is used directly for the benefit of the youngsters like the ones whose stories you have just read.



One of the easiest ways to help these children is through recurring monthly contributions directly from your bank account or credit card. You can make a secure donation to NYF today through our web site www.nepalyouthfoundation.org

Another way to help is by joining our Legacy Circle and making a bequest to NYF in your will or including us in your estate plan in other ways. I have left the large bulk of my estate to NYF, and it gives me great comfort to know that long after I am gone, the funds from my estate will be used to deliver the children of Nepal from hunger, forced labor, and homelessness.

Warm regards,


Olga

P.S. We would like to update our donors about NYF projects and current events through email. This will help us communicate more quickly, save money and be more environmentally friendly. Please submit your name and email address to info@nepalyouthfoundation.org. Your information will not be sold or given to any other group or mailing list.



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DEAR FRIENDS: Back again to beautiful Sausalito after a gratifying six months in Kathmandu. I love the fact that our Spring newsletter reaches you around Mother's Day because it's the perfect time to think about not only mothers, but children everywhere - including the lovable kids of Nepal. Lots of good work and good stories to tell you - delightful new children at J and K House, women parliamentarians encouraging former bonded child servants to advocate against the bonding custom, and an outstanding project to educate and empower girls of the untouchable caste.

Get your hankies out - appalling beginnings, happy endings

We have new children at J and K House - our two small, excellent homes for children in Kathmandu.

Each of these kids has an unbelievably tragic background. At J House, we have four new little boys. Three are brothers, ages three, five, and six, from the Chepang community.



New J House boys

The Chepangs are an indigenous group in Nepal who until fairly recently lived as hunter-gatherers. Most have now settled into rural communities, working as farm laborers or at subsistence farming, but they are very backward, and few are literate. Like some other communities in west Nepal, they follow the shockingly brutal, deep-rooted tradition of "chhaupadi," which compels the isolation of a mother during childbirth to a cowshed or mud hut out of sight of her house because she is considered to be unclean and untouchable during this period. She is not allowed nourishing food or warm clothes, and is kept in isolation for 11 days. Sometimes, women and their babies subject to this horrendous

practice perish from snake bites or attacks by wild animals, and sometimes they bleed or freeze to death. This is what happened to the mother of our three little boys - she was cast out to give birth in a hut in the forest, had a stillborn child, and then froze to death. The father was both incapable and unwilling to take care of the children, and they came to J House in February.

At first, they were understandably frightened and confused. They did not understand Nepali, as they spoke only their own dialect, so communication was difficult. But, with the help of the other boys, who patiently taught them new words, it didn't take long for them to learn a little and to adjust to their new environment. I doubt if they had ever seen a toy before, and they were fascinated particularly with cars and trucks, so the J House kids hauled out all the toy vehicles they could find.

When I left a week or so after their arrival, they seemed to be adjusting well. They will receive intensive counseling at our Ankur Counseling Center to help them to overcome the trauma they have already experienced in their young lives. ▶



First see-saw ride

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I just learned from Nepal that the five and six year old have been enrolled in what is the very best kindergarten/preschool in the country (on scholarship, of course). This will assure them admission to one of the top schools in Nepal for first grade. So, they are on their way!

The other two new children have, if anything, even a more tragic history. They are a four year old boy and his two year old sister.



Brother and sister adjusting well

Their father, a violent alcoholic, killed his wife with an axe, and the two year old was found covered in blood, crying, draped over her mother's body. The father fled to India. We ordinarily do not accept children this young at K House, but we did not want to separate the sister and brother, and who can resist giving shelter and comfort and care to such a child? She and her brother will have everything a child needs to grow up healthy and whole as a part of the J and K House family. Here is an email I just received from one of the older K House girls about their new sister: "She is very cute but small ...every girl wants to carry her. She is really sweet and smart and very good, she doesn't cry and eats everything. She has adapted the environment so fast."



New little girl gets sisterly love

In my life, the high point is seeing the reactions of the children at J and K House when a new child arrives. They run to offer their toys, clothes, books, anything that will make the child more comfortable in the new environment. They vie to carry, play with, comfort, and teach the new arrival. The outpouring of love and concern is palpable – it is as though we had a houseful of new young mothers and fathers, all overflowing with tenderness and delight in their newborn. Perhaps it is because they recall viscerally their own arrival at the house many years before, frightened and lonely. Whatever it is that brings on this rush of love and unselfishness, it is a wonderful thing to see.

