

SCAW



NEWSLETTER

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A charitable organization founded by Margaret and Murray Dryden

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BANGLADESH, October 2 - 22, 2003: 7,000 Bedkits

BY CLARENCE DEYOUNG
HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA

Eq, Duey, Teen, Hasho (one, two, three, smile) is still ringing in my ears from trying to get these poor 7,000 boys and girls, who have nothing to smile about, to smile for a picture for you, our donors. We are not there to try and make these children's lives like ours, but to try and make them a little more comfortable in their culture/environment. Upon receipt of their bedkit, the smiles usually end up coming because the children and parents are very appreciative. A bit late for the picture, but we know you donors understand.

The most distinctive, fascinating feature of Dhaka city is its human mass. No nook and corner of this huge city is devoid of humanity. People loiter, walk, squat, and hang around everywhere: on roads, alleyways, highways, along railroads, under bridges, on station platforms, inside sewer pipes, in the shade, or under the open sun.

Young boys and girls sell flowers, candy, cigarettes, newspapers, bananas, and coconuts, on street corners, while old men stagger under huge head-loads, and drivers take brisk naps on their wheels. Executives pass by carrying brief cases in their hands, and bureaucrats and industrialists relax inside their air-conditioned cars, while all the time, hawkers and petty vendors shout at the top of their voices, and unclad children defecate anywhere.

What is their one common element — they all belong to Dhaka.

The greater part of the population of Dhaka consists of migrants who were driven out of their village homes by poverty, natural disasters and unemployment. About 75% of heads of families were born outside of

Dhaka. Dhaka is overwhelmed with people, significantly more than the city can support. It is projected that by the turn of the century,

more than 420,000 people. Is it any wonder we had a hard time getting the children to smile?

BANGLADESH 2003 BEDKITS

Lions Club Bedkit

Mattress
Pillow
Pillow Case
Bed sheet
Blanket
Mosquito Net
Towel
Thongs (Footwear)
Boys – Shirt & Pants
Younger Girls – Dress
Older Girls – *Kameez* (a tunic-type of dress), Trousers, *Urna* (Shawl)
Sweater
T-Shirt
Raincoat
School Bag

Rotary Club's Bedkit

Mattress
Pillow
Pillow Case
2 Bed Sheets
Blanket
Mosquito Net
Towel
2 Large Cotton Shawls
Boys – Shirt & Pants
Girls – *Kameez* & Trousers
School Bag
Water Bottle
Plastic Box
Mug
Blanket

Dhaka's population will hit 11.2 million, making it the 10th largest city in the world. Today's Dhaka has 1,125 slum areas, and in each of these slums, each square mile houses

Although I have been on many distributions, I continue to be amazed at the amount of work put into them by our overseas volunteer organizations, and in this case, the Lion's Club, Supreme View, and the Rotary Club of Dhaka. From getting bids and selecting the manufacturers for each item in the bedkit (in some cases there were 3 or 4 manufacturers for one item), to checking the quality control, and making sure things are delivered on time, to assembly of the bedkits at the warehouse, and then getting the bedkits delivered to the distribution sites, and finally, to selecting the children and making sure they arrive on time on the right day, the list goes on and on.

And what a team! Chris, Dorothy and Linda, thank you very much.

BY DOROTHY DALE OAKVILLE, ONTARIO

It was four years since I was in Bangladesh, working with members of the local Rotary Club in the capital city of Dhaka. There were many obvious changes since my last visit—less pollution, due to the banning of some of the mini-cabs, a great deal of construction work, and not as many visible homeless or begging people.

This visit began with the distribution of 3,500 bedkits scheduled with the Lions Clubs of Dhaka. Some of the work was in the city of Dhaka and some in outlying places, one necessitating a stay overnight in a small town some distance away. The Lions were very hard-working, and did their best to help us as much as possible.

(continued on page 2)

SCAW • 33 YEARS • 1970-2003 • 686,600 BEDKITS TO-DATE

(Bangladesh by Dorothy Dale, Oakville, Ontario, continued from page 1)

Some challenges, however, were beyond their control, such as the day at an outlying school when we had torrential rain. One only had to be in it for about a minute to be soaked to the skin, and wading through muddy water over the tops of our shoes. We were at a school in a very poor area, and due to the weather, had to work indoors; the Lions put bricks down in the mud to make stepping stones to help us negotiate the puddles. The waiting crowd besieged the area, pushing closer and closer to the rooms where the photos were being taken and the bedkits given out. It was a nightmare, but eventually all the children got their bedkits and left happily, carrying the bedkits on their heads, some with parents holding umbrellas over them. What a day!

