Trips with a Mission

Helping the Least of These

FROM THE FRONT LINES **April 2006**

The Least of These Children's Home - Relli, India

This article is written by Lauren Salamone a participant in the March 2006 trip to India and Nepal, and a child sponsor.

I have come full circle in life. I never thought of myself as 'overly emotional', but indeed I have discovered the depth of my sensitive side. I had the pleasure of accompanying Suzy Sims and Diane Hill, a dear friend of mine, on the March trip to North India and Nepal. The experience cannot be summed up in any phrase or cliché one could think up. It's hard to describe a life-altering event in a few words. But let me try to impart some of the wisdom God gave me on this trip.

It's about the faces of the children - the incredible beauty of the Spirit of God that lives in each one of them. I have dozens of pictures of your children. They are so alive with excitement and expectation of 'visitors' who would come to see them. Our arrival was a gift to them and they had no idea that they were the gift to each of us. Each child was ever so grateful for the food they receive each day, for the stories of our Lord Jesus and the love that they were receiving from Jonathan, Laxmi, Suzy, Diane and me. God lives within each of the children and their faces are a beautiful mirror of God's Spirit within. They have very simple needs - to be loved, cared for and educated in the most humble of fashion. They have no expectations other than to share what they have with each other, though not one of them owns much, and to care for each other as a family. I saw the faces of those being screened for admission - the sadness was gripping. I saw fear, abandonment, starvation, and in some, great expectation that they might possibly receive education. And then you compare their faces with the faces of the children that live in the LOT home - they are beaming with happiness and enthusiasm for each moment. What was once sadness has been transformed to overwhelming joy of their new home, family and stability they had never known!

It's about hope - hope for what was a hopeless future and is now the promise of tomorrow. Each child has a story - every one seemed more heart wrenching than the last. I had to take time out to sort through all of the information coming into my brain. In fact, at one point, I thought I would never stop crying over their beautiful faces filled with unconditional love for me - a total stranger. It was very difficult to take it all in - what was happening every day at the Relli Home.

Some of our girls at the LOT Home in Relli

The Least of These Children's Home - Relli, India - continued

In India, every child struggles for survival. What we put in doggie bags in the U.S. would be considered gold from heaven to any of these homeless children. Children are for sale every day - no one seems to experience shock or horror by this event. It's just how it is in India. What all of these children really want is food to eat, a roof over their head and some level of education. Parents or relatives are willing to sell children for just the possibility that they can get some of these things. I can't describe the deep anguish I experienced within me when I looked in the faces of homeless children in both Nepal and India. I can hardly sleep when I think of this. That is why I now know at age 52 that I am 'overly emotional'. I never knew in my life the kind of pain that God saved me from I never understood just HOW lucky I have been for the gifts given to me. I have never known a day without a meal or a roof. I have so flagrantly enjoyed the gifts of America without question or thanks - I just expected that every day would have no threat. Even though I am a daughter of illiterate Italian immigrants, I never knew poverty or what my grandparents went through when they came to this country. They struggled on a similar level to these children and I never knew. My tears were about what I have taken for granted, the gifts I never said thank you for and the life I live without threat of violence of any kind. I never knew what I didn't know and now I cry about that. God gave me a window to redeem myself and help those who can't advocate for themselves. The promise of tomorrow - our children in Nepal and India who live in our homes will not have to worry about threats, hunger or violence. They now have a chance to live and be educated and create the new middle class in India that is so obviously missing.

It's about God's wisdom for selecting a disciple named Suzy Sims and calling upon her for what seemed an impossible task to make a difference. I have been Suzy's friend for about 10 years. I never understood the depth and the greatness of her being. Suzy has been called by our Lord to help these children - to create the promise of tomorrow. Suzy's mission has been blessed with incredible people to help her at all her sites. It's because of Suzy, her colleagues, and **each of you** that our children can thrive in an environment of hope and love and caring. These children are selected by God to have what so many others will never have in these 3rd world nations. I am humbled by the faith of the individuals who care for our children daily. They serve as a shining example of what faith can do in our modern times.

