

SCAW NEWSLETTER



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A registered Canadian charity founded by Margaret and Murray Dryden

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SRI LANKA: July 13 - 31, 2005: 5,000 Bedkits

**BY LAURA HARPER
OAKVILLE, ONTARIO**

It takes many hands to ensure that a \$30 donation will reach a child in a developing country. After being placed in an envelope by a donor, the cheque travels through the postal system to the SCAW office where it is opened by a SCAW volunteer, then coded and marked for processing. It then joins other donations, and the information passes to the volunteers in the computer room where it is entered into the computer which then prints it into a label bearing the donor's name. Next it goes into a box marked for the country of distribution. All the labels are checked for spelling/clerical errors by volunteers and later packaged in groups of 100, ready for the travelling volunteer to sort and package. In the meantime, the \$30 donation has joined other donations in SCAW's bedkit account and about four months prior to distribution day, is sent to overseas partner volunteers who purchase the actual bedkit items.

This year 5,000 labels were sorted and packaged, ready for the 11 scheduled Sri Lankan distribution sites. They were then carried as hand luggage from Toronto by our travelling team. Travelling with me to Sri Lanka on this trip was a school teacher (Nancy), a University student (Joanne), a retired Social Worker (Greg), and a military person (Harry). On the day of distribution one label would be placed in front of each and every recipient for the photo shoot. Once the photo was taken, a volunteer removed the label, handed it to the child who then took it to the volunteer keeping track of the numbers. It is at this



2005 Travelling Team

L to R - Joanne Overbeek, Harry Gautier, Laura Harper, Greg O'Neill, & Nancy Loveless point we see the label transformed into a bedkit to be carried away.

I feel so fortunate that by doing SCAW presentations here in Canada I get to meet many donors, I witness volunteers working at the office, I make lasting friendships with many travelling volunteers, and I get to work with our overseas volunteers. To see the end result – a child carrying away his/her bedkit – is indeed a special privilege.

Sri Lanka 2005 Bedkit

Mat and pillow
Mosquito net
Flask
Sheet
Sarong/skirt
2 T-shirts
2 shorts
2 towels

Sri Lanka has often been called "the pearl in the necklace of India". With its lush beauty, Marco Polo remarked in the 13th century that Sri Lanka "was the finest island of its size in the world". I carried a book with me to read in spare moments written by John O'Donohue and a quote typifies for me the beauty that is Sri Lanka and its people:

To behold beauty dignifies your life; it heals you and calls you out beyond the smallness of your own self-limitation to experience new horizons. To experience beauty is to have your life enlarged.

**BY GREG O'NEILL
AJAX, ONTARIO**

"If you want to build a ship, don't herd people together to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea." - Antoine de Saint-Exupery

Sri Lanka has a legendary reputation for its natural beauty. Such was evident to us each and every day as we passed the beaches, the inland lakes, and travelled through the lowland jungle areas and the hill country. It is a landscape resplendent with many exotic trees and flowers as well as rare endemic bird species. As the SCAW team draws near to leaving this very lush land, the overwhelming impression that will remain with me is the warmth, kindness and generous spirit of the people with whom we came into contact.

While the team travelled widely throughout the country, I was most gratified that we were able to distribute bedkits in Jaffna and the north, especially since Jaffna was only recently reopened to visitors after two decades of isolation during the civil war. The north seems a world away from the rest of Sri Lanka as it is closer to southern India than to Colombo. Because of the physical distance and the countless checkpoints along the way, our hosts advised us to fly to Jaffna rather than to travel overland. We were later informed that the truck that transported the 500 bedkits from Colombo to Jaffna had to

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MURRAY'S DREAM 1,000,000 BEDKITS - TO DATE 776,850!

(Sri Lanka by Greg O'Neill, Ajax, Ontario, continued from page 1)

unload and reload no fewer than four times at various military checkpoints along the way. Although the effort in reaching the north is considerable, the trip provided us with a richly rewarding experience.