By the end of the afternoon, we were taking pictures with the aid of hastily rigged primitive electric lights, and even using flashlights to see our way back to the waiting van. Our hosts had arranged for us to have some refreshments at the home of a local member, but all we really wanted to do was get on the road (which was pretty rough) and get back to our hotel. This was the hardest and most difficult day for everyone due to the weather and the confined space but, all in all, the Lions did a pretty good job, and with their continued help, all the other distributions were easier.

Our night at the out-of-town guest house was quite interesting—it was very simple, but I shared my room with two unwelcome guests—cockroaches; one in the bathroom, and one in my shoe in the bedroom! I dispatched them both, one with a well-aimed shoe and the other by scooping it up in a plastic pitcher in the bathroom and flushing it down the toilet. I wrapped myself up like a mummy in the bed sheet I had taken, and being pretty tired, managed to get a good night's sleep in spite of all this commotion.

Our Lions Club hosts were very hospitable, took us to their homes, and were very helpful in many ways. It is quite a feat of organization for them to acquire all the items in the bedkits, assemble them, pack them and store them safely, before transporting them to the different sites to be given out, and 3,500 children will now be able to sleep better because of their help.

The second part of our work was with the Rotarians, and they also put a great deal of time and effort into making our job as easy as possible. Before the distribution of the second 3,500 kits, the Rotarians took us to the basement of one of their homes where all the items for the bedkits had been gathered and were being assembled by some of their employees. They also enlisted the help of a Ladies Club and some very able Girl Guides for the first distribution. These young ladies wear a white uniform adapted from their national dress, the *Kameez* (a tunic-type of dress) and the trousers worn beneath, with a white apron over it all, plus a red scarf at the neck.

There were also a lot of young Rotarians who helped control the onlookers, although at some of the locations where we worked, it was often possible to keep them away as there were gates that could be used so that the parents could wait outside for the children.

The Rotary Club had also enlisted the help of the police, and their presence served to keep things under control. It can make things quite awkward if the crowds are too near, as it becomes difficult to make sure that the children are getting back safely to their own parents or to the Rotary transportation that has been arranged for them.

Some of the children came a considerable distance, brought by the Rotarians by rickshaws, ferry boats and buses. It was a wonderful sight to see a loaded bus full of happy little ones, with the bedkits piled on top secured by ropes, and by this time all signs of apprehension and shyness had disappeared, the youngsters happily grinning and waving as they went on their way. The Rotarians were extremely well organized, and that made our job go very smoothly. We did a great deal of travelling, both in our rented van, and in the transportation provided by Rotary, with skillful drivers, although they appeared to take appalling risks in the incredible traffic and on some of the really rough roads.

Our last job was out of Dhaka in a town called Pabna, about 140km away. It was a busy, bustling, crowded and noisy place; and we once more stayed at a Guest house—this one was pretty basic and mostly had been used by Government employees, and could not by any means, have been given much more than a one star rating! However, we

survived—carrying one's own bed sheet and towel helps, although the place appeared fairly clean, just what one might call a trifle run down.

We gave out our first batch of bedkits soon after we arrived, in the grounds of the home of one of the members. We were helped by a group of young members of the Red Crescent organization—the Islamic equivalent of the Red Cross, recruited by Rotary, and also by some very capable young Rotarians. They made our job a lot easier, carrying the bedkits for the little ones who were too tiny to balance them on their heads, although quite a lot of these small children did carry their bedkits, which in some cases were almost as big as they were—quite a feat, as I myself found it a heavy load when I tried it. Apparently this is how they carry many things from a very early age.

At the end of this final distribution, we were driven back to the very welcome Rosewood Residence, our home away from home, to finish packing, say our farewells and set off on the long journey home. Without the help of the Rotary Clubs and the Lions Overseas Volunteers, it would not have been possible to assist the 7,000 very needy and deserving children to have the comfortable beds provided by our donors, and we give our grateful thanks to you all. Many thanks also to the other three travelling volunteers for a most successful and rewarding trip, and for their good fellowship during some rather difficult moments!

BY LINDA WEBB ETOBICOKE, ONTARIO

When I first heard Murray Dryden speak at my children's junior school ... could it really be fifteen years ago ... I was so impressed by his integrity and compassion, I resolved that I would volunteer for the organization. Following many years of processing donations in the office, there I was, in Bangladesh, on a distribution of 7,000 bedkits. I had seen several presentations and heard many stories, but nothing adequately prepares you for the actual experience. It was the worst of times. It was the best of times.

