

SCAW NEWSLETTER



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A charitable organization founded by Margaret and Murray Dryden

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MUMBAI, INDIA: January 26 - February 16, 2005: 7,000 Bedkits

BY TED SWANSTON
ETOBICOKE, ONTARIO

This year's trip to Mumbai coincided with the first anniversary of the passing of Sleeping Children's founder, Murray Dryden. So as we left Toronto, it seemed fitting that our team would soon be distributing bedkits in Pune, where Murray did the first-ever SCAW distribution in India in 1970. Our trip would take us to twenty-four locations, ranging from cities to remote sites in central India, covering 3,000 kilometers, and working with over sixty Rotary Clubs.

Murray used to say one should be prepared for surprises on SCAW distributions, and our team was unfortunately in for an early surprise on arriving in Mumbai. After travelling halfway around the world at his own expense*, first-time team member, Jean-Pierre Hamelin, discovered an administrative error on his Visa which meant he would be denied entry to India. In spite of our frantic efforts to persuade immigration officials to allow him to stay, Jean-Pierre was put back on the Air France jet that brought him to India, and he returned to Paris, then on back to Toronto. It's hard to imagine what Jean-Pierre went through on this ordeal, but we were soon to learn the tough stuff of which he is made. Ninety-six whirlwind hours after JP was refused entry, he arrived a second time in Mumbai, again at his own expense, to be re-united with our joyous team. Sleeping Children is fortunate to have volunteers like Jean-Pierre who will do whatever it takes to

participate in a SCAW distribution for the benefit of needy children.



L to R: Mumbai 2005 Travelling Team -
Jean-Pierre Hamelin, Sally Jo Martin,
Christine Swanston and Ted Swanston
Photo by Sally Jo Martin

2005 Mumbai Bedkit

Shetrunji (sleeping mat)

Chaddar (bed sheet)

Pillow and cover

Heavy blanket

Towel

Two sets of clothing each (two shirts and two shorts for boys; and either two dresses, or two blouses and two skirts for girls)

Sweater

Underwear (two sets)

Shoes

Raincoat

School Bag

Stationery Pack (four notebooks; pencils; pens; erasers)

Clipboard (writing pad)

Box of colored pencils

Tiffin (lunch box)

Water bottle

Packing bag

SCAW is also blessed with extraordinarily committed people overseas, and I would like to mention a very special person who has led Rotary Club of Mumbai's involvement with Sleeping Children for many years. This year's distribution marked the twenty-fifth year that 82 year-old, Shamaldas Parekh, has been involved with SCAW distributions. Shamaldas said to our team that he believes Murray has not really passed on, and will never pass on, so long as we, the overseas and Canadian volunteers in partnership, follow Murray's vision and continue to work together on behalf of the children. We thank Shamaldas for all his efforts over the years, and pray that his wish will be Murray's legacy, to have his dream continue.

We learned, on our distributions, of the extent to which Rotary goes to select needy children who can most benefit from receiving bedkits. Rotary Mumbai gives the majority of bedkits to children in rural areas. As one Rotarian said, most children in both the cities and rural areas are needy. However poor children in rural areas, which include much of India's population, receive few if any of the social services that poor children receive in cities like Mumbai. Organizations providing basic health and other services, while often under-funded and stretched, at least can reach some of the needy children in the larger centers within their jurisdiction.

The child selection process is time-consuming, often involving long travel over rough roads to conduct the selections. Rotary clubs work with school principals and teachers to make the selections, since school personnel know the children well. However we learned that several clubs also sent Rotarians to interview each child. The Rotary Club of Belgaum went so far as to do

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MURRAY'S DREAM 1,000,000 BEDKITS - TO DATE 758,850!

(Mumbai by Ted Swanston, Etobicoke, Ontario, continued from page 1)

a double screening to ensure that only the neediest children in each school were chosen.

Interviews focus on the source and level of family income. Parents of selected children often do agricultural work which is, at best, seasonal; others work in quarries, on rock splitting or construction. One parent in the family often has to leave home to find odd jobs to supplement family income. Annual family income for children chosen to receive bedkits would generally be 4,000 to 5,000 rupees per year, or around CDN \$120 to \$150.

