

# theirfuturetoday

Issue 3 2008 [www.twirltourtravel.co.uk](http://www.twirltourtravel.co.uk)

## We cannot change the world, but we can change the whole world for one child...

There is now 'Hope for these children' and it is 'Their Future – Today' which is so important.

Only with your continued help this extraordinary and difficult journey continues ...

With heartfelt thanks

*Lynn Stanier*



## My Diary

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

#### Where to begin?

Almost as soon as issue 2 was produced there was already another story to tell.

In October I returned to Sri Lanka to follow up and support the ongoing needs of the children at Ruhunu Orphanage in Galle, and was invited to visit some of 'Hopes' very successful projects with Dr Bob Parsons' MBE Founder of the wonderful low cost charity 'Hope for Children'.

Bob had also agreed to come with me to Ruhunu, despite the fact that it is 'Hopes' policy to invest money only in keeping children out of the orphanages.

The problem is that all donations to state run orphanages have to go through the government, and unfortunately there is no control over what happens to the money. One thing is for certain, the children do not benefit.

#### DAY 1

##### There is Hope...

Bob looked tired after a punishing 12 hour drive the day before. He needed to speak to the person he had travelled with, but refused to call them before midday as he said they would be tired and needed to rest! He however had been up early to meet me and one of 'Hopes' patrons, on yet another busy day.

Tyrell, 'Hopes' retired representative in Sri Lanka couldn't meet us as he had been invited to meet with the President to collect a lifetime award for helping children. So well deserved.

Our first stop was a mobile eye care unit supported by Hope which was at a local school. The children lined up excitedly, some had come from other nearby schools to have their eyes tested, we learnt that almost one million children had been tested since the unit was introduced.



There are eleven blind schools in Sri Lanka, the optician said that many of these children were not blind but had impaired vision. Once they had been tested and received glasses they could actually see.

I asked the optician if they would visit Ruhunu as I know there is at least one child with a very bad squint. He agreed. Excellent.

Next we visited Hopes' Day Care centre for street children and their mothers in Colombo.



I remembered seeing this centre on GMTV in 2003 when Lulu visited and Hope were trying to raise awareness and funds. It was then I had written their telephone number in my filofax, I called them two years later...after tsunami.

The children and staff waited excitedly for Bobs' arrival and gave him a huge



welcome. His vision has changed the lives of so many of these children, they have a safe and welcome place to come. The staff had been there since it opened, and it all felt good and positive.

There was even a metal works at the back where some of the older boys worked and sold their wares.



As we were leaving the matron in charge asked me for a photo as I reminded her of Lulu (what a compliment!) she gave me the guest book to sign, yep, right next to Lulus' signature! Life is strange huh?



Our next stop was at a place where they make prosthetics, run mostly by volunteers. Hope sponsors a mobile unit and the amazing doctor can sometimes travel 3 hours to someone who needs a limb, he makes it on board this unit, fits it, and within hours can have someone walking again.

For more difficult cases he brings the patient to the centre where they are cared for and taught to walk.

Most of the men making these limbs were themselves amputees, and the various types of prosthetics were hung around the walls like works of art.

Everyone was so proud of the work going on here, and so appreciated the funding from Hope, another success story.

## DAY 2

### The horror of Ruhuna

Today we set off to Galle with the intention of meeting the Commissioner. It was Saturday his day off, but he agreed to meet the Hope team for lunch.

As we had met in February (and he had been so accommodating) I was surprised he claimed to have no knowledge of me, our conversations or our arrangements at all.

But this is not a straightforward country. And I soon realised that to acknowledge me in front of strangers could be serious as he had agreed to things which were against his governments policies which could seriously jeopardise his and the livelihoods of many other people.

I had asked Hope as part of this meeting to try to move Nilanthe, the disabled boy who had not left his cot for eleven years at Ruhunu to a more suitable home where he could be cared for properly. The Commissioner strongly denied that any such child existed.