At first glance, the tropical vegetation appeared much like Trinidad, where I was born, but the squalor and poverty were

immediately apparent on the drive from the airport to our hotel. This is the stark reality of Dhaka. Ten million people live in this capital city. The Rotarians call it not a mega city, but a mega slum. In addition to a turbulent political history, Bangladeshis have had to endure some of the worst natural disasters. Cyclones and monsoonal flooding annually cause loss of life, as well as extensive infrastructural and agricultural damage.

As though that were not enough, another nightmare is arsenic, which occurs naturally in the country's alluvial soils. Arsenic is being released into the groundwater. In an effort to reduce waterborne diseases in surface rivers, and provide a safe source of drinking water, shallow wells, called "tube-wells", were constructed throughout the country. In the 1990's, it was discovered that many of these wells were contaminated by arsenic. You can well imagine the numerous health problems associated with arsenic poisoning.

Despite domestic and international efforts, Bangladesh remains one of the poorest countries in the world. In *The Daily Star*, a Dhaka newspaper, it was reported on October 9th, that Transparency International "pegged Bangladesh as the most corrupt country of the world for the third straight year". And yet another agency, based on a world-wide poll, nominated Bangladeshis, in spite of being among the poorest, the happiest people in the world. Go figure.

On our first evening in Dhaka, we were treated to a delicious Thai dinner at the apartment home of one of the Lions Volunteers. From the posh 6th floor balcony, we watched the construction of a nearby building across the street. Concrete was being mixed on the ground floor, and a steady stream of labourers carried it in baskets on their heads up the stairway to the seventh floor. It was past 10:00 p.m., and believe it or not, they were singing.

Bright and early the next morning, we started the distributions with the Lions Club. The first site in Belabo, about two-and-a-half hours North East of Dhaka, was a school compound. The children were so poor. They were so thin and ragged.

About 5% had footwear. Many had skin ailments, sores on their hands and feet, abscesses, eye and nose infections. They were so beautiful, incredibly well-behaved and patient. Some of them had walked for several kilometers and endured waiting in the scorching sun. Many were nervous, not understanding the proceedings, and disbelieving of the fact that they would receive a bedkit. I had my arm around one wispy-thin girl as I guided her towards the camera, and I could feel her little heart pounding. One of the Lions explained that politicians make many empty promises, so to actually receive a mattress, blanket, clothing, school supplies, etc, is an unheard of treasure.

In the second part of the distribution, led by the Rotarians, we were taken to visit some of the slum homes. We trudged through muddy, filthy alleys. The living conditions were appalling. With no means of garbage disposal or sanitation, the stench was staggering. In one home, which consisted of an enclosure about 9'x7', with a dirt floor, there were a number of cooking utensils in one corner on the floor, a raised platform where the family of six slept, and a number of shelves where all their earthly belongings were neatly stacked. Consider the following figures:

- The rent is 800 Taka per month (about \$14.00 U.S.) No receipt is issued, and they may be evicted at any time to make way for the haphazard construction underway in Dhaka.
- On a good day, the father may earn 150 Taka pedaling a rickshaw from 2 p.m. to 10 p.m.
- He pays a rental of 50 Taka per day to the owner of the rickshaw.

Proudly arranged on the platform was their SCAW bedkit. The mother, with tears in her eyes, clasped my hands in hers, then pressed her hand to her heart and then on my heart, in an unmistakable gesture of gratitude.

It was one of the most emotional moments of the entire trip, and her tears are forever etched in my memory. I extend the gesture to you, dear donors, because without your faithful and generous support, I would not have witnessed the joy and gratitude of that family.

The next segment of the distribution took us to Pabna, a rural district about four hours west of Dhaka, in an area where the Ganges and the Brahmaputra meet. These historical rivers are

locally known as the Padma and Jamuna respectively. In contrast to the teeming mayhem on the streets of Dhaka, we drove through soothing and serene countryside, with rice paddies lining the roadway. Pabna was the ancestral home of one of the Rotarians, and is famous for its mental institution. He joked that he went twice a year to Pabna for a tune-up. One of the grandest buildings we saw was the District Courthouse, built during British rule and comparable in stature and architecture to any District Courthouse in England. It seemed so out of context, until it was explained that it had been intended for Patna in India, but was constructed in Bangladesh because of a typographical error.

On this leg of the journey, we stood on the banks of the Ganges (Padma) River—an awesome experience. We visited a temple where we were welcomed by the caretaker, a forbidding figure with hip-length dread locks, wearing only a *lungi* (wrap-around). He led us to an alcove at the back of the temple to view the icons. In the midst of all the icons of gods and goddesses, was a picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. He sensed my astonishment and succinctly stated, "Many names, one God."

