

one of the most gifted kids at the house and that given the chance he would excel academically.

A Difficult Surgery

I wrote to a friend in San Francisco, Dr. Bob Gilbert, a prominent orthopedic surgeon, and learned that it was possible to perform an operation that would build Raju a bladder out of his own intestines. It was a complex and difficult surgery, but it could be done at California Pacific Hospital in San Francisco, where Dr. Gilbert practiced. With his help, the hospital and Dr. Ray Fay, an outstanding urological surgeon, agreed to perform the operation without charge, and I brought Raju back with me to the U.S. when I returned a couple of weeks later.

The surgery was successful; and Raju returned to Nepal six months later. He had learned almost perfect English, had satisfied his obsession with Bugs Bunny cartoons, and like any other boy, could go to school, ride a bike, and play soccer.

Growing up and giving back

Raju grew up at J House. When he graduated from high school, he entered law school in Kathmandu. In his second

year, we invited him and a fellow law student to come out to the Dang District with us to witness the rescue of bonded children. They were so incensed by what they saw that when they returned, they filed a writ with the Supreme Court of Nepal (admittedly with some help from NYOF's lawyer). The suit sought to compel the government to declare clearly that the bonding practice is illegal, to enforce its own laws against the custom, and to provide funds to rehabilitate the liberated girls. They won a sweeping victory, and they appeared on TV and in the newspapers.

But all this happened in the middle of the Maoist insurgency, and the government took no steps to comply with the court's order. Nevertheless, we were able to make good use of the Supreme Court's opinion, waving it under the noses of recalcitrant employers and citing it to judges in the many lawsuits we brought against employers who refused to free bonded girls. The decision might well have had an impact on the government's recent action to provide funds to educate the children returning from bonded labor.

We Are Thankful for Your Continuous Generosity and Advocacy

We so much appreciate your loyal support over the years and assure you that your contributions are reaching the children they are intended to help. Both on this side of the world and in Nepal, we make the most of your donations. For the third year in a row, we have received the highest rating possible (four stars) from Charity Navigator, the biggest charity rating organization in the U.S., for the efficient use of your contributions. In Nepal, dollars go far, and we are able to achieve spectacular results like freeing a child from bonded labor for about \$100, and saving a baby's life at a Nutritional Rehabilitation Home for an average of \$340, which provides five weeks of hospitalization, as well as education of the mother, so that the condition does not recur. It's hard to think of another charitable donation that can go as far and provide critical support for some of the most impoverished kids anywhere.

Please give as generously as you can.

Warm regards,

P.S. Again, we would welcome any suggestion you may have for a new name for NYOF as it enters its third decade.

Please visit our web site www.nyof.org



Raju in the U.S., after his surgery

Now Raju is about to graduate from law school and plans to enter public service. He is the kind of civic-minded young person the country needs to pull itself out of its political and economic doldrums. When I look at this now six foot tall, slender, very intelligent young man and recall the frail, sad little boy in the hospital room that he was, it makes me proud of our accomplishments.



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Nepalese Youth Opportunity Foundation

3030 BRIDGEWAY, SUITE 123
SAUSALITO, CA 94965
415-331-8585
FAX: 415-331-4027
E-MAIL: INFO@NYOF.ORG

DEAR FRIENDS For all of you who love the children of Nepal, we have tremendous news – something that will make you forget for a moment the barrage of gloomy messages that daily fill the airwaves and newspapers.

Sound the Trumpets, Beat the Drums, We Are Thankful for a Major Victory for the Child Slaves of Nepal

In July, the government of Nepal appropriated **1.6 million DOLLARS** to rehabilitate young girls freed from bonded labor. This is an enormous sum in Nepal. It is the culmination of a decade of lobbying by NYOF. The funds may be used for schooling and for vocational training. To my personal delight, and at our suggestion, the funds may also be used to provide housing and an education for bonded children who have no home to return to because they are orphans or their families are homeless.

