



Letter from the President

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President's Letter.

December was a wonderful month. The children put on a spectacular Christmas pageant for their parents. The parents had come for Parents' Day, all dressed up and excited, because they were bringing their children home with them for a two week holiday. The children had been practicing long hours with their "dancemaster", Shaun Parry, to get the program ready. It was full of exhilarating and fast-paced dances. The children were in colorful costumes, and their abilities surprised all in attendance—there were lots of "Oooohs!" and "Aaaaahs!" to be heard. Dance, in India, is "the thing". Indians love to dance! (Think of all those Bollywood movies with the endless dance numbers!) The parent's beamed with pride to see the progress their children had made in dance.

Rising Star Kids Start their Own Micro-businesses

With the New Year, the children returned to school, ready to get to work on their second semester of studies. The children work hard in their studies. This year, they have an extra responsibility. One of our staff members, Gabe Bush, has been busy starting a micro-loan program with some of our older students. The idea is to let the children grow crops or raise chickens. Rising Star will buy their products as part of our food purchases, instead of buying these items from outside. The

plan calls for the children to keep individual "bank accounts" at Rising Star. We are working on getting this program set up. The earned money is to be saved for college or to help start a business when they graduate. These small projects teach the children important life skills. Currently, they are excited to grow rice, tomatoes, lady's finger, bananas,



greens, chilis, and more. A number of Indian supervisors train the children as they work. The fields are initially prepared by our staff. Then the children are responsible for weeding and harvesting the crops. Gabe writes: "We now have some chickens in the children's egg micro-business. Deepenraj is part of the Chicken Family which collects our eggs each

day and cares for fifteen chickens. He used to be afraid to touch the chickens because of their "massive claws" but soon learned how to handle them nicely. Often times he'll spend his recess time inside the chicken coop catching and petting his feathery friends. We have had a couple of fast ones escape when the door is open but fortunately our students are even faster and love the bird chase that ensues (sometimes we wonder just how "accidental" the bird jail breaks are!)."

Christmas Gift List

Once again we'd like to thank all of the generous donors to our Christmas Gift List. Many of you blessed your friends with presents this year, that actually ended up in India. We received donations for the purchase of rice, beans, underwear and play clothes. The children were especially excited about the donations for a soccer field and for team jerseys. Most amazingly we received a gift of \$7,500 for all our children to receive their vaccinations. Wow! Dr. Kirby is going to have a busy January! Hopefully, this will help the children to have healthy lives. Thanks to all of you who remembered us at Christmas time.

World Economy

The end of 2008 saw the development of a world economic crisis. Many of us have lost much of our savings. Some have lost their jobs. Some of us have close friends or family members who have needed to turn to us for

assistance. It has been an economically trying time for many around the world. In times such as these, charities are traditionally especially hard hit. Charities serving foreign causes are even harder hit. When we have immediate family members or close friends who need our assistance to keep their homes or to help with monthly expenses, it obviously becomes a more immediate issue than worrying about the leprosy-affected over in India. I have to admit to waking up at night several times, nearly hyperventilating, afraid for what may lie ahead for our children if their support dries up. So far, we have been blessed beyond measure. While a few of our long-term supporters have had to cancel their sponsorships, for circumstances beyond their control, we have received a number heart-warming letters reaffirming commitment to Rising Star. The depth of personal sacrifice described in some of these letters, literally bring tears to our eyes. We are grateful for all of you who continue to remember the children and families of those in India who rely on us to have lives of opportunity, hope and meaning. With a lot of faith, and a lot of prayer, we expect to weather this crisis. Our biggest goal is to not have to send a single child home. We will tighten our belts in as many ways as possible to avoid this. We extend our greatest thanks to all of you who so generously continue your support. With your help, and God's grace, we believe we can make our goal.

With Love,

Becky Douglas

Postcards from the Field: Hanson's Report

We have had a wonderful week. Pongal is a three or four-day Indian holiday to give thanks for the bounties of the earth. It is a little like our Thanksgiving and Christmas put together. Thanks to the urgings of our "Shyam Uncle" volunteer, our children were organized into five vans for a much-needed vacation outing. The first stop was the nearby national bird sanctuary. That was easy, but the next destination of Mamalapuram was something else. Herding 120 children through the Pongal crowds in the city and the beach was harrowing. Somehow, we brought back the same number that left with us. The children were exceptionally good. The older ones kept order in the ranks, while Housemother Kala and Shyam led the way to the beach. Like the rest of the city, the crowds at the beach were shoulder to shoulder. We wedged through an opening to the surf line where

Shyam stood thigh deep in the warm Bay of Bengal facing the children daring anyone to get by him into danger. Shyam may have ruined his pants, but he kept everyone safe. After the dunking, Shyam negotiated the carnival ride operator to allow all of the children to take a whirling ride for a total of 300 rupees. That is equal to about six dollars or five cents a child. We were sorely tired at the end of the trip home, but the children were still going strong.