Why have I come full circle in life? I guess I now get it! My initial experience was painful for me. Now I can't stop smiling. I see the joy and the hope that we are giving each of these children. My sadness on what they don't have has transformed to joy and humble thanks for what they do have. We make a difference!! If you ever wonder about the wisdom of your investment in the life of a child, please call me to ponder this thought. What we do for the Least of These cannot be measured in any dollar amount. There is not enough money to save all the children, but understand how important you are in each of your children's lives. Please know in your heart that your support makes a life and death decision for each of our children. I don't expect that I am smart enough, sophisticated enough or blessed enough to ever understand God's great pleasure for your contributions to the lives of each of these. I am a humble servant who had a window in God's world. My problems are nothing compared to each of these. Let me personally thank you for your support. Words can't express what you are doing for these children. You each need to go see for yourself. Let me know when you do ... *Lauren Salamone*

Lauren, with her sponsored child, Joy and his twin brother, George

The Times of India, New Delhi
Friday, March 31, 2006

Driven away from Valley, they now sell their kids

Survival At Stake, Migrants Take To Extreme Measures

By Aarti Tikoo Singh/TNN

Jammu: Seven-year-old Ranjo wearing a placard around her neck that says "Sir buy me, pay Rs 2,000" bears testimony to the fate of many other children like her. If becoming migrants in their own land was not enough, they are now being sold by their parents stricken by poverty and starvation. These children come from 953 families who had fled terrorist violence in upper reaches of Udhampur district and took shelter as refugees in safer places.

Though the government initially gave them relief under migrant quota, the practice was given up in 2004. Once this happened, their situation worsened to the point of starvation and with survival at stake, parents began selling their children. Fatima Bi of Mahore is one of them. With three sons and no source of income, she migrated to Talwara migrant camp six years ago.

But when one of her sons died of hunger after the relief was stopped, she sold 12-year-old Anwar for Rs 8,000 to a Jammu businessman two years ago. Now, his brother is about to be sold too as no help seems to be coming from the government.

Says Ranjo, "My two sisters have already been sold to people outside J&K. But I am working in Talwara itself for studies. There is no shame if I get Rs 2,000 but am allowed to study by whosoever buys me."

These extreme measures are pushing the hapless children to the brink. In one case, 14-year-old Joginder, who was sold by his mother for Rs 8,000 to sustain his five siblings, committed suicide.

These migrant families have come together to protest the government's apathy towards them. Chattar Singh, one of the demonstrators at a protest rally in Jammu, said he sold his nine-month-old son to an issueless couple since he had no money to buy milk for the baby. "He would have died otherwise," he says.

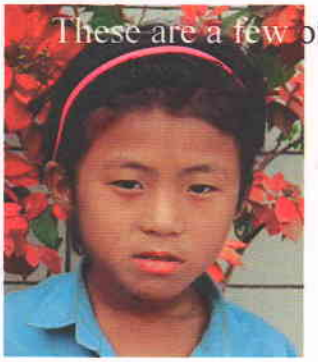
STARK REALITY: 'There's no shame if I get Rs 2,000 but am allowed to study by whosoever buys me,' says seven-year-old Ranjo.

A delegation of these families met chief minister Ghulam Nabi Azad on Thursday who assured them that he won't let them sell their children. Azad also formed a four-member committee, headed by Congress MP Lal Singh to probe the matter and submit a report.

Look at These Faces!!

Every time we visit one of our homes, people line up outside in hope that we will take the children. We interviewed nineteen children at the LOT Home in Relli, India. It's terribly hard to say no to a child, yet we only said yes to 2 girls, both at high risk of being sold. We told the girls to come back on April 2, the day before the new school year begins. On the 2nd, *all 19 children showed up* and we couldn't turn them away. **Folks, we need sponsors!!** It only takes $50 per month to give a new life to our children.

These are a few of our new children



Come Join Our Party!!!