The Sri Lankan army continues to maintain a significant military presence in the north, visible in the gun emplacements, military bunkers, the miles of barbed wire and the myriad checkpoints that dot the roads. Jaffna itself is a town with a war-torn colonial charm and a vibrant Tamil culture which was strangely very beautiful. Our host Rotarians hooked up with an NGO [non-government organization] working in the north to help organize and facilitate our distribution of bedkits. On our way to the distribution site we passed several abandoned houses that had been razed or were completely bullet-riddled from the war. And we saw row upon row of white, unadorned crosses on the sand dunes which marked the graves of tsunami victims. We were told of the extensive work that was being done to remove the land mines in the area, and we saw first-hand the temporary shelters that had been erected for those left homeless by the tsunami, as well as the houses that were being constructed to provide these families with permanent homes.

The site of the distribution that day was in Point Pedro, Jaffna's second largest town which stands at the extreme north-eastern tip of the peninsula. We distributed 500 bedkits that day out of St. Anthony's, a quaint colonial church just a few hundred meters away from the Indian Ocean. Six foot high watermarks were evident both outside and inside the church, indicating the level to which the flood waters rose during the tsunami. Some of the children to whom we distributed bedkits that day had lost brothers or sisters, or a parent. A few others were orphaned by the catastrophe. A number of the children had very visible scars on their faces and bodies caused by the barbed wire

as they were tossed inland on the waves of the tsunami. Here especially in the north, the smiles of the children receiving their bedkits were particularly poignant, leaving a powerful and everlasting impression on all of the travelling volunteers.



A Happy Recipient

To all of the donors who have given from their hearts, we want to thank you for the joy and privilege of representing you and presenting your gifts to 5,000 very appreciative and deserving children. On behalf of all recipients and their families, we would like to convey their gratitude to you which they so freely and spontaneously expressed to us through their smiles, their gestures of appreciation and their thank-yous.

As we leave Sri Lanka, having completed our assignment, the faces of the children and the gestures of appreciation are indelibly etched in my memory. Personally, I return home with a sense of humility, a profound respect for the people we have met and a deep appreciation for all that we have waiting for us back home.

BY HARRY GAUTHIER BARRIE, ONTARIO

"A Land Like No Other"

Here I am sitting in the terminal in Hong Kong on our return trip to Toronto. We have a four hour wait, so I will take advantage of this to write my report.

This is my second distribution with Sleeping Children Around the World and my second time to Sri Lanka. It certainly was a pleasure renewing old acquaintances and work-

ing once again hand in hand with the Kelaniya Rotary Club.

Distributions this time pushed to new frontiers and we visited Jaffna and were able to distribute 500 bedkits to very needy tsunami-affected children in this war torn area. It was strange to see armed soldiers and beefed-up security, and it certainly made me feel uneasy at times. Regardless, we were able to distribute the bedkits to these more than deserving children.

We also pushed further into the interior to Polonnaruwa and spent six days there distributing once again to very needy children. Occasionally we experienced a few distribution hiccups, but they were quickly resolved and our mission was accomplished in a speedy and efficient manner.

I commend the Kelaniya Rotary Club for reaching out to new areas, and thus ensuring more of Sri Lanka's neediest children being able to take home bedkits. These little ones will in future experience peaceful nights' sleep. Naturally, we could not help them all, but at each distribution, 500 additional children got to take home a bedkit.

Life is full of surprises and new experiences. Well, we certainly experienced something that we may never experience again. On our way to our hotel where we were to stay before our final distribution, we were attacked by an elephant. Imagine, driving through the mountains on a winding road at night and you come upon a truck stopped on the road. Our driver pulls out to pass, and there in the headlights is the most enormous elephant and he is heading towards us. Oh! Oh! Panic! What is going to happen? Well, our driver had already experienced this, so

he started backing up. There was a truck beside us and a van behind us and the driver of the van wasn't aware of what was going on and wouldn't let us back up. Eventually he must have seen the elephant and started backing up. What a relief!