Parents on such low wages often can't support their families. The government helps by providing accommodation, food, and education to some children in Municipal schools. We did distributions at several such schools, where children sit on the floors in "classrooms" with no desks, and only the most basic teaching materials. At night, they sleep on the floor of these same classrooms. You will enjoy reading the account by a member of our team who describes the joy expressed by the children who received bedkits in one such school.

I want to thank Sally Jo Martin, who agreed to join our team on short notice (due to the illness of Carmela Mainiero that prevented her from coming), Christine Swanston (my daughter), and Jean-Pierre Hamelin, for all their efforts throughout the distributions. And a special thank you to you, all the donors, for making it possible for 7,000 needy children in India to receive a bedkit.

[* We remind readers that all volunteers travel at their own expense, without the benefit of tax receipts.]

BY SALLY JO MARTIN ETOBICOKE, ONTARIO

Murray Dryden's dream of putting one million children into bedkits is closer by 7,000 after this most recent distribution in the Mumbai area. Our team of four enthusiastic travellers was partnered with dedicated Rotary members, to



photograph very needy children and give them the "gift of love" from the donors whom we represented. Their smiles, along with occasional solemn faces, convey the importance of these occasions for the children.

Their emotions ran the gamut from joy and excitement, to awe and exhaustion. They demonstrated patience as they awaited the arrival of our SCAW team, fatigue from having often travelled up to 100 km from their village homes, apprehension at not knowing what would happen next, enthusiasm as they sang a well rehearsed song of welcome, tears at seeing strange faces, joy when they saw all the items in their bedkits, and excitement as they attempted to carry their bag which weighed more than 15 pounds. The day of distribution was so important for the whole family, and we were delighted to share the thanks from parents and teachers who accompanied the children to the sites. When we were able to take casual photos with our digital cameras, they were excited to be shown their images, perhaps the first that they had seen of themselves.

"India cannot be explained, it must be experienced" said one of our hosts. As we travelled great distances from city to town to village, on highways and/or bumpy country roads, we were constantly alerting each other to those sights that were unusual for us. Buildings that I thought were dirty, were in fact covered with mold from the monsoon season that lasts four months. Cows, pigs, donkeys and oxen roamed freely amongst traffic. Cars, three-wheeled auto rickshaws, motorcycles, bicycles, buses, and small trucks laden with cargoes that threatened to overturn the vehicles, clogged the roadways. From our bouncing van, we attempted to photograph roadside vendors with their wares spread on plastic sheets; snack carts with open fires to prepare food; women doing their laundry on the banks of streams or at the village wells; beautiful children in school uniforms walking to attend classes; homes built from mud, thatched leaves, vertical sticks or brick, and roofed with hay or corrugated steel. So much to see, so much to remember! India truly is an assault on the senses.



A very proud mother helps her son with his new SCAW shirt! Photo by Sally Jo Martin

Two distributions will stay in my memory for a long time. The first was at a quarry outside the city of Pune, where 172 children of local labourers were given bedkits. The children had been tailor-measured for their first ever school uniforms, and the tailor had even designed a crest showing the tools of the workers – a pick and hoe. Going to classes meant that these children were not used as workers, which otherwise would have been the case. After the distribution, which was watched with great interest by many adults, we went to the edge of the quarry to see two children wearing their new clothes, running to meet their parents at the work site. How excited they were and how valuable this gift of clothing, school supplies and sleeping materials will be!

The other memory comes from a residential school at Panvel, where 440 children live for up to 10-months of the year while their parents move from job to job as itinerant farm or brick-works labourers. At this school, 225 children received bedkits, and before the bags were distributed, we were treated to an emotional welcoming ceremony. The children sat on the floor of a small hall singing a heartfelt tune whose message was translated as, "Like gold flowing in the river Ganges, our hearts are filled with gratitude for your gifts." Their bodies swayed and hand actions portrayed the movement of the water as their beautiful voices sang the message of thanks. The Rotarian who spoke on their behalf was, herself, overcome with emotion at the sincerity of their words. It was a moving experience!

Such distributions would not be possible without the tireless work of a large number of Rotarians in the Mumbai and Karnataka regions. In addition, our team was also

blessed to have the volunteer talents of Sanjeev, and his wife, Archana Navelkar, residents of a suburb of Mumbai, who worked with us for many days. Their knowledge of the local Marathi language, and their happy way of dealing with the children, made our tasks much easier. Sanjeev works in Mumbai for Peter Newton's Toronto based company, Champion Photochemistry, a long time supporter of SCAW. Sanjeev came to a distribution two years ago and was very impressed with the philosophy and integrity of this charity. He has continued to help and this year took this, his vacation, in order to have the time to volunteer again.

