



Letter from the President

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President's Letter.

Normally our volunteers share their experiences in India. But on a visit to India last week, I had an experience that reconfirmed to me the value of our work. I had accompanied a group of volunteers to the Villivakkam Colony of leprosy patients. We were building a goat shed for the colony so that they could have a goat-raising micro-enterprise. That particular day we were putting braided coconut sheaves onto the lashed roof we had completed the day before. The day was hot. Feeling a bit overheated, I sought shelter in the colony's small community center for a few minutes.

Finding my water bottle I took a drink of water (almost hot from sitting out in the heat). A woman from the colony approached me. She pulled up her sari to reveal a swollen and distended stomach that had a one inch wide scar running from top to bottom. She was obviously in a lot of pain. I called for a translator.

Her story was all too familiar. She had been diagnosed with a tumor in her stomach. She had withstood one surgery, but had been told a second one was needed. The first surgery was much more difficult than she had expected. More than three months had passed.

They had been months of pain. Only now, was she just beginning to be able to hold a little food down. She told me she definitely could not stand a second surgery.

Her current problem was that she was in a lot of pain. Was there anything I could do? She



said she had been praying for help, but felt that God had abandoned her.

I asked her when the mobile medical unit was due to come to her colony again, and the answer was that it would be 8 more days. She clearly couldn't wait 8 more days for relief. I

called the doctor and asked him if I could give her some pain medications. He said that I should definitely not give her any pain medication as she had a bleeding ulcer. Pain relief would cause her to bleed to death. When I asked him about the second surgery, he responded that she couldn't have it because she was too old. "How old is she?" I asked. He replied, "55".

His answer struck me. I am 56. I couldn't help reflect on the fact that if the tables were turned, and I was the one to have a stomach tumor, I feel very confident that I would be in the finest hospital in Atlanta. I would be attended to by the best doctors in the city. My family would be there to support me. My anesthesiologist would see to it that I was kept comfortable.

The value of a life is very different in a leprosy colony. The whole situation seemed insane to me. We were both children of God. We both should be able to lay claim to His blessings. Something was

very wrong with this picture.

I hated having to give her the doctor's message. She lay down on the concrete floor, cradling her head on her arm. I looked around for anything to put under her head—even a gunny sack, but there was nothing to be seen

that would suffice. I sat down next to her. Not knowing how I could help, I just stroked her face and hair. I sang simple songs to her—songs that I would sing to my own children when they were younger, (and I was trying to sing them to sleep). She closed her eyes. After a few minutes, she laid her own hand over mine as I was stroking, and followed the movements with me. This continued for about 30 minutes. The time came for us to have to leave. I gave her a final hug and we boarded the bus to return.

The next day when we returned to the colony with 16 goats to give to the colonists, she came to the door of her hut. As soon as she saw me, she broke into a big smile and ran up to me and buried her face in my shoulder. As I hugged her, I was struck again with how little I had been able to give her, yet how grateful she was. It was another witness to a fact that we see constantly at Rising Star. It's not what we do, it's the love we do it with that makes the difference. This was taught eloquently by Mother Teresa. We see it in real life almost every day.

This summer we will have nearly 100 volunteers attending to the needs of the leprosy-affected served by Rising Star. The volunteers come with open hearts. Each one comes to offer their own talents, time and energies to help lift people who are considered nearly worthless by their own countrymen. I salute each volunteer who comes with a heart full of love and such enthusiasm to share that love. Sometimes, it turns out, that love is the most healing thing we have to offer.

The new children in the home are darling! They seem to be fitting in very well with the original children. Our volunteers have been busy each day tutoring them in English. The volunteers have been following an ESL (English second-language) program taught to them by Heidi Hyte. Heidi came out and personally trained the first group of volunteers. The other groups have been studying with her through an on-line course. The program is making a noticeable difference.

The volunteers are continuing our tradition of hygiene clinics with the mobile medical unit under the direction of our wonderful doctor, Dr. Senthilkumar. Dr. Kirby and his wife, Amy, will be joining our medical team on July 15. The Kirby's will be staying for one year as part of the medical effort. They are bringing their three young children with them. We should be able to send you pictures of this new Rising Star family in India in our next issue.