The people of Bangladesh are rich in culture, kindness and courage. They are devoted to their children and their country. Many of the Lions and Rotarians have travelled and worked all over the world, but remain dedicated to improving the lives of their less fortunate countrymen. They were so hospitable to our team, and often prepared sumptuous meals, which were a challenge to our un-acclimatized digestive systems.

In an effort to communicate with the children during the distributions, I learned a few Bangla words (my spelling is phonetic):

Namkee Linda – My name is Linda; *acho* – come; *bosho* – sit; *shundor* – beautiful; *chile* – boys; *may* – girls; *dunobad* – thank you.

When I said to the girls, "*Tumra shundor*", (you are beautiful), they just beamed. They speak very little English, but there were two words that came through loud and clear "Canada good". On behalf of 7,000 grateful children, *dunobad*.



**BY CHRIS PRATT
BARRIE, ONTARIO**

This was my first trip with Sleeping Children. It was an experience I would highly recommend and will never forget. I have often heard the phrase “what goes around comes around.” Well, on this trip I can truly say I saw that phrase in action.

I remembered how some of the donated money had come about. I have participated in some of the fund-raising events the Rotary Club has put on in Barrie. The memories I have are of people smiling as they go about putting in countless hours of volunteer work. I remember the smiles on the faces of my own children as they donated bedkits for my birthday. I remember a mother smiling as she told me about receiving a bedkit in memory of the death of a 16-year-old son. People coming up to wish me well on my trip were always smiling. So as I boarded the plane, I was loaded with smiles, smiles, and more warm smiles to deliver to the children from warm hearted people half way across the world.

When we arrived in Dhaka and met with the wonderful people from the Lions and Rotary Clubs that had put their hearts and hard work into producing the best bedkits possible, they were smiling. However, the best smiles of all came from the 7,000 children over the next 12 days. Travelling for hours to get to their remote villages, I watched in awe as we approached the run down schools, primitive cement classrooms with dirty wooden benches. Sometimes the children had been waiting for hours in the heat and rain, but they always greeting us with smiles. Smiles also surrounded us from grateful parents and teachers as they helped the children carry their bedkits.

One distinct aspect of Sleeping Children that impressed me is how much attention is paid to make sure that every cent of the donors thirty dollars (\$30.00) goes directly

into the bedkit. Our team leader, Clarence, was always checking the bedkits for quality and contents.

One day we visited the factories where some of the school bags and mosquito nets were made. I have a whole new understanding of a factory. These were one of two small rooms with old pedal sewing machines. All the work, done by hand, was carried out in rooms that are well over 90°, but all the workers greeted us with smiles—they were just happy to have the work.

We also visited some of the homes of the children who had received bedkits. Primitive crowded dirt floor shacks with tin roofs, but again, I was touched and impressed by the smiles of the children and parents as they greeting us and welcomed us into what was home to them. The colourful new bedkits stuck out like beacons in the dull dirty surroundings.

Getting back on board the plane, I felt loaded again with warm smiles of heartfelt thanks from 7,000 children that Sleeping Children had helped put to bed once again.

I would like to thank SCAW for giving me this great privilege to be a small part of this trip, and also to my wonderful team members, Clarence, Dorothy and Linda for all their care, who make this trip unforgettable in so many ways for me. Now that I am home, people ask would I do it again. My answer is ABSOLUTELY!

“TRI” FOR THE CHILDREN

This past summer, Ilana Singer, Heidi Franken, Irene Tsatsos and Ellen Love (all of whom are current or former employees of the Ontario Securities Commission) raised over \$1,100 for Sleeping Children around the World by initiating and participating in the first annual “Tri for the Children”. The four women collected sponsors for their completion of either one or two “mini-triathlons” over the summer, each of which consisted of: 375m swim, 10km bike and 2.5km run. Ilana, Heidi, Irene and Ellen plan to participate in the second annual “Tri for the Children” in July, 2004, and would be thrilled to welcome new participants! For more information call Ilana Singer at 416-363-2197 or e-mail her at ilana_canada@yahoo.com



*Murray Dryden
and all SCAW's
Volunteers
Wish YOU the Very
Happiest
Holiday Season
and an
Awesome and
Inspiring,
and Peaceful,
Year 2004!*

THANK YOU
for your
contribution to this
Bangladesh trip

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Donors and Volunteers!

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DISTRIBUTION TRIPS**

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MUMBA, INDIA
6,000 BEDKITS**