



SRI LANKA: August 17 - 28, 2004: 4,000 Bedkits

**BY LAURA HARPER
OAKVILLE, ONTARIO**

Sri Lanka is truly "a land like no other". As I sit in the Kuala Lumpur airport (a ten hour stop-over between flights) so many images are coursing through my brain from this, my second trip to Sri Lanka for Sleeping Children. I continue to see the breathtaking views of the scenic island: the natural beauty of the hills, the flowering trees and shrubs, massive and old trees creating umbrellas over the road, cascading waterfalls, green terraces of tea, tall waving palm trees, and sandy beaches with the pounding surf of the Indian Ocean.

What a delight to be greeted by familiar faces among the welcoming Rotarians upon our midnight arrival - Chandra (The SCAW Co-ordinator), Varuni, Sydney and Maha. Nine days of distributions brought nine more special welcomes - children in colourful costumes playing music, beating drums, singing, dancing, performing acrobatics, and reciting verses, as well as the traditional presenting of betel leaves or the lighting of wicks in a huge brass rooster topped structure.

I wish every donor could have been there to experience such a thrill, and to realize how much their contribution means to the Sri Lankans. Many of you may receive photos that do not display the scenic beauty of Sri Lanka, but its greatest treasure is its children, and I hope their beautiful faces will more than compensate for the lack of picturesque backgrounds.

Thanks to our trusty driver and his able assistant, Asitha (the women on our team all wished we were 21 again), we safely travelled by bus from the west coast, on roads filled with hairpin turns, through the mountains to the east coast. With the tremendous support of Chandra, Varuni,

Themiya (Varuni's 12-year-old son who became expert at pulling labels), and Ravi, who all travelled with us, and the additional many hands of helping volunteers at each distribution site, the SCAW team fulfilled its mandate to oversee the distribution of 4,000 bedkits throughout Sri Lanka.

2004 Bedkit

- 1 mat
- 1 mosquito net
- 1 pillow
- 2 pillow cases
- 2 bed sheets
- 2 towels
- 1 thermos
- 1 sarong or skirt
- 2 T-shirts
- 3 pairs of shorts
- 1 plastic carrying bag

In addition, the Kelaniya Rotary had purchased an additional 100 bedkits as a memorial to Murray Dryden, and 38 extra bedkits for special children at one of the schools in Colombo. In total, 4,138 Sri Lankan children benefited from this 2004 distribution.

Once again, and for my 19th time, I feel very privileged to have represented so many generous donors, and to have worked side by side with such a group of caring and committed volunteers, from both Canada and Sri Lanka. We, as a SCAW organization, might do well to keep in mind the words of Rotarian, Paul Harris, which were quoted as part of the Kelaniya President Installation program:

"As long as grass continues to grow
green,
As long as water continues to flow
downhill,
So long Rotary will worship its ideal -
The ideal of service."

**BY JEANNE CULP
PORT PERRY, ONTARIO**

The day had finally arrived. Carol Nass and I were at the Toronto airport for our long flight to Sri Lanka and our first distribution of bedkits with SCAW. We were excited and apprehensive—excited about our first visit to Sri Lanka; apprehensive about whether we would be able to "handle" everything that was expected of us. Under the capable leadership of Laura Harper, and help from the heat (40°+ C) and humidity (98%) of Sri Lanka, our concerns evaporated! We had a wonderful two weeks distributing 4,138 bedkits, travelling from the west coast to the east coast and back on this beautiful tropical island with their winding roads.

We had nine distribution sites throughout the country, varying from schools, churches, sport areas and town-halls - some even had shade!

The children (ages 6-12 years of age) waited patiently for us [Canadians] to arrive and give them their gifts from you, the donors. These children were definitely from the "poorest of the poor" families (ANNUAL income \$1000 U.S. or less), and most had never before received any gift.

