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President's Letter.

June is one of my favorite months at Rising Star. After all the preparations and anticipation of May, in June the children return from their summer vacations. The excitement is amazing. Dozens of new students arrive, scared and tearful; their parents excited for their family to become part of the Rising Star education program, yet worried about trusting their precious children to American strangers!

Fortunately there are 140 returning students, excited to be back, running around, thrilled to be greeting old friends and hugging their teachers from last year. Inevitably there are also dozens of parents and children, hoping against all they've been told, that if they show up, miraculously we will find a place for their children. As gently as possible we try to remind them of our waiting list. We hug the children and try to hold out hope for the future as they turn to leave, disappointed. It always leaves us with a lump in our throats.

But school is starting again! Everyone is excited. This year, we are especially blessed to have Dr. Gordon Gibb and his wife, Vickie, on campus. Dr. Gibb is directing the school. He will be training the teachers, working with the curriculum, and heading up the search to find the perfect principal. Vickie

will be directing the housemothers and the children's homes. We are very indebted and grateful to BYU for helping to provide Dr. Gibb's salary for the year he'll spend with us. Under his expert guidance, we are expecting this year to be "the great leap forward"!



Another surprise this year for the students is the coming together of our computer lab. Don't get me wrong—it's still not completed—but it's well on its way. Nothing in India, it seems, happens quickly! We've been blessed to have Melissa Mitchell spend several weeks

in India working with all the challenges of putting together a computer lab in a remote village in India (Our property is in the proverbial Middle of Nowhere). At times the task has seemed impossible. But she's been determined! It looks like it might actually be up and running by the first part of July. Back in the States, she's continuing to work with our Indian IT partners: to push, cajole, and politely demand! India won't be able to rest until she's got the lab up and running! As you can imagine, the students are cheering her progress each step of the way.

We will reluctantly say good bye to Tagg Grant at the end of the summer. The year he promised to Rising Star has been amazing. He's been a blessing to every aspect of our program. We will miss him terribly, but realize that life has to go on. He'll be returning to the States as a consultant. He's excited to move into the next phase of his life, but will leave a wealth of happy experiences and contributions in the lives of hundreds of children and leprosy-affected patients in India.

The good news is that two members of our board in America have stepped up and agreed to take Tagg's place in India. Ron and Joyce Hansen will be arriving in India as the new country directors for Rising Star Outreach, on July 16. To those of us serving on the board, this has been like a gift from God! To know Ron and Joyce, is to love them! They will be an incredible blessing to the work

in India. I asked them to write down just a few of their feelings about coming to oversee our work in India. I think you'll agree, we are so blessed to have them coming.

The volunteer program is off to a big start. We will be welcoming a record 90 volunteers this summer. For the first time, we have a significant waiting list for volunteer opportunities. This year's volunteers are more involved than ever. They've each already participated in a fundraising activity for Rising Star before even arriving on our campus. They will be working with our children to increase their English proficiency, working with our mobile medical unit, and working in the colonies. Each one brings unique gifts and talents to the work.

In some fun news from our operations here in the States: we are thrilled to announce that the PBS documentary on our work, *Breaking the Curse*, won the Gracie Award for the best full-length documentary of the year! I got the never-dreamed-of opportunity to travel to New York, to the Gracie Awards Ceremony, where I got to watch the producer of the documentary, Brian Kosisky, receive the (well-deserved!) award. Speaking of the documentary, if any of you would like a copy, send \$5 for mailing costs, and we'll send one out to you. We have produced a shortened version of the documentary as well (13 minutes). It's also now been translated into Spanish. The Spanish version should be available within a month. It's a great way to share our mission with your friends.

We've also been informed that I have been named as one of 5 Classic Women in the annual contest to recognize leaders in service by *Traditional Homes Magazine*. Rising Star not only receives a cash award, but our story will be featured in their November issue. Another great way to share our mission with your friends!

