

# theirfuturetoday

Issue 2 2007 [www.twirltourtravel.co.uk](http://www.twirltourtravel.co.uk)

## Since visiting Sri Lanka as a volunteer six weeks

after the Tsunami in February 2005, we have continued to raise money and support some of the 1500 children orphaned on that fateful day 26th December 2004 when their lives changed forever.

The billions of pounds donated around the world still has not materialised in Sri Lanka, and in what was already a poor country the devastation has left vast numbers of children living in severely impoverished conditions in a bureaucratic and political jungle.

In 2005, we opened a trust fund named 'Their Future - Today', all monies raised here have been utilised locally to directly benefit those children that are so in need, this is a commitment that we continue to uphold as requirement and need continues to evolve.

Between February and December 2005 we raised £8424.59 through the support of local schools and coffee mornings - this money was spent partly at Ruhunu Orphanage in Galle where we bought washing machines, arranged and paid for plumbers, lorry loads of essential items including medication, vitamins, food, bedding, clothing, nappies, and some play equipment. Separately we funded school uniforms for children who are fostered through the wonderful low cost charity 'Hope for Children' and sanitary wear for young girls who no longer have a mother to ask and are too embarrassed to request these essentials from male relatives or foster carers.

**Their Future - Today is NOT a charity - it is a Trust Fund. The difference simply means ALL monies raised is spent on helping children and NOT administration.**

Lynn Stanier



## Fund Raising Event

In 2006, it was decided to hold one major fund-raising event. This took place on 30th September in the form of a magnificent Medieval Banquet at the magical location of Hampton Court House, Hampton Court.

Outside, a period musician on stilts, playing a flute and drums welcomed attendees and led them through flaming torches to the beautiful entrance hall of the Champagne Reception where talented Connor Richardson played piano.

Gorgeous wenches serving champagne greeted guests, and at 7.45pm all were called to the Main Hall, where the tables were sumptuously decorated with red and green silks, and dinner was served. Flickering candles throughout the hall lent to an almost surreal ambience, magicians and jugglers entertained at the tables whilst music from a bygone era added to the wonderful atmosphere.

The medieval menu provided mouth-watering fare, a starter of delicate fish mousse was followed by hog roast and spit chicken accompanied by new baby potatoes and spiced red cabbage. A dessert rich with colour of fresh fruits and cheeses with dates figs and

nuts, accompanied by the all important Mead wine.

Guy Holloway, Director of Studies at HCH highlighted his true vocation, as an amazingly successful auctioneer! The auction and raffle together raised an amazing £20,646.16. Guests danced the night away to the talented Functioneers, and a fabulous time was had by all!

Enormous thanks to the thirty volunteers who worked tirelessly and professionally throughout. With very special thanks to **Eliana Houstoun Boswell** who so generously donated beautiful Hampton Court House for the evening; **Guy Holloway**, auctioneer extraordinaire; **Phil Phillips** and his team for their superb catering; **Alexander Catering** and **Charleys Catering** for the equipment hire; **Charlie Macdonald** professional photographer, **Click 2 Print** in Hampton for photo printing, **Lurgashall Winery** for provision of Mead wine; **Ryan Stanier**,



event creator; **Sally Hamilton**, event organiser; **Averil Beeton**, advisor and treasurer; **Lydia Beeton**, stationery designer; **Janet Fisher**, stationery printer; **Jane Downes**, decorations, **Sam** of Asian Adventures our translator, driver and guide on the ground in Sri Lanka.

Finally a huge vote of thanks to the many generous donors and bidders of auction prizes, particularly parents from **HCH**, **Sri Lankan Airlines**, **Asian Adventures**, **Jetwing**, **Mt Lavinia Hotel**, **Colombo Hilton**, **In Harmony**, **Café Capriccio**, **Tim Etchells**, **The Kew Grill**, **Charley MacDonald**, **Mark & Deborah Penrice**, **Ros Richardson**, **David Whittaker**, **Bruce Dickinson**, **Catrina Nason**, **Disney Channel**, **Andy Rutherford**, **Barry Cooper**, **Corinne Temple**, **Pauline Crosbie**, **Sandra Wadsworth**, **Tonys Hairdressers**, and **Andrew & Averil Beeton**, **David Nash MCC**, **The Optical Shop** and **World of Fantasy** and **Jamie Roche PR** to name but a few!