As the children arrived at their distribution site, they would be given a small package containing a medium and large T-shirt, plus a skirt for girls or a sarong for boys. They then got dressed for their photographs. In their excitement and not wanting to lose anything, they often put both T-shirts on over their school uniform. Some of your pictures may have white shirt collars showing—we just did not have the heart to make them change—they had been up for hours and it was HOT!

Each distribution site had a welcoming ceremony for us. Imagine: - arriving at a school yard and seeing 250 children sitting

(continued on page 2)

D. MURRAY DRYDEN - 1911 - 2004 - AN AMAZING LIFE!

(Sri Lanka, by Jeanne Culp, Port Perry, Ontario, continued from page 1)

on little chairs and holding on to colourful umbrellas to protect them from the hot sun, their parents standing close by; – police closing the “main street” while we were paraded half a kilometre by the school band and “stick dancers”, followed by 500 children and their parents to the distribution site; – a lamp lighting of oil wicks circling a five foot high brass rooster-topped structure in the hope that light and prosperity would be with everyone on this occasion; – a little boy or girl suddenly dropping to their knees in front of you, first touching the ground with their foreheads and then touching your feet with their hands (a gesture of eternal gratitude) often saying “Thank you, Madam—thank you Canada”; – arriving at a site and being presented with a bouquet of wild flowers or ten betel leaves, (another token of gratitude and respect).

Our SCAW team often had “watering” eyes. Some of the children had never seen white people before, but, teaching the children to “high five” brought a good smack to your hand, and a beautiful smile to their faces. After having their pictures taken, the girls and boys walked along an “assembly line” of helpers, first getting their mosquito net, then a colourful plastic mat, a thermos bottle and finally, handed out by a SCAW team member, a big plastic bag containing the remainder of their goodies. Many times little squeals of “Oh thank you, Madam, thank you, thank you” were heard as their beautiful brown eyes were wide with amazement and a smile from ear to ear appeared on their faces. They had just received their first ever gift!

Following one afternoon distribution, we visited the home of a six-year-old boy who had received a bedkit that morning. His father had been killed three months ago in a car accident. The ‘home’ was one 8’x 8’ windowless room. It was clean and tidy, and the mosquito net was already hanging from a hook above the bed he shared with his mom. On hot nights he might sleep on his mat on the floor amid the bed, kitchen table, two chairs and two-burner hot plate. Outside, about 10 feet from the doorway was a small “outhouse.” Between the home and outhouse was a bit of land, well swept with a bit of garden area at the back. We handed out Canadian flags to the neighbours who came out of their homes to see the “white” visitors. As we left, both mother and son were waving, smiling and saying “Thank you, Canada.”



Making sheets for SCAW bedkits - a 2004 cottage industry, Sri Lanka

The Rotary Club of Kelaniya contacted other Rotary Clubs throughout Sri Lanka, and together organized the bedkit distribution project. A special thanks to Chandra, Ravi, Varuni and Themiya for helping us with all our distributions, and our bus driver, Saman, and his helper, Asitha, for getting us safely back and forth across Sri Lanka. Varuni Cabraal, wife of Rotarian member Sydney, organized the bedkit contents using cottage industries as often as she could to manufacture the items. Her bargaining talent kept monies in the hands of the poor and made it possible to stretch your \$30Cdn. a long way, ensuring the children received an outstanding bedkit!

Many extra children arrived at the different sites in the hope of receiving a bedkit too, but they had all been specifically assigned beforehand [in accordance with SCAW’s policies]. Although these extra children were disappointed, they still had big smiles and waves for us. One of my special memories is of children walking across the field clutching their gifts, big smiles on their faces and yelling to us – “Thank you Canada—thank you, thank you! Bye!”

Through the generous donations from you, the donors, we, the volunteers, were privileged to be able to ensure that 4,138 children will have many good nights of sleep. “THANK YOU, DONORS!!”



BY JEAN BENNETT BAYFIELD, ONTARIO

My first impression of Sri Lanka was of its incredible beauty, and I thought of a statement I read in a 2003 SCAW newsletter: “Sri Lanka, a land like no other.”