Bob's face on arrival at Ruhunu was full of horror. That look made me realise how difficult it is for many people to acknowledge the desperation in this place. It isn't for the faint hearted and I have to admit how much I hate it too.



Seeing these children caged in such a small space, so sad, the smell is overwhelming. The silence is even worse. These are 'Children in Need', but their own government make it impossible for the outside world to help them.

They say they are 'protecting' the children by not allowing outsiders or foreigners in. **But is this really the case? Is this protection or is this abuse?**



# Great News!

Despite Hope for Children's policy of not funding orphanages, they have unexpectedly offered to take us, 'Their Future-Today' under their wing and umbrella us. This means we will be able to claim gift aid through 'Hope' and will have the support we need locally in Sri Lanka to help us achieve our goals.



Nilanthe! We found him hidden away. Hope team were horrified and promised to do what they could as soon as possible. It seems doubtful that anyone from the government offices have ever been inside here. But why would they?

Having visited so many of Hopes' happy and successful projects, life at Ruhunu is a million miles away, and this visit invoked Bobs strong determination to keeping as many children out of these places as possible, for which I am in total agreement. 'But we can't just forget the children here,' I wailed. Our minibus fell into an uncomfortable silence.

## DAY 3

### A day of ups and downs...

I was up at 5am, ready for departure at 6.30. The sunrise was just beautiful.

Hope team picked me up and we visited a family at 7am with a severely disabled son. This project finances trained physiotherapists to visit families in their homes and train the mothers in specialist care for their children. This scheme also helps to keep children with their families who would otherwise have put them in homes.

The family were asleep (not surprisingly!) but gradually more and more faces appeared (there must have been 10 people living under this tiny roof) and we observed this little boy fast asleep in the middle of the living room floor.

Everyone was smiling and seemingly happy with this early intrusion. Again, they were so appreciative of this support and help from Hope. It is so heartwarming to see these projects working so well, and everyone so happy.

Later I met up at last with Corinne at Ruhunu. The silence turned to screams of excitement, smiles and laughter, we spent the next couple of hours playing with the children, who were just desperate to be picked up and held, like leeches, clinging, never wanting to let us go.



These cheeky faces are growing bigger each time I come, they are now little people with their own identities and personalities, the need to help them just grows stronger. It is the injustice of human beings living in such inhumane conditions, which drives me on.

I had bought a holdall full of flip flops (25p per pair) from Tesco's end of season sale.



They went down a storm, particularly with Piyumi who cried uncontrollably when one of the children peeled them off her feet when she had just got used to proudly wearing them!

Corinne does amazingly well considering the fact she doesn't speak Sinhalese and only one worker speaks very little English. With our translator Sanath we found out that although the Government provides the bare essentials, it is never enough for a whole month.



Therefore, they are constantly in need, and with Corinnes' support each week it has made life so much better. They have felt confident in knowing if a child needs medication if they run out of a particular age baby milk, or if the gas cylinders run out Corinne will arrive on her motorbike with these supplies. The general hygiene has also improved slightly with all our purchases of cleaning materials. She is their 'angel' without doubt.

We asked what else was needed and the immediate answer was more help and geezers for hot water. There are simply not enough workers to look after this



amount of children, and more importantly there is no nurse, and the children are bathed in a dirty dustbin of cold water.

After another meeting with the Commissioner it was agreed we would finance two more house mothers and a nurse for the next two years, and if this was successful we promised to finance more. So with as much assurance as is possible under these circumstances, promises were made, names and telephone numbers were exchanged, another meeting with the government accountant, we arranged a money transfer.

I practically begged to take some photos of the children to help us with our fund-raising but the answer was a resounding 'no'.

This was very disappointing, but with a hidden camera some photos were taken (obviously we were completely unaware and we were very very angry at the culprit who was completely unaware he was doing anything wrong)???!!!

## DAY 4

### Children without a voice cannot be heard...

This morning I visited Corinnes' little house. It is the cottage annexe of some local people who live in the 'big' house.

