



A Monthly Newsletter October 2008

Letter from the President

August was a spectacular month for Rising Star Outreach! Lives were touched on all sides!

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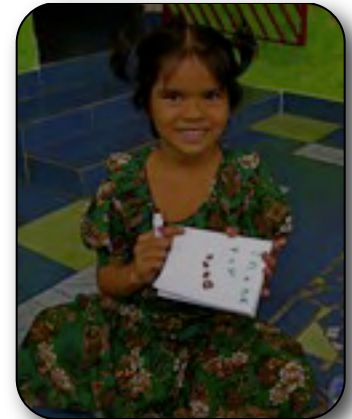
August was a spectacular month for Rising Star Outreach this summer. We had our last volunteer session, which completed some wonderful projects in the leprosy colonies, tutored the children at our school in English skills, and helped out with the mobile medical unit. Lives were touched on all sides of the equation; both the volunteers, children at the school, and the patients in the colonies. As the summer of volunteer tutoring has come to an end, we are so gratified to see the progress the children have been able to make in English. The new children attending the school in June are gaining more confidence with a language that before this summer, sounded totally foreign to them. The students, who have been with us for a while, are becoming more fluent in conversational English. It's a big job, because the language is not spoken at home. Our next goal is to train our housemothers to speak as much English as possible when dealing with the students.

Melissa Mitchell has been working with a great team of wonderful people and organizations to put together the Rising Star computer lab. As is typical of endeavors in India, it has taken much longer than any of us expected. But it is finally about to be a reality! We have hired a computer teacher, P. Mathavi. She's wonderful! In only a few days of classes, she already has the children in a fever pitch of excitement about their class. They are all busy drawing the keyboard and naming all the keys and what each one is for. Unfortunately, Mathavi came down with a case of typhoid only a few days after starting her computer

classes. The doctor assures us she'll be able to resume teaching within about 10 days, so we're all praying for her speedy recovery.

Her husband, Thirumaran T.S., is the new general manager at the property. He comes to us after having been the director of a large bank in India. We are thrilled to have his expertise and experience. He is a great asset to the Hanson's as they direct the affairs of Rising Star in India.

Increasing our program by nearly 80 children this year has also increased our expenses. We still have many children without a sponsor. Some of the children who started with us, on the other hand, have more than the needed three sponsors. This next month, we will work to shift some of the older sponsorships to the new children, so that each child has at least one sponsor who is writing to them. If any of you have friends who may be interested in sponsoring, please let us know about them. We can send them a copy of the PBS documentary, so they can have a good understanding of what we are accomplishing, and



what our goals are for the children. We'd love to welcome them to the Rising Star family.

We continued to be blessed by people's interest in our work, worldwide. Our work at Rising Star Outreach was recently highlighted on a TV series, Profiles in Caring. The 30 minute program has been downloaded by Good tube.

You can see the program, (or send a link to your friends) by clicking on this link: <http://www.goodtube.org/video.php?organization=244&l=Rising+Star+Outreach,+Inc>

Or, you can go to our webpage www.RisingStarOutreach.org, and click on Press Room, then on Goodtube.org feature.

Once on Goodtube, you need to click on parts 1, 2, and 3.

We are also having our work featured in the program, Small and Simple Things, in Orange

Co, California and can be accessed at the following link: www.smallandsimple.net

Rising Star was featured in a beautiful 5-page article in the Gulf News in Dubai. The response to that article has been remarkable. Dubai is now becoming a major center of support for us. That article can be accessed on our web page under "Press Room", and "Rising Star in the News". These are all great tools to use in telling your friends about our work.

As our work moves forward, we are constantly reminded of the great support given to us by our sponsors, volunteers, and friends. None of this would be possible without your support and prayers. Thank you for helping us to reach out to thousands who would otherwise have been marginalized and ignored by society. Through your support, we are able to give hope and opportunity to the leprosy-affected. Thanks to your generosity, a new day is now dawning for them.

Becky Douglas



Exciting News!

We are thrilled to announce the first Annual "Rising Stars for Rising Star" Bash! This year it will be held in Salt Lake City, where you'll have the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to shoot hoops with Darren Williams and some of the other stars of the Utah Jazz. Tickets are going to go quickly because we are only selling 100 in order to give each guest more one-on-one time with the players. They'll be available for purchase on our website starting Friday, September 19. Don't wait too long to purchase yours! Besides being a wonderful blessing to



Rising Star, the event promises to provide an unforgettable experience for you and your family.

"Rising Stars for Rising Star" will be held Thursday, October 30 at 7:00 pm. Tickets are \$300 for a single or \$500 for a team of two. Hope to see you all there!



