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To make a long story even longer- they met at my house in March (she chaperoned by her boss, and I representing the groom’s side). As I learned, these matters must be carefully choreographed. My Nepali friends were horrified when I suggested that they might walk down the road together and have a cup of tea to get acquainted while we waited for them at my house. “THEY CAN’T DO THAT!” they exclaimed in alarm.

After we introduced them and made some small talk, my friend and I went into an adjacent room and left them alone to talk; and they talked and talked and talked, until we had to interrupt them. So here’s the Nepali version of outlandish flirting – she told him at this first meeting, “I would love to eat a momo (Nepali dumpling) made by your own hand!” Sweet!

They met at a public park the next Saturday, their day off and again several Saturdays after that, and they chatted every day on the phone. Ram sent her frequent amorous text messages, which she couldn’t read because they were in English, and my friend composed suitably romantic responses.

He proposed marriage - she accepted. But – you just can’t get married on any old day of your choosing in Nepal. A few times a year there is a “wedding season,” and the date has to be auspicious, as determined by an astrologer/priest. I was hoping that the stars would align so that I would still be in Kathmandu for the wedding. Fortunately, the gods were willing, and the date was set for a few days before my departure.

On the wedding day, we all went to a temple for an endless ceremony - the bride and groom and priest all sat on the ground on carpets, and there was a lot of chanting, giving and receiving of blessings, exchanges of rings and gifts, and other formalities. The groom looked a bit dazed, but very happy.

Then on to my house for a wedding party which started out with a guest list of 22 and ended up with 250. A happy ending to a 20-year-long saga. ●

## How you can help

These stories are your success stories, too, for they would not be possible without your support. Your gift will help us to continue to give these destitute kids the opportunities they need to reach their true potential. On behalf of all our wonderful children in Nepal, thank you for all you have done and anything you can do to help now.

Warm regards, Som and Olga



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Spring 2013

## Dear Friends:

Spring is beautiful here in Kathmandu. Although the winters are short and relatively mild, spring comes as a relief, even in this smoggy, filthy, chaotic city. NYF programs are flourishing. The more than 12,000 girls we have rescued from indentured servitude are in school or vocational training; some have jobs or have started their own businesses. The Nutritional Rehabilitation Homes (small hospitals which restore malnourished children to health and educate their mothers about nutrition), are being gradually taken over by the government. We will have reached our goal of building 16 of these centers by year’s end. And the J and K House kids are exuberant and loving, as always.

## iPad Mania

As some of you know, each winter I (Olga) invite the girls from K House for a sleepover. I wish you could all be here for these evenings of good food,



K House girls at sleepover



K House girls with beloved iPad

laughter, dancing, and earnest conversation. After a good dinner, the little ones have an unforgettable experience – a bubble bath! Most Nepalis have never been immersed in hot water before, so they are afraid at first to take the plunge, but once they are in (three at a time), it’s hard to get them out. They giggle and splash themselves and each other, treating the tub like a swimming pool, until there is more water outside than in. Afterwards, they dry off in front of a roaring fire in the living room. Then the older girls put the little ones to bed, the teenagers gather around the fire, and we talk about LIFE!

At our overnight in January, after we tucked the little girls in, I asked the teenagers casually if they had ever seen an iPad. They almost swooned. iPads are relatively rare here, and very expensive, and none of them had actually seen one, though they had heard of them. Like teenagers everywhere, it was not long before they knew how to navigate all the icons – something that took me days to learn. Then they took turns pounding away at the keyboard. I had no idea what they were doing, but a couple of days later, almost by accident, I tapped the “Notes” icon on the iPad and found a bunch of messages from them. Here

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is a composite, complete with teen-agey punctuation:

“Today is the first day of me... using an iPad and it is so wonderful!! IT WAS ALWAYS MY DREAM!!!... When I will finish my study I want to be person like you and I will do my best in my future and definitely I will buy an iPad. Thank you mom for everything you have done for us..we will always remember you. Because of you we are able to use iPad...omg... iPad!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

“After dinner we had lots of talks with Olga mom... We learnt many things with her!! many things in life.. .we should learn to stay happy...We should learn to be thankful for everything that we’ve got!! Sometimes it doesn’t work as we want and that totally makes us down...but we have to learn to cope with it!! Our life is not always fun and interesting it is filled with problems!! But without problems our life won’t be interesting at all...We get in problems...why?... to cope with it! to learn many new things in life! To know that our life is not always easy!! I am happy to live my life like this!! I am so happy for all the things

I have got...

“I am not ... able to write more because I ate too much and my stomach is going to blast so I am stopping to write but I will write you an mail when I will buy an iPad ok mom?...?????

After (writing this), we brushed our teeth and then again had a talk, sang and danced then went to sleep...