NYF has a sponsorship program; if you would like to sponsor one of these young new arrivals, we would be most grateful. Please contact our Sausalito, CA office for more information about sponsorships (415) 331-8585. ●

Women politicians empowering liberated slaves

Most of you know about our spectacularly successful program to end the custom of bonding little girls away as house servants for about \$50 a year. We provide the families with a piglet or goat if they will bring their daughters home or not sell them, and then arrange for the education of the girls. Simultaneously, we carry out a dynamic awareness program to turn the community against the well-entrenched bonding practice. We have been successful beyond our wildest dreams. We have liberated 12,000 of these children, brought them home to go to school, provided them with empowerment training, and facilitated the formation of an NGO by the older girls, which will take over the rescue and anti-bonding campaign from us in the future. The practice of indenturing daughters is not yet over, but it is close to eradication.

The girls who were rescued early on (we began the program in 2000), some of them now in college, have evolved into passionate advocates against the custom to assure that their little sisters won't suffer the same fate. To teach them to become effective champions for their cause, we arranged a conference with 100 of the most committed and dynamic freed girls and ►



IDP leadership training

women members of Parliament from the three major political parties – left (Maoist) right (Congress) and center (UML) in Nepalgunj, in west Nepal. We asked the speakers to focus not on partisan politics but on how and why they had run for office, and how to advocate effectively for a position.

Early on in the meeting, each of the girls was asked what she wanted to do with her life – “ teachers, doctors, lawyers, social workers,” they said. I can't tell you how thrilling it was to listen to these savvy, self-assured young women, who had not so long ago slaved away in the homes of strangers, talking confidently about their dreams for a fulfilling future.

The speeches I heard there were barn-burners. These women members of Parliament spoke passionately about their suffering and the discrimination against them because of their gender, and

went on at length about the reasons they had become advocates for their communities. They were both from large, dirt-poor families and not allowed to go school because they were girls. One had been a bonded child herself. They urged the audience to work tirelessly to end the bonding custom and offered their help in Parliament toward that goal. One of the participants summed up the reaction of the girls to the speeches: “When I hear the story of speakers, I too memorized my past and with tears I built a confidence that yes I too can do.” I am confident that all of them can – and will - do! ●



Som Paneru
NYF's Executive
Director in Nepal

Educating and empowering girls of the untouchable caste

Som Paneru, NYF's Executive Director in Nepal, has written this account of our just-completed project to educate and empower girls who belong to one of the most downtrodden groups in Nepal: Educating Dalit Daughters

Untouchability and caste discrimination are deeply rooted in Nepali society, especially in rural communities. The 'untouchable' community, or "Dalits," about 20% of

the population, are trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty and oppression, largely because they lack access to education. Their representation in higher education, the professions, and government bodies is virtually nil.

In a country where gender discrimination is severe, Dalit girls are doubly disadvantaged: not only are they illiterate, but severely lacking in self-confidence as a consequence of growing up amid discrimination and exclusion in all spheres of life.

In response to this problem, NYF launched the Empowering Dalit Daughters project (EDD), designed to educate and empower Dalit girls and to train them to be leaders in their communities. In the five years of the program, 25 Dalit girls received an education in excellent colleges in Kathmandu in diverse fields such as business studies, hotel management, public health, social work, journalism and medicine. Their education included not only academic instruction but leadership training. They participated in social activities and debates, interaction programs, and rallies relating to economic, social and political issues, particularly regarding exclusion, gender bias, and violence against women.

The outcome of the project is exceptional. From the most oppressed, marginalized and despised group in Nepali society, these girls have become confident, educated, and highly aware of the most crucial issues of inclusion and equal access. They have developed important life skills. Two of them were awarded full government scholarships for medical school, and they will be the first doctors in their ethnic group; the others are working successfully in their chosen fields.

Aside from the girls' personal and professional development, the project has had an important social impact. The attitude of the so-called upper caste toward the girls and their families has changed to one of respect and friendliness. The parents are even invited to participate in community events, something unheard-of previously. The girls have become role models in their communities, and their success encourages other Dalit parents to educate their daughters to a higher level. The project has not only developed leaders in this most underprivileged community but contributed to social inclusion as well. ►



Girls in the EDD program