# A Miracle...

## Raising this huge amount of money was incredible

But even more incredible was the extraordinary generosity and commitment of Corinne, a guest at the Medieval Banquet. So inspired by the event, and the needs of the children of Ruhunu and 'Hope' she decided to take a year out from her job as an acclaimed BBC Make up artist and volunteer in Sri Lanka to actively help these children – Corinne is also a qualified teacher.

It is our continuing pledge to spend all monies raised directly in the areas where need is most urgent. So, on 1st February 07, Corinne and I set off, me for five days and Corinne for one year.

## My Diary

### On the flight to Colombo feeling nervous and excited.

**I love Sri Lanka** – I have yet to find another place in the world which does tick so many boxes and no apologies for the cliché! It's diversity of beauty, culture, relaxation, sport and spas, beaches and adventure tours took Sri Lanka to the top of most popular destinations in 2004.

With many more interesting boutique hotels and luxury hotels built since then it is still a truly amazing destination. (I sound like I'm writing a travel brochure - sorry!) I'm trying to remember the number of times I have visited Sri Lanka over the last six years, mostly to work on cricket tours and familiarisation trips, but I have lost count!

This will be my third visit to Ruhunu. It had been an appalling and horrifying discovery to find 54 children living in such appalling conditions on my initial visit. That day I vowed I would not forget them, and in some small way I would try to help – sometimes I have to remind myself of that moment, and remind myself that small changes can make big differences, and miracles do happen...

My thoughts go back to my previous visit, the meetings with the local commissioner, where intense persuasion was needed in order for him to allow us to buy goods and give them directly, instead of handing over money to the government. How will we be received this time?

I am also feeling responsible for Corinne. Would this be too much of a culture shock for her? Watching her say goodbye to her family and friends was heart-wrenching – I hope she stops crying soon. We've landed!

### DAY 1

#### Not the best of days...



On arrival we were honoured to be invited to attend an emotional Farewell Dinner for Tyrell Cooray. A retired Probationary Commissioner, he has worked tirelessly as a volunteer for Hope for Children during the last ten years as their local representative.

'Their Future – Today' funds have been spent by Tyrell without administration fee to the children he considers to be in most need, and we have been able to claim some Gift Aid through our relationship with Bob Parsons – founder of 'Hope for Children'.

Tyrell is sadly retiring due to ill health. I truly felt in the presence of a man unique and inspirational. My experience of Tyrell has been consistently "anything is possible" – and in his speech he tells of the children he has helped over the years and how it is 'their future – today' which is of such importance. I felt a shiver go up my spine.

During the Farewell Dinner, we were alarmed to learn that new government legislation meant volunteers were no

## Thank You!

### A donation of £8,000

was immediately given to 'Hope for Children' to supply school uniforms school equipment and sanitary wear for the children in foster care – a donation that was inspired by a young orphan girl on my last visit to Sri Lanka, whose ultimate Christmas wish were these somewhat unusual presents.



longer welcome in Sri Lanka. We knew already that visas were valid only for up to three months, but this was not a good start for Corinne. Dramatically things started to go downhill.

An email I've sent hasn't arrived – which means appointments for the following day will not be possible...

Tomorrow is Saturday, then Sunday, and the Commissioner will not be available at the orphanage – so access will not be allowed. Monday is a public holiday and I'm due to return home on Tuesday morning.

Suddenly, I began to choke on a spicy peanut, eyes watering, nose dripping I spluttered my apologies and dashed to the toilet. I was violently sick several times. The thought of a long drive to Galle tomorrow suddenly seems arduous and pointless, I feel tired and ill. In the morning I'll make some arrangements for Corinne and go home...