Later that evening we were invited to our next door neighbor village to participate in the Pongal celebration of the cows. It is the one time of the year when the whole village comes together. The freshly washed and festooned cows were brought to the center of the crowd while blessings were pronounced and thanks given to the cows for all they provided



to the village. Then we had warm sweet milk and treats at the modest home of one of our cleaning ladies, followed by similar welcomes from Nithya's family (a college girl who attends Dr. Gibbs' evening English class) and at the home of the president of the village.

Volunteer Report

By Gabe Bush

We run a weekly art and music class. Every night I go to a different "family" consisting of about 20 students and we draw. When we tried to make Christmas cards for sponsors back in October it was apparent that the children had a very underdeveloped ability and creativity to create art. We purchased a few beginner art books and sketchbooks for the children. Within literally a matter of weeks,

drastic improvement was visible. The children love to draw. From Disney characters to dragons and flowers they draw non stop for an hour a week. Emanuel and Kartich show the most promise and have developed a real eye. I remember waking up one morning to Emanuel knocking on my door at 6:00 AM. He couldn't wait to show me his notebook, completely finished with over 50 drawings in a single week. They can't get enough and it's wonderful to see their creative sides coming out.

Piano and guitar lessons run twice a week. Again there is such an enthusiasm to learn new things. If I walk to the school with my guitar out in the open it'll take half an hour to get there because every two steps a new horde of children appear dying to get a strum or two in. The girls seem to take to the piano more so than the boys. There are currently 6 maturing pianists Sujeta, Pria, Bulah, Graci, Mary, and Alemaylu. When they first heard the piano being played they laughed and said they could never learn to play it. All 6 can now read music, play around in the keys of C and G, and have expressed a desire to play music throughout the rest of their lives. Pria, one of the most talented, has fallen in love with the song, "Colors of the Wind" from Pocahontas and can be seen humming the music and playing the air piano as she walks from school to the dorms.

One of the most successful programs thus far has been the soccer league. Six coed teams were created with referees, captains, substitutions, and scorekeeping. The teams created their own names, banners, and cheers. The names were team Power Ranger, Lion King, King Kong, Godzilla, Danger Lovers, and Fire Eagles. King Kong went undefeated the whole season thanks to lead scorer and Captain Shankar. The soccer league serves as a great incentive for respect and schoolwork. Only students who are completing assignments and showing their house mothers respect are allowed to play.

Medical Clinic Update

Our mobile medical clinic quietly goes about its business every day, caring for the medical needs of both the colonies and the children at the Rising Star campus. This past year, because of an extremely generous donation of one of our Board members, we were able to add the services of an American doctor, Dr. Karl Kirby. In addition to our Indian Doctor, Dr. Senthilkumar, Dr. Kirby and his family

have been living on campus and assisting with the clinic work. He has been extraordinarily successful in his work, and is well loved by the children and the patients in the colonies.

Dr. Kirby came to India with his entire family, including his wife, Amy, and his three children. Dr. Kirby's wife, Amy is a gifted teacher and has been teaching English to our staff. Their three children are loved by all on campus and have a bit of "celebrity" status! This is the first year since we started that we haven't had any amputations. This is a huge achievement—a testament to the excellent wound care given by the clinic.

We saw a total of 6467 cases this year. This includes children and employees seen on campus. Of these, there were 2626 ulcer cases and we distributed 15,102 bandages. We sent 257 patients to Sri Ramachandra Hospital. Of these 39 were seen for eye care and 218 for general care or surgery. We paid for surgery for 5 children this year. We provided 5 eyeglasses. 5 of our patients died. We provide bandages and some basic medications to 15 distant colonies on a monthly basis through Padma. No known amputations this year. Having a doctor living on campus has provided for much better medical care for the children. The clinic treats around 100 children (plus staff & volunteers) each month

Because of the amount of money we were spending for surgeries, we obtained medical insurance for all the hostel children and employees. We now have a clinic room on campus so that we can care for medical needs on site. The clinic is equipped for some emergencies and has been used for nebulizer treatment in the case of asthma attack, IV infusion of fluids, suturing (stitches), incision and drainage of abscesses, injections. It is equipped with an instrument sterilizer, patient bed, and other medical instruments.