We got a huge response to our request for USB drives last month. One donor, alone, sent 80! The personal commitment and involvement of our supporters never ceases to amaze us. Can we ask for yet another favor? If you will use [www.Goodsearch.com](http://www.goodsearch.com) <<http://www.goodsearch.com/>> as your search engine, and list Rising Star Outreach as the charity, we will be given one cent for every search you do. Most of us use Google several times a day. It all adds up! Some charities are receiving more than \$1,500/month just by having their supporters use Goodsearch!

WOW! That's equivalent to having an extra 50 sponsors a month! So PLEASE, use Goodsearch for your online searches. Thanks!

Becky Douglas

Volunteer Story

I hardly knew what to expect when I first arrived at Rising Star Outreach last November. I had braced myself for dirt, heat, and culture shock, so when I arrived at the property, I was surprised by the cleanliness, and enchanted by the beautiful land. Amy & Tagg asked me to run the school. I think my official title was "Acting Director," but the kids and teachers started calling me "Principal Sarah," and that's the title that stuck.

I loved my daily work. I loved being Principal Sarah. The days began early, with the first sounds of rising housemothers and children coming even before sunrise. By 6:30 I would hear the children singing (okay, let's be honest,



shouting) and making a lot of happy kid noise as they washed their clothes, took bucket baths, and occasionally finished homework. Later in the morning, the village students would arrive, walking in a line behind their mothers, balanced on the handlebars of their fathers' bikes, or piled on the back of an uncle's motorcycle.

Every morning around 9:00, we'd all walk down the dirt road to the school. The boys always offered to carry my bag, and the girls to hold my hand, sometimes three girls to a hand. The kids would tell stories of snake sightings and try to trick me into telling who would win the Rising Star Respector award that day. The girls wore fresh flowers in their hair, and I could smell the jasmine as they walked by.

At 9:15 the children stood in rows in front of the school for Morning Assembly. They did a few funny exercises, and sang (shouted) a few

songs and poems, including the Indian national anthem. We gave two daily awards and made announcements, and then they ran into school. Most of the children shook my hand on their way in, and I learned so much about their personalities in those tiny exchanges. Some would be mad at me for not giving their class an award, and they'd deliberately ignore my outstretched hand. Some would squeeze as tight as they could, some insisted on high fives, some wanted to kiss me instead. Some had a funny joke prepared, some just smiled sweetly. Those handshakes were what really made me fall in love with the kids.

After the daily assembly. Mariammal the cleaning lady and I would chase out the wildlife that gathered in the classrooms every night. Frogs, toads, ants, stickbugs, beetles, the occasional snake, the occasional puppy. I sprayed pesticide while Mariammal went crazy with the mosquito bat, an electrified bug zapper tennis racket (possibly the most important invention in history). One morning another volunteer found me out of breath and blood-smeared from a serious kung fu fight with a swarm of mosquitoes. I couldn't help taking adventurous pride in the number of bizarre creatures I worked around and mosquitoes I killed every day.

During the day, I would take care of school business and observe classes. Often I prepared lesson plans for our special units - *Amazing India*, *Space & Sky*, *Inside the Human Body*. I wrote plays for each class to perform on the last day of school. When a teacher was missing, I would substitute, which was always a humbling and educational experience. While I worked, I could hear the kids reciting poems at the top of their lungs ("My house is red / a little house / a happy child am I / I laugh and play the livelong day / I hardly ever cry"). On hot days, sometimes I would stand on the school steps and watch a teacher conduct class outside under the mango trees, and feel dazzled by the beauty in my life.

After school, the kids cleaned their classrooms, going all-out to win the Clean Classroom Award. The ones who were trying to get out of work would visit my office and beg to look at their pictures on my computer. 1st grade Ismail, who I suspect fancied himself my boyfriend, would wait to walk home with me every day, carrying my bag, which was as big as him. It hurt his feelings if I patted him on the head or did anything that reminded

him of his status as a 7-year-old, so we would just walk on as equals, talking about the day. That was a hard goodbye.