To represent donors to Sleeping Children Around the World is a distinct privilege and I am thankful for the opportunity. We hope that the photos you receive convey some of the gratitude shown to us by the children, their parents and school teachers. The benefits belong to the children, but the thanks belong to you, our donors.

BY JEAN-PIERRE HAMELIN BARRIE, ONTARIO

This was my first distribution for SCAW. For many years, I had raised funds in my school and community for the organization, but upon retiring as an elementary school teacher, I now fulfilled my wish to become a travel volunteer for SCAW, and was asked to join the Mumbai distribution. I was both excited and apprehensive about the trip.

Our team left Toronto on January 26th and had a stop in Paris. Because of a late departure from Toronto, we missed our connecting flight to Mumbai and had to stay overnight in Paris and catch the next plane the following day. Then, leaving Paris the next day, we arrived nine hours later in Mumbai - Wednesday night at 11:30 p.m. Because of irregularities with my visa, I was sent back to Paris that same night, and continued on to Toronto, arriving on Saturday afternoon. My apprehensions had come to fruition, and then some!!!!

My visa was eventually put in order, travel flights were rearranged and I was back to

Paris and then Mumbai, and finally rejoined my team members on Tuesday night. Now I was finally ready to start the job I had been awaiting for so long. The car ride from the airport that night shocked me. There were vehicles of every description on very congested roads at 1:00 in the morning!

The next day, Wednesday, our team had a joyful reunion at breakfast. This day would be my initial distribution. I was overtaken by emotion as I entered the distribution site. The selected children were all sitting in rows dressed in their SCAW clothes. As our team entered, the children all clapped in unison, waved and smiled as a greeting for us. It had finally begun for me and it felt very good. That day I was in charge of handing out the bedkits to the children. Time and time again, the children thanked me in their broken English, and gave me a big smile. The gratitude of these children along with their parents and teachers made the effort all worthwhile.

This scene was repeated over and over again in the following days. The children of this area were living under truly heart-wrenching conditions. The Rotarians in India had made an effort to select the neediest of the needy from among these conditions.

The scene of an excited child having his or her bedkit carried by a parent on their heads, or of a group of children with their bedkits in a wagon pulled by an animal, or a group of children in the back of a truck with their prized possessions, stands out vividly in my mind.

One particular distribution left a profound impression on me. It was a site in the city of Pune. I'll call it the 'stone crusher's site' because the people in this particular village worked in a huge stone quarry, crushing stones with hammers of various sizes for their livelihood. When we arrived on the site, there was a lot of dust in the air. One particular building was larger than the rest. This was the school. The children of this village had been provided this school by a local charitable organization. The theory was that the children would go to school and receive an education, and therefore would not be forced to work in the quarry as child labourers. The children appeared to be very needy and were quite shy and apprehensive towards us.

We set up our bedkits for the photos with the background being rudimentary stone buildings with farm animals tethered outside. Despite the extreme poverty of these people, they were very friendly and thankful, and they invited us into their humble dwellings. As I was leaving, I asked a group of children to pose for a picture with a bunch of bedkits in the background. They willingly obliged and had great big smiles for the camera. I couldn't help thinking on that particular day how fortunate we were here in Canada.

In the following days, the distributions continued, but all were different in some form or another. In the middle of our distribution trip, we had a few days to rest, relax and regroup. This was good planning since the work was both physically and emotionally draining.

We finished off our distributions on February 13th, making 7,000 children very happy. As a rookie to the SCAW team, I found the experience quite memorable and gratifying. I would like to thank our team leader Ted, who did an exceptional job coordinating and overseeing everything, also my fellow team members Christine and Sally-Jo, for encouraging me and making me laugh when I wanted to cry. I would also like to thank all the members of my community for the great fundraising party they had for me before I left, and for my wife and family, who encouraged and supported me on this venture. I had all of them in my heart when I was handing out bedkits.

Thank you donors, for your generosity to needy children; and thank you SCAW, for allowing me this opportunity to experience such a wonderful moment in my life.