As SCAW team members, we travelled to several different locations in a bus provided by the Rotary Club of Kelaniya to distribute the bedkits. At each area, we were welcomed, usually at the gateway to a school or a community hall, by a school band or a group of beautiful children in their school costumes, and these children paraded us to the actual area where we would take their pictures, and then give out the bedkits.

Volunteer Rotarians, who had assembled the bedkits, and who had pre-chosen the children, would have either had the children already dressed, or were in the process of dressing them in an outfit from their bedkits.

Then the children were assembled for some opening comments by local school teachers or officials. On one such occasion, the president of the local Rotary Club spoke, and I quote: “We thank SCAW because 500 needy children in this area will have a wonderful gift, thanks to the generosity of Canadian people”. Our team leader, Laura, spoke at each of these ceremonies, telling the children that someone in Canada cared about them and wanted them to have a special gift.

At each distribution site, when I looked out at about 500 little faces, my thought was that each of those children was there because of a thirty dollar donation by someone back home. Everyone was so appreciative. For example, as we were preparing to leave one distribution site, one father came back with his daughter so she could say thanks one more time. Often, the children were so excited they would be giggly. Many also practiced their English by saying “Thank you!” over and over again.

Some members of the Rotary Club were always with us as we travelled to our nine different locations to hand out the bedkits. Often, we heard comments like: “In addition to seeing smiling children, co-operating with SCAW strengthens our [Rotary] club and furthers our commitment to humanitarian, educational and cultural programs.”

We were all very honoured to be special

guests at the Kelaniya Rotary Club meeting for the installation of their new president, as SCAW had a very prominent part in the program. Anyone who has ever helped with bedkit distributions cannot help but be enthusiastic about SCAW, and about our overseas partners, who assure us good value for each and every \$30.

We all appreciated the time and effort members of Rotary gave to make this distribution go so well, and we will not soon forget their very generous hospitality. Thanks to them, and you, our donors, we made over 4,000 children happy in Sri Lanka in August, 2004.

BY DON POTTER BARRIE, ONTARIO

On August 15th, I met my team mates, Jeanne Culp, Carol Nass, and our leader, Laura Harper, at the Toronto airport at 7:30 a.m. to start on an unforgettable trip to Sri Lanka.

Leaving Toronto, we flew to Newark, New Jersey, USA, then on Malaysia Air Lines to Dubai in the United Arab Republic, then on to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and finally to Colombo, Sri Lanka, arriving at 2 a.m. on August 17th, having flown a total of 25 hours, but a total time lapse of 48 hours to reach our destination.

After collecting our luggage and leaving the airport, we were greeted by five Rotarians who took us to our hotel. The next evening, we held a press conference with local reporters and the local Rotary Club.

After a much needed rest, we started our distributions August 18th in Kelaniya, Colombo where we distributed 500 bedkits. It started to rain, and we had to move inside. The temperature was 40°C with the humidity at 90+%. Onlookers and the recipient children were left standing outside as three young ladies danced a Sri Lankan dance for us, then each (soaking wet) child, received his/her bedkit, and we received a warm "Thank you!" from each and every one of them.

The next day, we boarded a bus supplied by the Rotary Club, and drove to Kandy, leaving at 6 a.m. to distribute 500 bedkits. When we arrived at the distribution point, we were greeted by a children's band

parading us into an open field where all you could see were children and their parents waiting in the hot sun, yet, each child receiving a bedkit, gave us a big smile. We then boarded our bus and travelled on to Kurunengala to spend the night.

The next day, we boarded the bus to go to Rangiri-Dambulla where we were to distribute another 500 bedkits. We were greeted at the school by an all girl band. We were instructed to follow them past people standing on the roadside in the hot sun. I turned around when we were walking, and to my amazement, saw 500 small children and their parents following behind – a truly amazing site to behold. It touched my heart and brought a tear to my eye. I will never forget that parade.

On August 21st, we drove to where we were greeted by children playing some sort of a stick instrument while performing a dance. Again we gave out 500 bedkits.