I have so many small memories I will treasure.

One day, looking out my window, I saw M. Vignesh prowling through the tall grass on his hands and knees, snarling and stealthy, lost in an imaginary life as a tiger. Another day, the girls made "cakes" out of sand in the yard, decorated them with flowers, and served me a slice on an imaginary plate. I will remember the wonder on their faces when we made rainbows with a prism and a sliver of sunshine. One day we painted famous buildings of India on the classroom walls, and they made the black-and-white outlines bloom into wild, whimsical versions of the Taj Mahal, the Golden Temple of Amritsar, the temple at Mahabalipuram.

I'll never forget the "star party" we had on the hostel roof one night during our Space & Sky unit. I showed the kids pictures of planets, nebula, comets, and the earth from space. It might have been the first time they saw the heavens like that. We craned our necks back to identify Orion, Taurus, and the Pleiades, we talked about how lucky we are to live on our beautiful planet Earth.

Now that I'm home and I miss the children, I take comfort in remembering that we all still live on the same beautiful planet Earth. I'm on the other side of it now, and my American life feels like another world, but I will be forever changed by the love they gave me when I was Principal Sarah and lived in their world. I am so grateful for the experience I had at Rising Star Outreach, and for the donors and leadership who have built such a beautiful place.

Peery School for Rising Stars

The Peery School for Rising Stars began the new school year with 171 children. Opening day was the usual hectic, happy chaos. The families from the village and the leprosy colonies miraculously mixed together as they all shared the sadness and pride of seeing their children start another school year with Rising Star. Everywhere you looked you could see families picnicking on the lawn, children laughing and hugging their old friends, and parents giving last minute "be good" admonitions.

The new students were frightened and worried, but a few reassuring words and few hands offered in friendship from the veteran students convinced them that Rising Star really is the wonderful place their parents

promised. The Session One volunteers were also a huge help, holding the smaller children for hours until they felt safe.

As usual, the hardest thing about opening day was the number of students we had to turn away. I think there wasn't a single staff member who wasn't in tears at some point after having to explain to a deserving family that there simply isn't enough space for their sweet child. These families make sacrifices to come, with their children dressed up in their best clothes, all the while hoping that if they just look cute enough we just might find a way to accept them. It breaks our hearts to see the hope in their eyes and to have to try to explain that the school just isn't big enough for all the deserving children in India. This year we had to turn away almost 100 children. Twelve more were admitted during the first week for various important reasons, so our total now stands at 183 and we are stretched to the absolute limit. The children, ranging from 26 very cute Lower Kindergarteners to 10 eager adolescents in 7th Standard, are squeezed tightly into each classroom.

Dr. Gordon Gibb arrived a month early to take the reigns from Principal Sarah and immediately got to work hiring a few more teachers to complete the staff. The search was difficult, and the week leading up to opening day was pretty frantic. However, as always seems to be the case with Rising Star, God waited until the very last minute to provide us with our teachers. The week before school started we added a PE instructor, a science teacher, and a social studies teacher for Standards 3-7! Katie Etherington, a long-term volunteer from BYU, did a fine job teaching social studies for our first week (including the history of India!) and has substituted in other classes as well. Her enthusiasm was contagious and her classes just adored her. "Miss Katie" was a huge hit!



Dr. Gibb conducted several days of teacher inservice training before school started. For many of our teachers, his approach was an entirely new. Focusing on effective lesson planning, classroom and behavior management, and increasing praise, the teachers got a brand new focus for the year. These principles will now act as the guideposts in Dr. Gibb's teacher supervision and mentoring.

During the training the teachers and principal more or less stumbled on a theme for the year, which is "India is a land of great opportunity. Children are the future." This year, our children are proving once again that they certainly have great ability and potential. We're confident that The Peery School for Rising Stars will be a major factor in helping them excel.