What makes these perceptive and lively messages especially poignant is their lineage: the girls who wrote them had endured great suffering before they came to us as young children. One was bonded away as a servant at a young age by an alcoholic father and refused our offer of liberation unless her two little sisters, who she supported, could also come to K House. Another followed her sight-impaired mother around on the street all day as she begged. A third lost both her parents to snake bite at a young age. ●

## Saving a life and finding a bride

A number of people have asked over the years what we would do to help the children we have raised at J and K house to find spouses. In Nepal, the vast majority of marriages are “arranged,” to a greater or lesser degree, by parents or close relatives. Most of the J and K House children do not have such intermediaries. My response has always been, “Look, they’re well-educated, well brought up, well-dressed, attractive kids – they’ll find their own spouses.” And so it has been – until now!

This story began many years ago. In the early days of NYF, we used to visit the children’s wards in the Kathmandu hospitals regularly, either to see our own children who were patients there, or to offer help to families who could not afford the care their kids needed. One day, perhaps 20 years ago, we were visiting one of our children and noticed a little boy in a bed across the ward – around six or seven years old. He was slight of build, but had an enormous belly and was obviously very ill; he never had any visitors and his little face wore a downcast, lost look.

When we asked the doctor about him, he said that Ram’s parents (not his real name) had sent him and his sister, who was a couple of years older, to Kathmandu, to find jobs and that they were both working in a carpet factory when he became ill. The owner of the factory did not want to take responsibility for a sick child worker, so he took him to the hospital and dropped him at the door. Ram was diagnosed with “kala azar,” a nasty tropical disease

caused by the bite of a sand flea. The only medicine available in Nepal was not working, and his spleen was grossly distorted; hence the huge belly. In truth, the doctors were waiting for him to die.

I wrote to the son of a friend who was working at the University of California hospital in San Francisco, and asked if there was any medicine in the west that could help. He replied that there was; the hospital provided it without charge, the therapy worked as intended, and Ram recovered.

He left the hospital in blooming good health, but since he had no place to go after discharge, he came



Bride and Groom and Matchmaker

## Golden Harmony School

NYF is committed to programs that have a powerful and sustained impact on the lives of Nepali children. The Sunoula Chowa, or Golden Harmony School, is such a project.

Launched 10 years ago to educate some of the country’s most marginalized children, the school is now the top performer in a region of Nepal where the prevailing population consists of “Dalits,” the caste of “untouchables” who live in appalling conditions at the lowest strata of the social structure.

When I (Som) first visited the village in 1999, I encountered a settlement of 65 Dalit households where not a single Dalit child went to school. They worked in a nearby mine to help support their families. The dropout rate in the local primary school, staffed with untrained and unmotivated teachers, was as high as 90%. In 20 years, no child had made it through 5th grade. Most of those children ended up working as farm or factory laborers or domestic servants. Many others ended up on the streets of Kathmandu. The fate of the girls was even more terrible.

With the help of local residents, NYF came up with the idea of opening a primary school in the village focused on educating children from the Dalit community. We developed a plan, emphasizing a community partnership approach. Local farmers and a generous NYF donor enabled us to acquire three acres of land for the school, and the community eagerly donated labor for the construction. We hired teachers and trained them in childhood and primary education, granted scholarships to 200 children, and provided books, supplies and

uniforms. We also built a library and a nursery. Children swarmed in; they not only enjoyed school, but also improved academically. The school grew to include a secondary level.

Since the school reached 10th grade five years ago (the last level of secondary school), all the students who have taken the SLC exams (equivalent to the college entrance exam), have not only passed, but 90% of them scored in the top percentiles. By contrast, only 40% of students in the nearby government school passed the SLC.

After running the school for 10 years, we successfully handed it over to the local community. The government is now providing financial support to supplement the community’s contribution.

We are happy to stand aside and watch what we started continue to grow and thrive in this rural and marginalized community.



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to J House to live. He grew into a gentle, helpful, thoroughly nice young man. After high school, he was not interested in going to college, so we placed him in a good vocational school where he was trained as a cook. He is now in his mid-20s and has a good job in a private school. Some months ago, I saw him at his place of work and asked him casually to give me a call some time. Little did I know what it would lead to.

**Matchmaker, matchmaker, make me a match**

He phoned the next day to tell me that he was very, very sad; he thought he would be getting married but the girl had called it off because her parents said he was “just a cook.” So – I made up

my mind to break my rule and find this young man a wife. He is very shy, and he needed help. I turned to a Nepali friend, who said she had a maid who might be a good prospect. The young woman, a member of the Tharu ethnic community, who had been a kamlari (a child bonded laborer), was just the right age, and agreed to the meeting.

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