Our driver backed up until we could not see the el-



Harry at Sigiriya Rock

elephant anymore and waited. The truck that had been beside us decided to go on, and so we followed, fortunately the elephant was no longer on the road but we could hear him trumpeting nearby. Enough excitement for one night! When we arrived at our hotel, food and a bed were just what we needed to bring us back to earth.

I have to mention at this point the beauty of Sri Lanka, the diversity of climate and the hospitality of the people who are exceptionally friendly. They welcomed us with open arms wherever we went. We also experienced mountainous terrain, desert, jungle and beaches. The flowers, lush vegetation and fruit trees make this island a tropical paradise.

I also fulfilled a dream I had since the last time I had been to Sri Lanka. We stopped to see "Sigiriya Rock" but did not have time to climb it. Sigiriya was a temple built back in 5 A.D. and is probably one of the oldest ruins in Sri Lanka. Joanne and I decided we would climb it on our spare travel day to Polonnaruwa. The Rotarians said it would take three hours to climb it, up and back down. However, we did it in an hour and a half and had time to stop, take pictures and enjoy the view. I got such a feeling of awe and grandeur being amongst such ancient and architectural monuments! No wonder the Sri Lankans call it the Eighth Wonder of the World.

Sri Lanka is truly "A Land Like No Other"!

BY JOANNE OVERBEEK INGERSOLL, ONTARIO

As a first-time SCAW distributor with a limited travel experience, you can imagine my trepidation as I boarded a plane for Sri Lanka. As I expected, there were several things to which I had to adjust. "Living on Sri Lankan time" is a phrase that can only be understood by those who have been to this

country. The slow-paced, relaxed lifestyle sharply contrasts to our hectic western way of life. Most of our travels were not less than two hours, and each time I asked how long it would take to get somewhere, the answer was "45 minutes", regardless of the real travel time required. In addition, meals were usually a two-hour event occurring at least two hours later than our usual western meal times. This leads to the second thing to which I had to adjust: the spiciness of the food. Not only did it wreak havoc on my intestines, it quite often left me with burning lips. Thankfully, there was always plenty of fresh fruit to ease the burning in my mouth.

Aside from adjusting physically, I had to adjust emotionally to the poverty that was especially visible in remote and rural areas. Nothing could have prepared me for the harsh reality that faced me. At the end of each distribution there would be parents milling around with their children looking at us with hopeful eyes, begging us to give their child a bedkit as well. One of the hardest things I had to deal with was my own mentality regarding this. It took a few distributions for me to realize that I was depressed and upset because I was focussing on all the children we didn't help,

rather than on those that we did. Only after I really thought about each happy face smiling for the camera, and imagined each child falling asleep with a smile on his/her face, did I feel the true reward of my work.

My favourite job by far was to entertain the children to get them to smile for their photos—smoothing collars, straightening braids and coaxing smiles with a loud "Hinawenda!" (Smile!), felt so interactive for me. I truly hope that I will remain a part of their 'bedkit receiving' memory.

It was usually easy to get the children to laugh and smile for the camera, but on occasion, it was like pulling teeth. This was a very new experience as most of them had never before had their pictures taken. In addition, it didn't help that I'd occasionally mess up my Sinhalese words. There was this one boy who stared straight ahead with a blank, stoic expression on his face, so



Joanne trying to coax a snake out of a snake hill.

I said, (rather, what I thought I was saying), "Smile!" He surprised me by immediately standing up, but continued to stare straight ahead at the camera. It took me a few seconds to realize that I had said "Nagitinda!" (Stand up!), instead of "Hinawenda!" (Smile!).

It seems obvious that you would hear someone say, "I now realize how lucky I am after travelling to a developing country": however, unless you actually experience this for yourself, you can't fully understand what this statement encompasses.