The teachers and students are absolutely loving the classrooms and furnishings of our new building. It is so much easier to hold school when the teachers and students have classrooms and desks, and it gives the children some much needed structure. Each day we continue to be grateful to the Peery Family Foundation for this wonderful gift.

This is also the first year that all students have their own official textbooks! The Peery School books match the Tamil Nadu matriculation curriculum and the teachers are making good use of them. Dr. Gibb is now working together with volunteer Melissa Mitchell on the major undertaking of establishing our first computer lab! Progress is being made slowly, but we expect to be able to show you pictures in the next two months. We have a room prepared especially for this purpose and the desks and necessary wiring are in place. Another dream come true! As our students become proficient in computer literacy, we will continue to maintain relationships with companies like Dell in the hopes of one day giving the children opportunities for career paths within the IT industry.

All in all, we are thrilled with the 2008! Dr. Gibb has already shown himself to be worth his weight in gold, and the children are more excited than ever to get going again in school. Keep watching each month for wonderful stories of their progression.

Child Spotlight

Nagaraj is the son of the Rising Star cooks. He first joined us two years ago as a very wild child. Back then, his family was living in a makeshift hut on the beach with only sand for their floor and a thatched roof for shelter. Since then, Nagaraj has slowly grown into a happy, helpful little boy. His English skills are

progressing beautifully; in fact, he can sometimes be observed walking around quietly talking to himself repeating English words he picked up from the volunteers that day. He is an outstanding runner, artist, and cricket player. Nagaraj is kind and gentle, and he enjoys spending time with his sister. He was given an award at the end of the last school year for excellence. He is always trying to find ways to be useful and always working on a project he creates for himself. It is gratifying to see the change that life at Rising Star school has made on this remarkable child, and exciting to contemplate his bright future. We are grateful to have Nagaraj returning this year as an important member of our family!

Hostel Report

Session One Volunteers came roaring into Chennai just before the return of the children. They were so excited to get to work helping that first thing they did was don their grubbies and pick up paintbrushes. For the next three days, they went to work on the hostel walls. Covering up the dirty fingerprints and scratches of last year with bright colors and fun, cheerful motifs, they quickly transformed the hostel into a wonderland of children's fantasy.

They painted everything from flowers and ocean creatures to a rocket ship and cricket bats. Every paint stroke was done in love, and every enthusiastic volunteer worked until they were exhausted to make sure the children felt welcome and loved upon their return from summer break.

The wonderful Rising Star Outreach housemothers worked side-by-side with the volunteers to help get the hostels up and running. Vickie Gibb, our wonderful new hostel director, took over the reigns with a flourish and immediately set to work making the hostel into a home in time for the children's return. Housing and caring for this many children is a huge job and it takes several people to make it happen. Vickie has done a wonderful job coordinating all the different staff members to ensure that the homes are run with a great mix of order and love. She is directing eight housemothers and several cleaners and cooks, and she is managing it all with grace.

Our housemothers have a particularly challenging job. They are responsible for looking after the children, making sure they study and get their homework done, getting them off to school each morning and after lunch, and watching over their hygiene and health, making sure they do their chores, and giving them enough love and affection to keep them happy. In addition to that, each one has other assignments within the hostel.

Some teach at the school, some help with the cooking, and one is in charge of making sure we have the amount of food, water, soap, cleaning supplies, etc. needed. They are on the job 24 hours per day, just like a real mom (only most of us don't have 25 kids at a time!)

There are three families of boys and three families of girls. Each family has a housemother and approximately 25 children. Because they live away from home, the hostels are set up to help the children feel like they are living in families. The ages in each group range from the youngest of our students to the oldest, with the older children taking responsibility to help their little "brothers and sisters". It is so sweet to see the children taking care of one another as they go throughout their days. The older children take great pride in teaching and helping the younger ones.

These children are happy, enthusiastic and affectionate.