Under Dr. Gibbs careful leadership, the Rising Star School is growing. He's busy training the

Indian teachers in progressive teaching methods that involve the students more. We're preparing to apply for our permanent status, a process that could take more than a year. The hostels are also full of happy, growing children. Under the direction of Vickie Gibb, the children are learning new skills. And for the first time ever—the children were lice-free when I arrived! That is no small feat! Especially considering 1) that many of the children have recently returned to Rising Star from the colonies, and 2) that many of the local children return home each night.

Under Padma's direction, the micro-lending program is continuing to grow and change lives. Her family has been plagued by a lot of sickness this year. Both her parents have been in the hospital, as well as her husband and brother-in-law. So it's been a challenging year. I teased her that 2008 is a good year, not to be



a "Venkataraman!" We send all our love and support to her family.

Thanks for the growing support that continues to make this an amazing adventure for us all!

Becky Douglas

A Change of the Guard

It is with great sadness that we all say good-bye to Tagg Grant. Tagg's been our managing director in India for the past year. He's done a spectacular job and we will all miss his direction. He's leaving to go work with his brother's law firm in New York (Is that right?) The staff, children, and families of Rising Star

have all been blessed and their lives have all been enriched by his service.

We've let him know that we expect frequent visits. We also expect him to bring lots of friends by. So we'll look forward to sharing our progress with him in the future when he's able to come by. We send him off with the greatest wishes of good luck for his future. We don't need to remind him that a piece of his heart will always remain with us in India. Thanks Tagg, for an incredible year!

We are excited to introduce our new Directors in India, Ron and Joyce Hanson. A little about them in their own words:

"Our new assignment in India will be the continuation of a journey that started over fifty years ago at Stanford University, where Joyce and I met. After graduation and three years of law school at Berkeley, we settled in Orange County, California, currently residing in Laguna Beach. We dedicated ourselves to our growing family, career, and community service. Early on, we decided that we had been greatly blessed with education, health, and strong family support, and we had a responsibility to give back to our community and church by willing service where we could.

We have served on various local arts and service boards in many positions over the years, as well as leadership in my professional trade association, the Stanford Alumni Association, and the Brigham Young University President's Leadership Council. Both of us have also been deeply involved in our church with many responsibilities.

We hope that all of these activities have prepared us for this tremendously challenging position in India. We are fortunate to have sufficient health and enough time that we can leave our eighteen grandchildren and their parents to embark on another direction in a cause that has excited us from when we were first introduced to Becky Douglas some six years ago. We believe in Rising Star!! This experience in India will be one of the high points of forty-eight years of marriage, and continuing our work together as a team."

Volunteer Journal

By Brook Curtis

Being in India taught me more life lessons than I could've asked for. My second day in the colonies was what we call a hygiene day, working with the mobile clinic and assisting the doctor. I saw "ulcers" and wounds I never would've imagined, some going all the way to the muscle. We saw large open boils, just huge, and we had to cut all the exterior tissue off until getting down to the raw bone. My



heart literally took over my mind and my body, and allowed me to work.

My first leprosy-affected patient I was able to work with was quite different from all the rest. She was very young, only 25, and her name was Mala. Not far from my same age, and my heart was torn apart thinking about what she has to look forward to. Because of leprosy, her legs had shriveled to her knees and she had learned to hobble around on her knees to move around. I watched her lift herself upon the chair and then I began to wash her feet. Her feet had morphed into balls of flesh that hung from her kneecaps; I had to search for her toes because they were so tucked away under her skin. While humming familiar tunes, I remembered I had brought nail polish in my bag. Excited to show her I grabbed the pink polish. She gave me a very concerned look and looked at me as if I was crazy! I told her to watch as I found her toes again and began to paint them for her. I will never forget the smile on her face. She was beaming with joy and I knew for that small moment she felt beautiful. I began to cry when I saw her hop off her chair to go and show some of the other women; she had something to be proud of and watching that made me feel fulfilled. Little did I know I would have a long line of women wanting their nails painted as well!