In Kandy, we stayed overnight, then drove through the mountains over very narrow roads. There were no guard rails, and I was sitting on the curb side of the bus and looking down at a drop of 6,000 feet! It seemed like I was literally sitting over the side of that cliff looking straight down, and I can tell you it was a hair-raising experience. We finally reached Eliya where we spent the night.

The next morning, we drove to Bandarawela to distribute 500 more bedkits. It was heart rendering to see the children's faces light up as we handed them their bedkits, then seeing their mothers coming forward to help them. These children were so small that they could not carry their gifts.

The following day, we did another distribution of 500 bedkits in Bandarawela, then it was on to Siyambalanduwa (250 bedkits), and finally on to Arugambe and another 250.

August 26th we spent 12 hours sitting on the bus as we travelled back over the mountains to Colombo.

The following evening, we were the guests of the Kelaniya Rotary Club installation ceremony of the new president, with Laura Harper being the guest of honour.

August 28th was our last day of distribution, this time 600 bedkits for the Kelaniya Club. When we arrived, we were greeted by small children giving us betel leaves and bowing down at our feet – this is such a great honour. We entered the school courtyard, and were again greeted

by children performing several dances.

Finally after giving out a total of 4,138 bedkits, it was now time to rest at our hotel in order to prepare for the long flight home.

My summation is that this was the most heart-rendering experience I have ever had: seeing the joy and smiles on all those faces when we handed the children their bedkits. Many a time, I had a lump in my throat and a tear in my eye. I wish the donors of each bedkit could see and experience what I had, but I pray for each of you and thank you. As Laura Harper, our team leader, spoke to the children at every distribution, the comment she made was that these bedkits were a gift from the people of Canada so that they, the children, could have a good night of sleep.

I was indeed proud and honoured to represent SCAW in Sri Lanka – giving to the poorest of the poor.

BY CAROL NASS BRECHIN, ONTARIO

After nearly 28 hours of [flying time] travelling from Toronto, we finally reached our destination, Colombo, Sri Lanka. It was two o'clock in the morning. We were very weary and ready for our beds. As we slowly made our exit from the terminal (gosh those bedkit labels in my suitcase had suddenly gained weight), we were greeted by a sea of smiling faces. Members of the Kelaniya Rotary, our host Club, had come out to meet us. They will never know how much we appreciated this welcome. From the onset, we felt the synergy, selflessness and graciousness of these club members. Post introductions, we were whisked off to our hotel, the Taj Samudra.

The following morning, Varuni, a key person involved in the distributions, took time from her busy schedule to escort us to a couple of shops so that we could get an idea of what was available and Sri Lankan prices. The next day, Thursday, we attended a school in Colombo, for the first distribution. A twelve-member school band greeted us, ushering us into the schoolyard. A flag raising ceremony ensued, followed by a dance presentation. It was raining and HOT (40°C)! We quickly got organized and started the distribution, with the Kelaniya Rotarians working along side us. Their support and attention to detail was immeasurable. The lunch Chandra, the

(continued on page 4)

(Sri Lanka, by Carol Hass, Brechin, Ontario, continued from page 3)

Overseas Volunteer SCAW Co-ordinator, had arranged for us was a welcomed respite. The afternoon distribution went well, and I knew then that I wanted to write my report about the hospitality and support provided by these Overseas Volunteers. This was Jeanne's and my first SCAW distribution, and we both quickly realized "We can't do this without them!"

We were now going to leave the capital city of Colombo and travel by bus out into the country for most of the remaining distributions. Two Rotarians, Chandra and Ravi, as well as wives, Swarna and Varuni, and Varuni's son, Themiyi, would accompany us. The Rotary Club of Kelaniya was our host Club, but various local Club members joined in as we visited their areas.