So tired... must sleep.

### DAY 2

#### What a difference a day makes.

Corinne woke me up at nine. She had already eaten breakfast.

After a good sleep, some soggy cornflakes and a slice of toast I felt hugely better and ready to face the day. We checked out of Berjaya Mount Royal Hotel, probably the worst hotel I have ever stayed in, and vowed never to return or send clients there! Four hours later we checked in to Amaya Reef Hotel in Hikkaduwa. Lovely. I was pleased to see dramatic improvements since my last visit after the tsunami. Things were looking up. We drove on to Galle.

Arriving outside Ruhunu I felt sick with nerves. Murray had been my contact there, I met him on my last visit in December 05, and with his help we had bought nappies and play equipment. Unfortunately he was unable to renew his agreement with the Government and in March 06 he was asked to leave.

To my knowledge, no Westerners or Foreigners had been allowed inside since then. We left Corinne in the car (praying!) and our driver Sam came with me to the entrance where an elderly lady was talking to someone. She asked us curtly in Sinhalese to wait. The old building was deserted and I was pleased to see a new building attached. The children were outside in the garden and peered curiously through the gate. I had forgotten the babies I met at a few months old, who were just over one year on my last visit, were now two. I could see little faces I recognised staring through the bars. I wondered if Piyumi was still there and if I would recognise her. She was my inspiration and as much as I tried to be calm I knew I would be disappointed if she had gone. It has been several months since I've had news.

It was difficult to distinguish between boys and girls as all had very short cropped hair, and all wore dirty t-shirts and shorts. The elderly lady finished her business and asked us to sit down. She seemed very hostile. Sam explained to her that I had raised money and wanted to spend it at Ruhunu – she told him quite abruptly to tell me to take it to the Commissioners office. I refused. Sam translated for me, he told her that I had bought washing machines on my last visit, her face softened, she remembered me, and told me the washing machines are still working!

Without the Commissioners agreement she would be unable to accept anything but she eventually agreed to give us his

mobile telephone number to arrange a meeting. We left feeling hopeful and positive.

Corinne could not understand how difficult it was to give – she said no-one at home would believe these problems, it's almost inconceivable.... But I've been here before!

### DAY 3 A good day!

We woke up to the news that Sam, our wonderful Asian Adventures driver, translator and negotiator had managed to contact the High Commissioner of Galle. A meeting was arranged for 11:00 am the next day. He agreed in principle for us to go ahead and buy goods, but he would have to arrange for the Assistant Commissioner to be there to receive and record our purchases. We spent the day loading the car with provisions from a local supermarket and market stalls and found the department store which was closed, but due to re-open the following day.

Clothes, including lots of dresses of all ages and shoes and sandals, as well nappies, bedding, towels, creams, soaps, medical supplies, medicines, rice, dried fish, rice, baby food, baby milk and vitamin tablets were just some of the items we bought in as large a quantity as we could manage. The children have been going to the hospital with bare feet – this is their only outing outside the orphanage. It's hard to imagine their image of the world – an orphanage and a hospital and that's it. Nothing and no-one else. Something has got to change.

### DAY 4 My advice to Corinne on arriving in Sri Lanka was 'to go with the flow and expect nothing to go according to plan!'



Woke up feeling excited and hopeful. We set off from Hikkaduwa to Galle, and went straight to Manjuris department store in Galle where we met with the manager and agreed a 5% discount. We bought bedding for 42 beds, bright and clean, new mosquito nets in blues and yellows, about 100 towels, food blenders, battery night lights and torches, more clothes, books, toys, a swing hammock (argued with Sam over this as he said it wasn't essential) but for £25.00 and for the joy it gave it was money well spent.