Her shower is in the garden and her water is from a well. The garden is tropical and alive with beautiful birds and naughty monkeys who steal the fruit from the heavily laden trees of avocado, mango and banana. It seemed a long way from the luxuries of life in Surrey.

We met Murray at Galle Fort for coffee. He, together with the Ayesha Foundation had tried unsuccessfully to maintain and support Ruhunu. After funding ten workers for a year, they were told they could donate their funds to the government but they would not be permitted to enter. This was an unreasonable arrangement and they had unwillingly and sadly had to leave.

Murray was sceptical about our agreement with the transfer via the government office, and his advice was to walk away. Another heated discussion followed.

At the end of the day, these children are suffering, they have no voice, and I feel we have no choice but to try to help them.

## DAY 5

### An embarrassing moment!

We made another appointment to meet the Commissioner as the Matron was told she could no longer admit Corinne without written permission.

We had a long wait in the Government offices before he became available, which was a waste of valuable and precious shopping time.

Eventually, we had our meeting and he invited us to lunch. (Still no written permission was given).

We sat down in the canteen and unlike all the other tables we were served our food. I must have looked horrified when everyone started to scoop up their rice and curry in their hands (including

Corinne) and the Commissioner kindly sent someone to find a spoon and fork. I popped what I thought was a cherry tomato into my mouth, only to find out later it was one of the hottest chillies in the world. I will never forget the embarrassment of having to spit out my whole mouthful of dinner in front of the Commissioner. It could only happen to me!

Later we visited Abans our favourite electrical store to sort out plumbers and geezers, and Manjaris' Sri Lankas answer to a department store to buy supplies. Corinne really appreciated not having to transport the goods by motorbike which she does every week, instead we hired a lorry!

There always has to be a formal handover of goods with receipts written on arrival at Ruhunu. We have to be careful to keep watch of everything as the workers are extremely poor and the temptation to steal is huge. We struggle with this but somehow feel it is understandable.

We always buy tea and biscuits and cakes for the workers, and this time we brightened the dull grey office with a couple of vases.



I introduced Corinne to the Government accountant hoping to seal our relationship, before saying goodbye to the children, this farewell gets so much harder... **Sometimes I wake up during the night and see their sad haunted faces.**

### DAY 6

**Shoulder to shoulder with two inspirational men!**

Departed early from Galle and drove back to Colombo to meet up again with Bob and the Hope team, this time at the British High Commissioners house, where a magnificent party was held for all the children supported by Hope in their many projects, including the blind, disabled, deaf, and street children.

A small white horse gave rides around the magnificent garden, there was so

much excitement in the air, and they all had the most incredible time.



I had to smile seeing Tyrrel and Cyril two 70 something retired Commissioners literally running around in the hubbub joining in the games and fun with the children.



It was such a happy special day, but a far cry from 54 forgotten children sitting alone, hungry, silent and stinking.

# Latest Update

**Corinnes' written permission never transpired despite her efforts, but her visits became increasingly more frequent at the Matrons' request.**

She now has an additional structured 'Playschool' time, with small groups of children, which they (and she!) loves.

The geezers and TV took weeks to install and nearly drove Corinne to breaking



point, she never wants to hear the word geezer again! But thanks to her the children for the first time have warm water.

The two housemothers were employed by December and the qualified nurse in January. I think the accountant was



almost at breaking point when faced with Corinne every week demanding to know where our employees were!



Corinne identified Kasun as an extremely bright child, with her help he has been relocated to another home which will provide education. He has no family so Corinne visits him, a 90 minute drive on her motorbike! We are helping with his funding.

In December our good friend David Nash MCC took a group to see England play against Sri Lanka, and carried presents donated by children at Hampton Court House. The presents were distributed by Corinne

on Christmas Day, this would have been the first time each child had received his own wrapped gift. When she called me on Christmas morning I could hear their screams of excitement, my tears dripped onto the turkey! David visited Ruhunu with Corinne and said he would never forget the terrible smell of the children as long as he lived.