We have begun staff education talks on medical emergencies and leprosy with more planned on basic medical problems. Thanks to a generous Christmas gift, we have begun to vaccinate all the children at our school. We are making final preparations to launch a self-care initiative to encourage patient care of their own wounds. This appears to be the best possible way to get these ulcers

to improve short of us visiting each colony with much greater regularity. On Jan 19th, we will begin at Chettipunyam as the pilot colony. Patients will be given self care kits and instructed on necessary steps to improve wound care, promote healing, and prevent disability. We're very excited about getting this started and have high hopes to see improvement in their wounds.

Volunteer Spotlight: Erin Pratt

Erin Pratt, another great volunteer leader of RSO, will be leaving in December. We are all feeling so sad about her departure. The Indian staff keeps asking her daily, "Erin, are you really leaving?" They know how much she cares about each of them and have a hard time understanding how she could want to go back to America. The children are all feeling



the same way. Erin has a wonderful way of communicating and interacting with all the Indians that she works with and knows. Her language skills are wonderful, and she speaks so that they can understand what she is telling them. She is tough when she needs to be (sometimes working with the adults is as hard or harder than working with the children), but always deals with respect and love. One of the drivers and his wife are planning to name their new baby daughter, Erin; quite a compliment. The naming takes place when the baby is three months old.

Erin's family lives in Florida. She is one of eight children, has graduated from Brigham Young University, and served for one and a half years on a mission for her church in Japan. She has been with Rising Star Outreach since March, spending two months in Atlanta

and coming to India in May. She recently wrote about a couple of memorable experiences she has had in the last couple of weeks. Life is always interesting here, but these two experiences were out of the norm. The two things that she was involved in were quite at the opposite sides of life: one was a wedding, and the other a funeral.

Much of what is included is in her own words, as she wrote of the experiences to her family. One of our teachers, and prior to marriage a housemother, was to be married. She brought the invitations in to the office and as the men in the office opened theirs they all started saying, "Hey congratulations Erin, Rising Star Director! ...[It] turned out she had included me in the program as Rising Star's Director to speak at the wedding." The bride lived about 5 hours from Rising Star, so Erin dressed in a

beautiful sari, and made the long trip. She was the only Anglo there, as well as the only English speaking person, and she had to give a talk to be somewhat translated into Tamil. Quoting again, "I was called up on stage at the beginning to give a speech. The lights were bright, my 'translator' couldn't understand what I was saying, everyone was silent, I had guys with cameras in my face... I said something, then sat down immediately, only to be called up about 15 minutes later for the cake cutting! I was supposed to cut the cake! ...I sliced a piece, then had to feed it to the bride. ...the rest of the night (about two hours) I was asked to stay on stage with the wedding couple and be in all the pictures." There

was a banner up on the main street announcing the celebration, so there was a huge crowd that she addressed. Quite an experience, but it shows the love and respect the Indians have for Erin.

The other thing that occurred this past week, was that Erin was asked by our office staff to attend a funeral for the father-in-law of two of our cleaning ladies. They told her all she needed to do was "to go on behalf of Rising Star...and present the family with a traditional garland that goes around the deceased persons neck.... There is a whole office full of Indian men, why send the only white girl to these things on behalf of the company?" Erin noted that she had been told NOT to touch anyone at the funeral, but that was impossible to maintain as they all came up and cried on her hands or hugged her. When she returned to the office, Hindu traditions prohibit com-



ing into contact with a deceased person. Our accounts manager told her she was not to enter his office until she had bathed. "He retreated to the back room behind his desk and insisted that I go take a bath!"

They have trusted Erin as they have learned to work closely with her, respecting her directions and her concerns. Her sense of fun has balanced beautifully with her strong work ethic, which she has encouraged among children and adults. They will miss her greatly, but perhaps not as much as the Americans who have loved her and know how much she has accomplished on behalf of Rising Star Outreach, and the hole she will leave behind.

Child Spotlight: M. Teresa

One of our beautiful young women is M. Theresa, daughter of our house mother Vijaya. The M. (or initial before their names) is the first letter of the father's name. Her father is Murugan. She is 11 years old. In these pictures she was doing a formal Indian dance for our Independence Day celebration. She is a beautiful dancer, and when all done up in a traditional sari and make up she looks much older. Day to day, she is a delightful pre-teen, although quite serious in her demeanor. She is 5th Standard, and has an older sister Gracy, who is 7th Standard. She is an outstanding student,

according to our School Director, Dr. Gordon Gibb. He describes her as diligent, attentive, with much better English skills than she sometimes demonstrates (she's a bit shy!)

Theresa said her favorite subject is Social Sciences, but she admits to liking all her classes. She likes to hang out with her many friends, when not in school, studying or working. Her friends told me that she is a very loving girl, and they all want to be with her. We feel so proud of all our young women, and the choices they make in their lives each day. Theresa is modest and refined, and a lovely example of a young Indian woman. It will be fun to watch her in the years to come, to see what she will do.