And food will be by the famous Cafe Rio!

Volunteer Story

By Jessica Hamilton

Dear Rising Star,

I have learned so much, been blessed in uncountable ways, and seen unimaginable amounts of joys while volunteering with Rising Star. The experiences I had in India literally changed my life, but I had no idea how

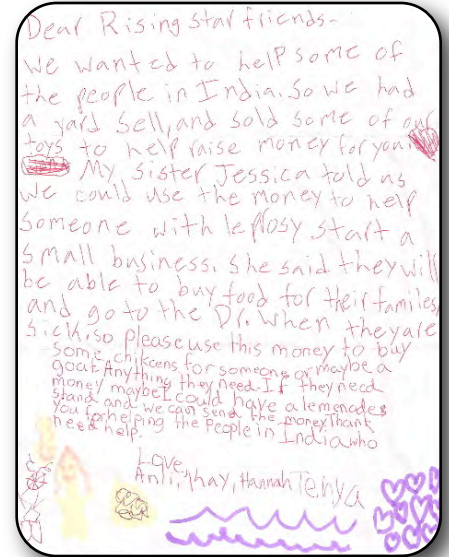


my service would touched more than my own heart.

When I first came home from India my family and friends were excited to see my pictures, and hear about my adventures in a country so incredibly different than our own. I was happy to share pictures of the kids, and point out the different areas of that I visited. all my cousins around, little ones to the leprosy colonies, and the homes where the children come from. I wasn't sure how they would handle the graphic photos. I knew that I was totally unprepared, and to be honest, a little shocked and scared, of what I had seen in India. Then I thought I guess I have to show them in order for them to know why Rising Star is so remarkable. As I watched my young cousins look at the pictures, I was in taken back by their reactions. Instead of shocked looks and gasps, I saw



concern and confusion. They flooded me with question, and as I tried to explain about leprosy, poverty, the suffering, and the children, their concern only grew stronger. They immediately wanted to do something to help. They decided that they wanted to have a yard sale and sale some of their toys, and collect donations. It was a very humbling experience to watch, and listen, to them tell strangers about their 'friends' in India. They have grown to love people on the other side of the world, people they have never met and probably never will. I wish that we all had the capacity to love so unconditionally.



Thanks for everything,

Jessica Hamilton

Blog Entry

By Amy Antonelli

All week we've been working in a leprosy colony in Thiruppani trying to get a new community center finished. The colony is three hours away from our land, right in the middle of nowhere. The intention, I imagine, when the colony was originally established, was to relegate them to a place that no one else could use. We've been working in dirt and cement and sand and paint, and the Indian sun did nothing to make it easier for us. Hot, sweaty, and dirty are were my defining characteristics this week. Almost hard to believe I'm still not married.

The colony started doing micro-loans a few years ago with Padma, and they were one of the first to completely give up begging all together. As a way of supporting them in their new businesses, we decided to help them build a place where they could meet, discuss, and plan for their futures.



The hardest part of the job, though, was the attitude of the colonists.

They were reserved, distrustful, and skeptical. We hadn't been there with volunteers before, and the leprosy patients were watching closely from a distance to see if these strange American volunteers reacted to them with the usual repulsion they face every day from their own countrymen. So the volunteers went to work without the usual feeling of camaraderie with the colony that usual inspires them, and they were frustrated.

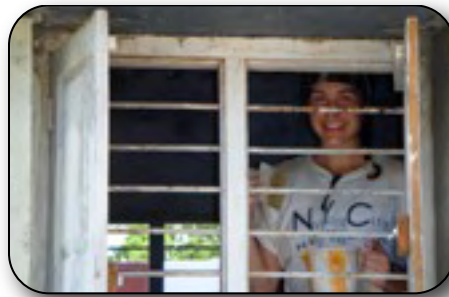


The entire colony has been built on rocks, and it is spectacularly beautiful. I suppose no one wanted the land because it would be impossible to cultivate. But oh, the place is amazing. Each of the little cement homes is built on levels, so in order to get around you literally have to climb the rocks. And all around the rocks are green hills, made lovelier by their ancient appearance. Sometimes India has a way of blinding her people to her virtues to the point where the filthy cities are considered desirable living locations and a place like Thirippani is tossed away as only fit for lepers.

The tenderest of God's mercies.

One day this week we ran out of water in the tank near our work spot, and we had to refill it from an old well in order to continue mixing the concrete. The process of gathering the water consisted of filling a big plastic jug by lowering it about 15 feet and dipping it five or six times, and then yanking it up quickly before too much spills out. Once we had it filled, then we had to figure out how to carry it back. We soon realized that whether the jug

rested on our hip, shoulder, or head, carrying



it was a difficult and uncomfortable job. It took nine of us about two hours to complete the task. I must have hauled about ten loads, and after each one I was so exhausted I had to sit down and rest for a minute. It was such a simple little job, but it gave me a much deeper insight into the lives that the people here lead, and once again I wondered at my own circumstances of birth. The question of why me, or why them, is unanswerable and persistent.