The Jaffna distribution sticks out in my mind more than the others in terms of the extreme poverty levels. These war-torn, tsunami-affected children appeared different in terms of their demeanour, compared to other Sri Lanka children. There was a harshness in their actions towards one another. For example, I blew up some balloons for the children to play with while they waited, but their response was both unexpected and upsetting. They were almost ferocious in their efforts to get a balloon. As a result, one child was actually hurt. Those who were successful in catching a balloon hoarded it and kept it away from the others, instead of all playing together with the balloons. The desperation in these people's eyes was unbearable at times.

Overall, this trip proved to be a very humbling, thought-provoking, soul-searching journey. I'm very thankful I had the opportunity to experience this at the earlier part of my life. This has been a life-altering experience, and will certainly affect my perceptions as I continue my own journey through life.



Patiently Waiting

**BY NANCY LOVELESS
COLLINGWOOD, ONTARIO**

Sleeping Children Around the World has been an integral part of my life for the last ten years. As a public school teacher, I have raised 'magic pennies' in my classroom and have made SCAW part of a weekly program in my grade two class that ties into the areas of global study and character education. My personal dream had been to go on a SCAW distribution, and this year my dream became a reality. This trip to Sri Lanka has proven to me once again that knowledge is one thing, but experience is the greatest teacher.



Another Smiling "Thank You"

As I have had the opportunity to work with the other team members to see that each child received a bedkit and had a picture taken, I experienced love in action. The faces of these children were ones of excitement and fresh hope. I have always enjoyed watching others opening presents, and this was like watching Christmas morning every day. Working with students as a classroom teacher, I have always noted the resiliency and strength of children. They possess an optimism at which we, as adults, marvel. These traits were very apparent in the eyes of the Sri Lankan children as they received their bedkits. I loved to watch the girls

giggling and the boys laughing as they would, at some locations, load up in tractor-drawn wagons to take home their precious cargo.

Most of the children on this trip were dressed in the school uniforms when they came to the distributions. As they were sitting and waiting, they looked like a sea of white with coloured ties interspersed. I had an opportunity to meet teachers and principals who were working with these children in village schools all over Sri Lanka. At one location, we were at a Roman Catholic church site and the priest said that he was so thankful that the children were

receiving the gift of a good night's sleep because this would help them to be rested and ready to learn at school. At the end of each distribution we would usually give the used labels to a teacher or principal so they would have blank paper for drawing and writing. When I thought of all the teaching supplies that are always available for use in my classrooms, I marvel at how these Sri Lankan teachers manage with so little.

We enjoyed music and dance while we were in Sri Lanka. The dancers, singers and drummers were colourful and performed beautifully at a few of our locations for distribution. I heard it once said, "Music is where you hang your memories." I will never forget hearing the Sri Lankan children singing their national anthem as the flag was being raised outside a school. They sang with such pride and love for their country. It reminded me of the children in my one class who face the flag each morning and sing our Canadian anthem.



For some ... happiness ... is a SCAW bedkit!

THANKS to the following for their contributions to this Sri Lankan trip:

Anonymous donors for providing a myriad of gifts

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

The Printing House (Gordy Leong, 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!

I am very thankful to have had this opportunity. It has been a life changing and emotional experience.

I am now anticipating starting a 'Global Awareness Club' at my school this fall where Sleeping Children Around the World will be an integral part.

Ghandi once said that to find yourself you must lose yourself in the service of others; and I found this to be true during the last several weeks.

Thanks Laura, Joanne, Harry and Greg for taking this journey with me. My world will never be the same.

There will never be another now – I'll make the most of today.

There will never be another me – I'll make the most of myself.

Dr. Robert H. Schuller
From Tough Times Never Last,
But Tough People Do!

**NEXT SCHEDULED
DISTRIBUTION TRIPS**

**September, 2005
HONDURAS
5,000 BEDKITS**

**November, 2005
BANGLADESH
7,000 BEDKITS**

SCAW'S GOAL - 1,000,000 BEDKITS BY 2010!