Enjoying birthday cake

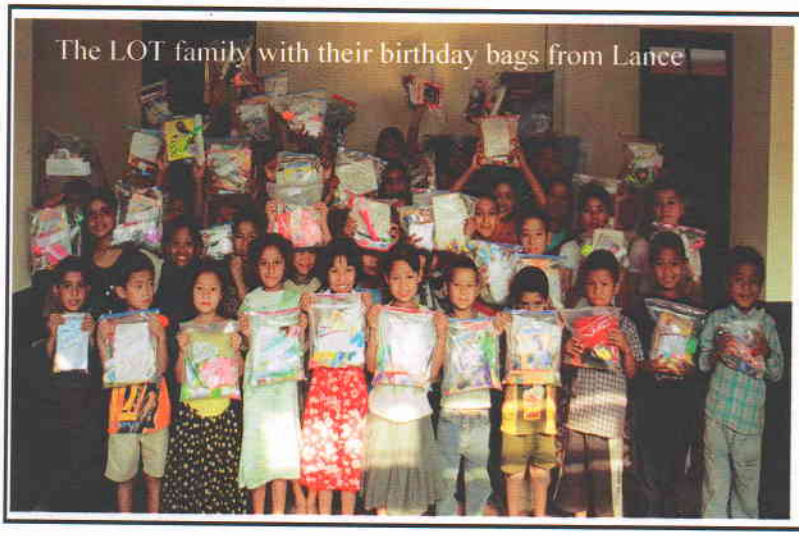
Diane Hill helping with the Pin the Tail on the Donkey game

Lauren cutting the cake

We had our first-ever group birthday party in Relli. You have to realize that the majority of the children have no idea of their birth date! 50 balloons of various colors were blown-up then everyone participated in a hilarious game of 'Pin the Tail on the Donkey'. We were afraid the older kids would think it a juvenile game, but our worries were unfounded. Everyone laughed as their blindfolded friends wandered around the room trying to find the 'donkey'. We had ordered 2 large sheet cakes and when Diane & Lauren walked out holding the cakes with 20 lighted candles on each, it was quite magical and it took their breath away. The cake was eaten with enthusiasm and fun was had by all.

Children examining birthday gifts

Our LOT Home (on the right) is nearing completion! We THANK all of you who have contributed towards this lovely building. The inside of the first 2 floors are completed and painted. The third floor needs to be plastered, painted, windows and doors installed and bathrooms completed. The outside will be painted and then we will finally be finished. Our LOT family moved into the building several months ago and feel richly blessed and delighted to have so much space!



The LOT family with their birthday bags from Lance

In December 2005, Lance Emerson, from Brookville, Florida sent us gallon bags of gifts to give to all our kids. Once we received these gifts, the idea of a birthday party at each home was born. Thank you so much Lance and all your friends who helped assemble the bags!! All the kids, regardless of age, loved the gifts. Each bag was chocked full of little goodies, most of which the kids knew nothing about. We had a blast showing how everything worked. Jonathan said some of the kids slept with their little bags of toys. It was touching.

The Women's Ministry Group from the Littleton Church in Colorado made 45 skirts for the girls in our homes. On the right you will see our Relli girls wearing their skirts. We explained to the girls that caring ladies in America made the skirts just for them, then we allowed them to chose the one they liked the best. Thank you ladies! You have not only helped clothe these little ones but you have made them feel special!!

If you would like to join us on our next visit to India in the fall of 2006, please call 303-660-8866 or check the appropriate box on page 6 and mail for more info.

The following is an e-mail received on April 5, from Jonathan and his wife, Laxmi, the 'parent's of our home in India.

"Namaste and greetings from Relli. I am really, really thankful to you for making your visit to this place and seeing the ongoing development. I am really happy that you liked the progress and work. All the children, workers of Home, Laxmi and I are really impressed with the games, gifts for the children and birthday party. All these were really fabulous and worth storing deep in our memory. I really thank you for bringing Lauren and Diane to this place and letting us know them personally and making them our new friends." Jonathan and Laxmi