The rest of the week we worked mixing cement by hand, carrying it in bowls on our heads to each other and then taking turns with trowels slapping it on a brick wall and smoothing it into a plaster. When it dried, finally, we mixed up primer and paint by hand and then we painted the building. Sam made the comment that this was the hardest work she'd ever done in her life, and I believed her. It was hard.

I did some exploring while we were there. Out by the well, we discovered an old building being devoured by the jungle. Long forgotten and completely dilapidated, I fell in love with it. Climbing on the rocks behind our community center, I encountered a family living in a thatched roof lean-to along with their chicken and goats. There was a Hindu temple that was presided over by a traditional priest that played bells and chants the whole day as we worked. It was really a fascinating place.

There was one commanding moment this week, another sad story to why we do this work. While I was exploring, I ventured into the home of one of the families. It was dark and dank, as most of them are, and in the very back room I discovered an old man who had just been ravaged by the disease. His was one of the worse cases I've seen. It looked like a hurricane had ripped through his body and all that was left was a vague reminder of a face and hands. The family asked me to take a picture of them, and after my camera was ready I motioned to the old man to go get in the picture. When I did, his niece made a grossed out face, pointed to him, and shook her head, stating her desire that he not be included in the picture. In his own family I encountered the visual evidence of the leprosy

we every fight-



stigma spend day in g



against. I took his picture anyway.

Slowly, as the week went on, the colonists started to warm up. A few of them even came to help us with the job, and the women started to help us with the water. The last day was the best of all. I think by then, they had started to believe that we were genuinely interested in them. They had seen the volunteers leaving every afternoon with cuts and bruises, filthy and exhausted. More than that, they had seen the volunteers' attempts to reach out to them and they had felt their genuine love.

When finally got the job done, the building actually looked pretty good, which was a surprise to all of us, I think. The best part of the week happened right before we left. The patients all gathered around us and started to say thank you by offering to shake our hands. That's a big deal, for someone considered untouchable, to reach out their hand and offer it. It implies a lot of trust, and that trust was earned through a lot of long hours under the hot sun by kids who came thousands of miles to show them that they do matter.

The colony president gave us a little speech, in which he told us that they now felt like we were their brothers and sisters instead of foreigners from a faraway land. They expressed their gratitude for what we had done and they even presented us with a ring of fresh flowers and ice cream for all.

My favorite part, the part that made me cry, was when Meg taught them how to do the signature "I love you" sign that all the Rising Star children always do. The colony members were delighted, and with their broken, curled, missing fingers, they all held their hands up and made the sign as we drove away. In their broken old smiles, and their gnarled old hands, they told us that they understood, and that they were grateful.

They smiled as they said I love you, and all the hard work was worth it in a single instant.

It was a week well spent.

Child Spotlight: Sugonia

The first time I remember meeting her was in February, the day her mother told us she was dying. Her mother had a tumor around her neck that looked like she had accidentally swallowed a whole mango and got it stuck in the side of her throat. She was in so much pain. We took this picture of sugonia that day as she took her afternoon nap in the filthy leprosy colony with the flies crawling in her mouth. I remember wondering what on earth would ever become of the child when her mother passed away.



can doctor had a chance to look at her, though, the tumor was way too advanced. There was nothing he could do.

Sugonia's mother died at the beginning of this summer. And Sugonia, all of two years old, came to Rising Star to live with us. She spends a lot of time with me now during the days. As I go about my work she is often there beside me, playing quietly. The other children have fallen in love with her, too, and she rarely goes anywhere where she isn't carried by a little person barely bigger than she is. Even the volunteers recognize in her a special beauty. I'll never forget Meghan Foulger's tears this summer as she described what it felt like to see where sugonia came from they day she visited her colony.

This morning I held her for a long time, just talking softly. I showed her pictures of her mother on my computer, and she stared at them with a sweet little smile before she laid her head on my shoulder and sighed. And then we went out into the sunshine, where she spent the morning laughing.

Hers is the story of Rising Star. It's a story told a hundred times over in the eyes of every child here. They all come from a starting point of sadness and hopelessness to this place, where the sheer abundance of love heals almost everything. The losses are real and deep and they never completely leave you. But the peace of this place provides a space for them to slowly evolve into just one of the beautiful parts of what eventually becomes the totality of our lives.