I looked at my watch – it was 11:00. I said to Sam that it was time to go now to Ruhunu to meet with the Commissioner. Sam looked surprised. 'I thought the meeting was off' he said 'the Commissioner is in Hikkaduwa at a hotel speaking at a Conference.' Somehow this information had not been given to me. Remember my advice to Corinne – never expect anything to go according to plan?

It was a 40 minute drive back to Hikkaduwa and without his formal consent none of the goods we had purchased would or could have been accepted, the whole trip depended on this meeting. I thought my world had just collapsed. It took several minutes to find Corinne who was filling her trolley with squeaky balls, we raced to the car and Sam put his foot down. Anyone who has been to Sri Lanka will appreciate this is not easy, especially if you get stuck behind a cow or a tuk tuk! We arrived at the hotel at 11:45, 45 minutes late.

The High Commissioner was about to begin his presentation to about 50 people in the conference room – I stood waving like a mad woman and eventually he agreed somewhat reluctantly to give me five minutes of his time. Fortunately his English was excellent, and miraculously (unlike my experience last year) he was very accommodating. Not only did he agree for us to deliver all the supplies to his Assistant, he agreed that Corinne (who is now on a very long extended holiday!) could return weekly to take shopping lists from the Matron, I asked if she could visit the children and play with them for an hour or so each week and he agreed. When he asked 'and what about photographs?' I quickly promised that we would leave cameras and mobile phones outside, unbelievably he said it wasn't a problem and we could take as many photos as we wanted! I talked to him about reuniting children with their families if they could be supported, and again he said he would be very happy to assist as much as he could.

I left feeling a mixture of total shock, disbelief and joy. Corinne cried. One of her earlier remarks was – ‘no-one would believe what you have to go through just to spend the money’ and the relief to get to this point was just fantastic.

We celebrated with a glass of wine on the way back to Manjuris Department store, and regretted this lapse of doing ‘good work’ when some hours later we realised how long the process of buying a lorry load of goods and hiring a lorry to transport it takes.

The Assistant Commissioner was leaving his office at six o’clock, and without him the goods would not be accepted. After purchasing our last items of a very large TV and a radio cassette player, we arrived back at Ruhunu with minutes to spare. Ok, I know. It’s the story of my life I hear my friends say! This time we were met with smiles from the Matron. She has to be very careful to abide by the many rules set by the Government – otherwise her job and livelihood would be at stake. Foreigners are treated with suspicion and are not welcome. It is very difficult to understand the logic of this attitude. But that’s how it is. It was sensible to buy tea and biscuits for the workers, not only to buy our way into their hearts, but to also have a drink of something after several hours of shopping in 40 degrees!

I was desperately seeking news of Piyumi and was told she had been moved from Ruhunu, but then we realised it was another Piyumi who had gone. My excitement was infectious and Matron who was now making eye contact with me sent one of the workers to find her. They carried her through the gate and she just looked at me and melted in my arms – I thought she was asleep, but she just cuddled me contentedly. Her hair was cropped short, and she smelt disgusting. But I remembered her eyes and her serenity from when she was only six months and weighed 61bs, to 18months and now to two and a half years old.

I was so pleased we had bought lots of dresses as all the girls wore shorts and t-shirts and they shave their heads because of head lice, they all



look like boys. The children, who by now were all peering at us through the railings were creating lots of noise, a noticeable difference to the silence of a year ago which was so heartbreakingly sad.

Finally Matron allowed us to go through the gate to see the children.



Visitors here are prohibited. Our arrival created so much noise and excitement, I felt as though we were surrounded by a pack of excited puppies. The lollies were being grabbed and snatched from our hands, there were screams of laughter as these toddlers tasted the sweet ecstasy of sugar for the first time! Some children were terrified by our white skins and screamed.



Mostly little arms reached to be picked up, desperate to be held and cuddled.