I didn't realize that by doing something so small like painting her toenails would make such a big difference in her life. I saw the feeling of self worth come back into her eyes when she saw the finished product of her feet. Mala graciously thanked me and asked her God to bless me each time I saw her that day. I hated not being able to communicate verbally with her, but maybe that's why I had so much compassion in serving her physically, because that is how I could touch her emotionally. Mala was ashamed of her deformities and her

initial reaction was to hide them from me. It is a very special gift to be able to make someone feel comfortable enough around you and let you hold their affected limbs.

It was our first Sunday in India and I couldn't have been more excited for that day to come. It was the day when all of the children would be back for the school year after their month long vacation in their

homes. As volunteers, we were warned that it would be an emotional day but I didn't have a clue on what to expect. They slowly began to trickle in and check in. As they said their farewells to their parents, we walked them up to the hostels for their lice treatments and to drop their few belongings off in their rooms. It was such a joy to watch the kids reunite with their friends and to get right back into the swing of things at RSO. Some of the children were more quiet than others because of leaving their parents, but most of them seemed to fit right back in. I was highly impressed watching the older kids take care of the younger kids. For being so young, they take on so much responsibility and they genuinely care for each other.

I walked down to the check-in area at the school. I watched the housemothers and Rising Star coordinators check kids in and talk to the parents. I noticed a mother in the distance who had sat her two young children down for a kind lecture. The boy being around 3 and the daughter around 5. With their big dark eyes they looked up to her and listened to every word she said. She then knelt down and hugged them and they began to cry. She held them for a moment and then I saw her grab their hands and walk them over to two of our volunteers. The mother threw her kids onto the volunteers and then ran off. I was confused when I saw this and didn't understand why she showed no emotion or affection towards her children. The kids were crying, the volunteers were crying, and as I looked into the distance I saw their mother hiding and watching from the trees crying as well. I then realized that she knew it would be too hard to say goodbye slowly and then to walk away. A great sense of emotion came over me as I realized something I had never thought of

before. I realized the courage that these parents have. They give up their children, their pride and joy, for the whole year because they see a better cause. They love their children so much and want the best for them. They are willing to sacrifice raising them so that they can learn English and have a better future. I couldn't even imagine the feeling that mother felt that day as she set her two young children in a new environment and hoped that it would all work out. She had so much faith and loved them so much that she was able to give them up. I don't know as if I could do the same. These two children ended up crying for the next few days and there was nothing to do except hold them and try to comfort them. While at Rising Star for the next three weeks I observed them closely. The two were never seen apart and always holding hands, even until the day we left. But, I will never forget the smiles on their faces and seeing how happy they were after they had adapted to Rising Star.

Children Spotlight

Manodhaya, age 11, and Aswin Raj, age 9, are two of our brightest students. They are a sister and brother who live in a village about an hour's walk from our school. They make the daily trip to and from school barefoot.

Manodhaya is in 5th standard and leads her class. When she grows up, she says she wants to "a policewoman and a mother." Her English is excellent, and she has a quick wit and creative mind. We often spot her helping other children – she's the first to notice and help if another child has fallen down and been hurt, or if someone looks sad. One day while walking home with the children, we saw an old





Aswin Raj is in the 3rd standard and is also a leader and good example in his class. He likes science, math, and English, and always has a huge smile. Like his big sister, he always seems to be looking out for the underdog, and always tries to make everything fair. He likes to look at bugs and plants and cars. It is great to have him at our school.

For Bloggers

man approach, begging. Although her family doesn't have a lot of money, Manodhaya pulled out her tiny wallet and gave the man a few rupees and some kind words. She is exceptionally emotionally intelligent, and the other children look to her as a leader. Manodhaya and Aswin Raj come from a very happy farming family of five children.

Rising Star Outreach had quite a remarkable week this past June. We had 21 members of the Marriott family join us as volunteers. They were also joined by Brian Foulger and two of his children. We had a packed house! Karen Marriott's blog has a remarkable account of their week. Log on and participate vicariously in their week of serving in the leprosy colonies. IndiaRisingStar.blogspot.com. Speaking of blogs, for continual updates, Joyce Hanson, one of our new directors in India also has a new blog; India_walkinginthesand.blogspot.com. You'll be able to experience India from the viewpoint of a new Rising Star director.