At our request another good friend Katy Cooke from the Barmy Army also

visited Ruhunu whilst on a cricket tour in December. With money she raised locally the children received gifts of musical instruments, and her friend Nicky King spent her holiday feverishly knitting teddy bears for all the children which most definitely put a smile on their faces. They were shocked and appalled at seeing such deprivation, and were horrified with the smell.



## Latest Fund Raising

**In February we threw a Venetian Masquerade Ball for 120 guests at Hampton Court House.**

After an elegant champagne reception with Bellinis, followed by a delicious Venetian Cuisine dinner, everyone enjoyed the entertainment of the magnificent internationally awarded singers 'The Three Waiters'.

Our auction was led once again by auctioneer extraordinaire Guy Holloway, and fabulous prizes included three nights at The Ice Hotel in Sweden including flights, luxury hotel accommodation in Sri Lanka, a cultural tour and beach stay in Sri Lanka, a

luxury hotel break in London, a trip on the Orient Express and much more. We danced to the sound of The Functioneers until 1am, and a great time was had by all. The grand total of £17,000 was raised.

This whole event was put together in less than three months due to the unexpected availability of Hampton Court House, and the amazing supportive efforts of our great friends Sally and Kevin Hamilton, and innumerable helpers.



## What's Next

With the money raised we intend to continue supporting the children as before with the help of Corinne, and also make available a foundation of money to move as many children as possible to other privately run orphanages where they will receive a better quality of life. Further funding will be available to family members who have abandoned children through poverty. This will be achieved with the help of 'Hopes' local representatives who have agreed to identify children, follow up their needs and control funds on our behalf.

Meetings have been set up in Sri Lanka to put these measures in place on my next visit at the end of April. We have also agreed to finance the landscaping of the garden, bathrooms and kitchen at Ruhunu.

## Another Bike Ride Planned

Richard (very fit husband) and Tony (very fit accountant) are planning another bike ride off road across the South Downs Way from Winchester to Brighton and then along a disused railway line back to Sunbury, 127 miles at 5300ft. Where do they get their energy?

### If you would like to sponsor them

on this amazing feat please send your donation to 'Hope for Children' and mark on the back of cheque 'Their Future - Today' and your address, this way we can claim Gift Aid which adds 28% to your donation.



### Please send to:

Their Future - Today  
101 Green Street  
Sunbury on Thames  
Middlesex TW16 6RD

# Heartfelt Thanks to All Those Who Helped on The Night of The Ball – We Couldn't Have Done It Without You...

## Extra special thanks go to:

- Hampton Court House – Eliana Houstoun Boswell
- Sally & Kevin Hamilton
- Phil & Wendy and the catering team who travelled especially from Devon
- Sam Hamilton & Katy
- Tasha Hamilton and Max who travelled especially from Newcastle
- Sandra & Lee Foster – Romsey Fotografix [www.romseyfotografix.co.uk](http://www.romseyfotografix.co.uk) who travelled especially from Southampton
- Carole Dyer
- Catherine Everest
- Helen Freeman
- Susanne Bascombe
- Sandra Wadsworth
- Mary Hodgeson
- Lana Holloway

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## And Enormous Thanks To To The Following Auction Donors For Such Overwhelming Generosity

- Discover the World, Banstead 01737 218 800
- David Whittaker
- The Fortress Hotel, Galle
- Weligama Bay Resort, Weligama
- Asian Adventures, Colombo
- Twirltour Travel
- Orient Express
- Bill & Suzanne Wyman
- David Nash MCC
- Corinne Temple
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- Sandra Wadsworth
- Virgin Music
- The Optical Shop, Woking
- Carluccios, Walton-on Thames
- Trio Pharmacy, Shepperton
- Kuoni
- Joy Stanier
- In Harmony, Hampton Court
- Andy Rutherford
- Bill Cadogan

'There is nothing sweeter softer or more gentle than water and water can move mountains'. Claire Bertsinger