We gradually brought in the toys, first the small balls brightly coloured, then the larger footballs. It was amazing to see a plastic hammer suddenly transforming into a hockey stick



to hit the balls, and the little budding footballers looked like they were in heaven, knowing instinctively to kick the ball! There were noisy toys, soft toys, something and more for everyone. The wrappers were torn off and strewn around the garden, the workers looked on bemused and the children went wild and had real fun. The experience was reminiscent of last year when we attached cot mobiles to the cots and the room just came to life. While I was



totally out of my depth and certainly out of my comfort zone, Corinne looked like she had come home! Within minutes she was on the ground playing and communicating with the children, I knew instantly that she has an incredible gift – truly an angel sent from heaven...

Piyumi sat poignantly at the back of the crowd quietly looking in wonder at the colourful pictures on the wrappers. It is hard to imagine a child of two years never having seen a picture. We were invited to go inside to see the tiny babies in cots. Rows of them, they will stay in their cots until they are old enough to walk, then they will stay out in the garden all day in blistering heat with little stimulation. The workers do their best but they are not trained in childcare and looking after up to 50 babies and children under five years old, 24 hours a day, is incredibly difficult.

I was pleased to see a new extension on the grim 1930’s original building, it looked clean and bright and had been built by a private donor. We found out it had been finished without electricity so we pledged to have electricity installed for them as well as a cabinet for the TV and radio. It was good to see some new play equipment – we had donated some funds for this last year.

The Assistant Commissioner insisted on a formal handover of goods – which were all recorded in a book and a receipt given. The workers were all very excited to have

photos taken, which I promised to send to them later.

Before we left, Lalitta the matron took my hand and asked Sam our driver to interpret for her. She said that while she was extremely thankful for all the goods we had brought to them, she said she believed the love we had shown to the children in those couple of hours meant



much more. I turned away trying to hold back the tears. The end of a perfect day and time to go home.

## Since then

We have continued to raise some money this year – a pot noodle eating competition raised £240 thanks to Ryan Stanier and Single Market Events – and a 100 mile off road bike ride raised £1,200 thanks to Richard Stanier and Tony Lawler and clients from Twirltour Travel and A Lawler & Co. A donation has also been made of 30 lice combs from Full Marks which we hope will enable the children to grow their hair. And a donation from EMI of childrens' nursery tapes.

In July we donated a further £2,000 to 'Hope for Children' for more school uniforms and sanitary wear. (These children just keep on growing!)

## August 2007

### Feeling their joy.

Corinne has established a wonderful rapport at Ruhunu. She is continuing to visit frequently at the request of the Matron – she takes her shopping list for the following week and arrives on her motorbike laden with supplies.

The Government does not provide enough money to feed these children, there is never enough baby milk, cleaning materials, soaps and gas – with Corinnes'

help we have been able to provide enough food and milk for all the children and some treats too!

The children now have their own cups and plates, toothbrushes and towels, and with the provision of brooms, mops, dustpans and brushes the whole area is now much more hygienic and well-kept.

## 'Suduwanti' – Corinne

The children excitedly wait for Corinnes' arrival and run up to the gate to meet her, calling 'Suduwanti' which means white auntie! They line up patiently for their treat of 'Happy Cow and biscuits' followed by fruit or cake.

She has been teaching them English nursery rhymes and songs which they love and I have had wonderful telephone calls saying 'Hello' and 'thank you' – or 'tankwee'!

One of Corinnes' most memorable emails to me said that she could 'feel their joy', and really there is nothing more I could have hoped for – she has been their greatest gift, an angel.

## The Future

### Changing childrens' lives.



Many of these children have been abandoned, not through choice but through poverty. We can help them.

It is our ultimate aim, our goal, our dream to reunite some of these children with their families, by giving them financial help. The process through the courts is long and complicated but it can and will be done. We now have the knowledge, the support and the co-operation locally.

With the help of our local contacts we have been instrumental in relocating a severely mentally and physically disabled child to another home which specialises in the care that he requires. We are hoping to move another severely

disabled child, who is currently displaced, at Ruhunu to a more appropriate home soon.