On Friday, we were in the town of Puwasnuwara. We arrived at a school and were greeted by the local Rotary Club and an "All Girls Band". We followed the band down the main street of the town with a police escort. People lined the streets smiling and waving. We turned around to see that we were followed by 500 children and their parents. Our sunglasses could not hide the tears. It was so moving! Our parade ended at the Town Hall and as all the children were there, we distributed all 500 bedkits without a break. The local Club participated in the distribution and provided lunch for us at one of their homes. The food was wonderful and, we were each presented with a Rotary Plaque.

Saturday, we were stationed at a school in Dambulla, and our hosts were the Dambulla Rangiri Rotary Club. A percussion band of approximately 10 girls greeted us. Each girl had two sticks which she clapped rhythmically together as she simultaneously

danced. Welcoming speeches followed, and then we gave out 250 bedkits. Once again, the local Club participated in the distribution and treated us to lunch. In the afternoon, we gave out the bedkits at a Sports Centre. Upon completion of the distribution, the Rotary provided hot tea. It really hit the spot!

Sunday was a free day. However, Chandra, Varuni and the gang wanted to ensure that we had a good time, so we travelled to a Tea Centre. It was very interesting and the tea was delicious. They also took us to St. Andrews Church which was over 150 years old. Our hotel that night was a special treat as our beds were adorned with flowers and there were hot water bottles tucked between the sheets. On Monday, we distributed bedkits in the Town Hall in Nuwara Eliya. We were greeted by the local Club and a group of children who presented each of us with a bouquet of flowers, bowing at our feet in the traditional manner. It was very touching. Once again, the local Club assisted in the distribution. The children were all Tamils and SCAW instructions, for the most part, had to be translated twice.



The following day, Tuesday, we were at a school in Badulla. We were met by their local Club and a group of children who gave each of us 10 betel leaves, another traditional Sri Lankan welcome, depicting honour and respect. The local Club wanted to ensure that we were comfortable during the distribution. Music was played as the team handed out the bedkits. They provided snacks for children, as well as sandwiches and tea for us. They also treated us to lunch. That night, we stayed at the "Grand Ella Hotel" and to our surprise, members of the Badulla Rotary Club came too and invited us to join in a singsong under the stars. What a way to end the day!

On Wednesday, the distribution took place in Moneragela. This time the host club was not local, but the Rotary Club of the Capital City. The club (from Colombo) had sponsored this area for a number of years as it was extremely poor and also near the site of "unrest". Again, members assisted in the handing out of the bedkits. Lunch was at the "Special Force Military Post". Two of the Rotarians went ahead to ensure that the afternoon distribution was organized. We were surprised to be accompanied by four military officers to our destination, a school in Slyambalanduwa. The children here also treated us to a variety show of music and dance.

Thursday was spent on the bus returning to Colombo. Friday night was very special as the Rotary Club of Kelaniya hosted the "Installation of a New President" with Laura Harper, as guest speaker. Varuni who had accompanied us on all distributions, was made an honorary Rotarian in recognition of her dedication to this undertaking. Rotarians from other Clubs, whom we had met during the distributions, also attended the festivities. Dinner and dancing followed the speeches. Another wonderful climax to a fabulous experience!

On Saturday, our last distribution was in a Buddhist School in Colombo, followed that afternoon by a "wrap-up meeting". The general feeling was that all had gone extremely well. We all felt sad at having to say farewell to this group of dedicated people. The Rotary motto is "Service before Self", and the Rotarians we met in Sri Lanka certainly embodied this.

THANK YOU for your contribution to this Sri Lanka trip

Black's Photography for
photofinishing

**Champion Photochemistry
Limited** for continuously
funding film and photofinishing
costs since 1986.

Konica Canada Inc. for
donating film

**The Printing House
(Russ Cosman)**
**5120 Dundas Street West
Etobicoke, Ontario** for the
printing of this newsletter

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

Donors and Volunteers!

NEXT SCHEDULED DISTRIBUTION TRIPS

**OCTOBER, 2004
BANGLADESH
6,000 BEDKITS**

**NOVEMBER, 2004
HONDURAS**