Throughout the decade since our Indentured Daughters Program started, we have asked the Nepali government not

only to enforce its own laws against the bonding of children, but to educate the young girls we have liberated. (See the last story about how a former J House boy helped in this effort.) Except for some actions by local government in the areas where we have been working, the result has been – zilch. Until this year.

March to the Central Government

In February, we brought 400 girls we had previously liberated in western Nepal on a 12 hour bus ride to Kathmandu to focus the attention of the central government on this practice. They marched through the streets of



Freedom March – Nepali Style

NOVEMBER 2009



Little girls like these will no longer be sold when bonding is eradicated

Kathmandu carrying banners, chanting slogans against bonding, and distributing leaflets. We arranged appointments for them to talk with the President, various government ministers, and the UN Human Rights Commission. We believe this high-profile campaign was a major factor in convincing the central government to make its move.

NYOF is the lead organization helping the government to plan and implement its program. We are working closely with various ministries to advise them on the most effective way to use the appropriated funds, and the government has adopted almost all of our suggestions.

This action by the government is an important step in helping us to reach our goal of eradicating this inhumane custom, but by no means the end of the line. It has relieved NYOF of the responsibility of educating the girls after we have liberated them, and as a result, we can use your donations to eradicate the bonding practice itself sooner than we had anticipated. Let me explain.

I gave a speech to hundreds of liberated girls at a rally last year following an anti-bonding march. If you would like to watch the speech, please go to www.nyof.org/current/speech.html.

The government appropriation cannot be used to liberate the girls or to carry out the awareness campaign against bonding that we have been conducting for almost a decade. Thus, NYOF will have to continue to support efforts to identify the parents of bonded girls and convince them not to sell their daughters, and to confront employers to persuade them to release the girls from their contracts. We will also have to provide the piglet or goat that the families receive from NYOF if they agree not to bond their daughters or bring them home from their labors. And we will still have to fund the local anti-bonding clubs, a weekly radio program where girls talk about their suffering when they were in bondage, and to present street dramas against the custom in these largely illiterate communities. Without NYOF's support, there will not be large demonstrations by the liberated girls or lawsuits against employers who refuse to release them from their contracts.



These activities, which are critical to permanently eradicate the custom, must still be supported by NYOF and our donors. **Our eradication campaign, including all the elements above, costs approximately \$100 for each girl liberated.**

Thousands Remain to be Rescued

Next January, during the Maghe Sakrante festival at which the bonding contracts are made, our staff will fan out across the five districts in west Nepal where indentured servitude of little girls is prevalent, to bring our awareness campaign to the towns and villages where we have not had the funds to operate previously. We hope to rescue the thousands of little girls still in the bonding process or prevent them from being contracted away.

When we began to confront this cruel custom in 2000, there was no opposition to bonding away children. Fathers could hardly wait for their daughters to turn seven so that they could be sold for labor. The bus park every January was filled with weeping little girls about to be parted from their families for the first time



Former bonded girls act in a street play about the plight of indentured daughters

and to go off they knew not where. Today, the practice is on its last legs in the Dang District, where we have been working since 2000, and it is on its way out in Bardiya, where we brought our campaign a couple of years ago.

But there remain thousands of girls who are the victims of this custom, so there is much left to do. We have an unprecedented window of opportunity to bring the bonding practice to an end. **Now we ask your continued help in finally closing this sad chapter in Nepal's history.**



Celebrate NYOF's Anniversary with Us!

NYOF is preparing to celebrate its 20th anniversary (and my 85th birthday) next June. We are marking the occasion in a number of ways.

First, we are considering changing NYOF's name. Some donors, Board members, and public relations professionals have commented that "Nepalese Youth Opportunity Foundation" is a mouthful and is not easy to remember. Your suggestions for a new name would be most welcome, or if you want to defend the existing moniker, let us know. The Board will consider your suggestions and make a decision, and we will let you know the winner.

Second, we are going to revive our campaign to encourage donors to join our Legacy Circle and remember NYOF in their wills or other estate planning arrangements. Such arrangements can provide significant tax benefits to donors, and there is no better way to assure NYOF's financial health in the long term. Some donors have told us that they have already included NYOF in their wills. If you have done so, we will be most appreciative if you let us know.