## GOOD NEWS!

### From Hopeless comes Hope

Corinne has highlighted another child who was extremely bright, and he is now going to be sponsored by Sri Lankan Airlines at an independent school.

There is another very bright child at Ruhunu who we would love to relocate, but he has a brother so we are looking for somewhere which will take the two children. Watch this space....

### The Forgotten Children

In recent weeks we have seen television programmes on the plight of the Elephants in Sri Lanka and the plight of the Turtles and as much as we love these wonderful creatures my heart just screams 'WHAT ABOUT THE CHILDREN?'

A poor uneducated Sri Lankan man was fined two thirds of his annual salary for 'stealing' a turtle egg for his starving pregnant wife and children. He had to sell his wifes' jewellery to pay the fine and he didn't even know he had done anything wrong. The TV presenter was supposed to be supporting the cause of the Turtles, but she couldn't stop crying at the unfairness and ludicrousness of this situation.

We must continue to raise awareness, and would like to see a documentary made on these issues – but it seems people are more interested in making programmes about animals and not the worlds' most needy children – living without life or love or care...and the sensitive political situation makes this even more difficult.

## August 2007

### BAD NEWS

I have just heard from Corinne who has been trying to spare me from bad news.

She arrived at Ruhunu a few weeks ago to find Piyumi with a big bandage round her head. All she has been able to find out is that she had an accident and has been to the hospital – but that's all.

She has been extremely withdrawn, and just sits by herself every day. She thinks in the last few days she has seemed a little better, and so Corinne decided to inform me now. A little girl, injured and alone, with no-one to cuddle, comfort or reassure her, to tell her not to be afraid...

**Can we do more? YES!!**

# A Spectacular Fundraising Event

## Watch this space

We hope you will support our next spectacular fund-raising event which is planned for Saturday 2nd February 2008 at Hampton Court House.

**Please let us know if you would like to register for tickets or offer any help or prizes. Further details to follow.**

Another trip is planned early October (Thank you Sri Lankan Airlines) to introduce procedures and identify children to be reunited through adoption with their families, supported by Bob Parsons MBE founder of 'Hope for Children' who are currently supporting hundreds of children through their Foster scheme and keeping them out of the many desperate orphanages throughout Sri Lanka [www.hope4c.org](http://www.hope4c.org)

We have also agreed to install a shower block and cover costs for electricity in new building and future supplies. They are also in urgent need of a tumble drier as the rains have been ceaseless and the roof is leaking badly, we are in process of having it repaired.

## STOP PRESS

### Richard and Tony are planning another bike ride.

This time from Bristol to Sunbury off – road in two days 135 miles... Will they make it? All support is so welcome.

### HOW TO DONATE

Should you wish to make a donation or set up a direct debit 'Their Future – Today'

**Sort Code: 070093**

**Nationwide account: 33 33 33 34**

**Ref Roll No: 0678/703/ 731 694**

Or send a cheque to 'Their Future - Today'

**c/o Twirltour Travel, 101 Green Street, Sunbury-on-Thames, Middlesex TW16 6RD**

## Email from Corinne

'A Father had come to visit his little boy on Sunday, I would say the child was about 2 and half to 3 years old. The Father was so tender and caring with the little boy... he was feeding him bits of orange and just being very caring with him... it was then obviously time for the Father to leave... you could see what a terrible wrench it was for him... I picked up the little boy and played with him... the Father just stayed and watched from a distance for such a long time. I have no idea what the circumstances are for this little boy being in the orphanage but it was very obvious the Father wanted so much to be with his child. It was a very moving moment. I really felt for the Father and the little boy who looked so lost and forlorn after his Father went.'

## BREAKING NEWS: Our Prayers Answered!

Have just heard amazing news from Corinne – she has decided she would like to stay in Sri Lanka permanently and is going to apply for residency. Bless you – and thank you Corinne! Our support for Ruhunu can now continue indefinitely.

Thanks again for your continued support and acknowledge without your help so many smiles and laughter would not of happened.