Happy children setting off for home!
Photo by Sally Jo Martin

**BY CHRISTINE SWANSTON
TORONTO, ONTARIO**

The sights, sounds and smells of India can only be described as 'sensory overload'. The frantic pace of the traffic, the congestion of the city streets and the chaos of the people coming and going were at first overwhelming. Elephants, camels, cows, buffalo, stray dogs and cats, bicycles, pedestrians, street merchants, auto-rickshaws, cars and other questionable motorized vehicles all assaulted the highways and byways of India; co-existing in random and bizarre interchanges.

'Sensory Overload' to be sure! Yet, at the heart of this confusion I discovered a peace that I had never before experienced.



As a first time volunteer for SCAW, I found this form of travel an incredible way to experience a new country, and India was up to the challenge. To travel and, at the same time, give of myself was truly a winning combination for me. As a volunteer, the feeling that comes when a child drops to the ground to touch your feet as a sign of thanks for the gift they are receiving can never be fully described. Nor can the tears that spring to one's eyes when a group of 300 children applaud your arrival after they have been patiently waiting for several hours. I had the gift of only a few hours with each group of children, but the memories will last my lifetime.

We conducted our SCAW distributions in cities, rural villages, mountain top residential schools, parks, open air courtyards, on the shores of the Arabian Sea, and other assortment of locations. Although the geography changed, the children all held the same anticipation of

the gifts they were to receive. Many looked with astonished disbelief at the huge bag before them: a weight which often times seemed to be double that of their meagre frames. Many of the children actually had to be encouraged to take their bag away with them. I was told that, in all likelihood, these children had never before, in their young lives, received such a gift. Having grown up with Christmas mornings, and birthday celebrations, the thought of never having received a gift from a loved one was heartbreaking to me. And yet these little spirits won my heart time and time again with their strength and resolve.

The pride with which some of the tiniest of boys swung that bag over their shoulder, doubling over at the waist to accommodate the massive weight that would later translate into a peaceful night's rest, was inspirational. At the end of a distribution, it was not unusual to see children and bedkits being piled into auto-rickshaws, tractors and cars for the long but satisfying ride home, or, seeing small groups of children and parents peppering the roadsides as they walked home, as they curiously compared the contents of their gifts. There's just nothing better than those sights and sounds!

The four members of our team travelled over 3,000 kilometres, in three weeks, to distribute 7,000 bedkits to the neediest of children in the Mumbai and extended areas — staggering numbers but with an endless return on investment. I will be eternally grateful for my SCAW experience as it gave me the incredible opportunity to work with a tremendous team led by an inspiring Team Leader. The Rotary Club members and our SCAW volunteers in India also made the success of this trip possible. Most importantly, thank you to SCAW for the chance to make such a difference! As a result I am forever changed!

**AN AMUSING ANECDOTE BY
SALLY JO MARTIN**

One morning we entered a school courtyard where the children were playing. They started laughing and pointing at us so we asked one of the teachers to explain. "They think you are the dinosaur hunters from Jurassic Park", she replied. Our broad brimmed Tilley hats had made us movie stars in the eyes of the children.

THANKS to the following for their contributions to this Mumbai, India trip:

Anonymous donors for providing a myriad of gifts

Black's Photography (Humbertown Plaza) for donating 50% of our film & photofinishing

The Printing House (Russ Cosman, 5120 Dundas St W, Toronto) for printing this newsletter

Kay Kelly, Harry Keating, and Maurice Kowanetz for publishing this newsletter

Milton van der Veen for maintaining SCAW's web site

Donors and volunteers for their continuing support!



**AN EXCERPT FROM
"THE TIMES OF INDIA" –
PUNE – FEBRUARY 7, 2005**

... After receiving the kits, the children of Ashram Shala could not hold back their joy. They sat in neat rows and cheered their benefactors.

Geetanjali Thakre (12), a class V student of Ashram Shala, said, "I am very happy to get the sleeping kit. I'm sure I will be comfortable tonight. When I grow up, I want to become a doctor and serve the poor people of the world."

Her classmate, Renuka Pujari (12), said, "I love school very much. English is my favorite subject. I want to become a teacher and take care of orphans like me when I grow up." ...

**NEXT SCHEDULED
DISTRIBUTION TRIPS**

**April, 2005
PHILIPPINES - 5,000 BEDKITS**

**May/June, 2005
UGANDA - 5,000 BEDKITS**