Third, we are inaugurating a drive to ask donors to pledge \$1000 for each of three years to support NYOF's viability in the near future. Any of you bighearted contributors who agree to do so will get as a gift one of my favorite books in all this world - Alison Wright's "Faces of Hope," a stunning book of photographs of children from all around the world, with captions describing Alison's encounters with them.

We Are Thankful to Be Saving the Lives of Malnourished Children at Our Nutritional Rehabilitation Homes - an Everyday Event

Take a look at this child - doesn't he look like a healthy, thriving, playful baby?



Shiva, Restored by an NRH

But it was not always so. Here is his story:

He is Shiva Rana (not his real name), and he was born in Kanchenpur, one of the nine districts where NYOF has established a Nutritional Rehabilitation Home ("NRH"). These are small hospitals dedicated to restoring the health of malnourished children. His mother gave birth to Shiva, her fourth child, at their hut in a shantytown settlement. Her health was fragile and her breast milk insufficient, so little Shiva started out life without adequate nourishment. When he grew old enough to consume solid foods, at times the family was so poor that they did not have food to offer him. His



Shiva at Admission to the NRH

mother took him to a local shaman (a common practice in poor rural areas in Nepal where there are no doctors), but Shiva continued to deteriorate.

She finally took him to a hospital nearby, where he was diagnosed as suffering from acute malnutrition. The hospital referred him to the nearest NRH. At our doorstep appeared an exhausted, malnourished mother carrying a tiny 11 month old baby weighing only 10 pounds, his face distorted by constant crying, with no appetite, a dull complexion, and severe diarrhea.

Although all 10 beds at the NRH were occupied by children in similar condition, our staff found space and admitted him because of the severity of his condition, and went into action. As she does for all the children, our dietitian prepared a special diet tailored to his needs as well as a feeding and nursing schedule, and the doctor attended to his medical problems.

While Shiva was being restored to health, his mother was instructed daily in the preparation of nutritious food inexpensively and easily available in her village, and about all aspects of child care - the importance of hygiene, the

Shiva is one of 6,000 severely malnourished children from throughout Nepal who have benefited from the intense, loving, intelligent care at one of our nine Nutritional Rehabilitation Homes scattered throughout the country.

symptoms of illness, etc. She stayed with Shiva at the NRH and was offered food that was nourishing and plentiful.

Voila - after 34 days, a healthy, smiling baby and a happy, well-nourished and educated mother.

Shiva's mother kept repeating that it was hard to believe that her half-dead baby could be transformed so quickly into a bouncy, vigorous infant simply by proper diet and care, and she vowed that she would continue to follow the practices she learned at the NRH to keep him and her other children healthy. Our field worker has made several visits to their home, and he reports that Shiva is in the pink of health. **And all this for an average cost of \$340.**

Another Reason to be Thankful: J House Boy Who Traveled to the U.S. for Life-Changing Surgery Becomes an Advocate for Bonded Girls

In a newsletter three years ago, I shared the inspiring story of Raju, a boy who grew up in one of NYOF's programs and later helped another of our programs to defend children's rights. I am excited to recount this tale because it has now turned out even better than we had hoped.

Many years ago, at a time when NYOF was in its infancy, we were told about a little boy who needed our help. Raju (not his real name) was about eight years old and was born with a condition called "extrophy." He had no bladder, his intestines were exposed, and he had to wear a urine-soaked towel around his waist at all times. His father had died, and his mother was unable to care for him. Raju could not attend school and was shunned by society. An uncle brought

him to Kathmandu from his remote village to seek medical care. When we went to visit him in the hospital, we found a gorgeous, dark, rail-thin child with beautiful expressive eyes, tears running down his cheeks. We brought him a few little toys, and I will never forget the brilliant smile that lit up the whole room when we ran a little car up and down the windowsill by his bed.

When he left the hospital, he came to live at J House, our then recently opened home for boys where children from the most deprived backgrounds find a loving, supportive home. The other boys were good to him, but he could not go to school, so we provided him with private tutoring. It was clear that he was