

Gratitude. By Marilyn Tam, co-founder, Us Foundation.

In this second of two articles, Marilyn Tam chronicles her trek to India to provide anti-parasitic medicine and Vitamin A to impoverished children in India.

Dear Friends,

More on my adventure. When I get home I'll include photos. You have to see the beauty, the inspiration and the bleak conditions....



We had an amazing day. We went to a desperately poor area today where everyone is so malnourished that I was the tallest person there and definitely the fattest. The children are so small they look at least several years younger than they are until you look into their faces and get a sense of their true ages. The illiteracy is almost 100%; in fact most of the people including adults do not know how old they are because they cannot count or add. Heart breaking to work with such dire conditions, and also that is why we are here doing what we do.

HH Sai Maa Lakshmi Devi has just been gifted land in this area and I know that she is thinking of building a clinic here. It would be so great to have medical support here. There was a boy with a broken arm that has healed in a crooked fashion and there is nothing we can do for him, very sad. Many of the children have obvious diseases like jaundice, ring worms, vision problems, beri beri, fungus, scabies and drastically stunted growth. The

adults are also malnourished, and I just wish there is so much more I can do to help. My mind is spinning as to how we can do more.

The land is very rocky here and the main work they have is to dig rocks up and break them up into sand and sell that to brick making factories. They do everything manually, yes, dig up rocks, pound them into sand and then make bricks from them all by hand with very primitive tiny little hammers and spades. They make from 40-100 rupees a day if they are lucky, that translates to \$1-2US; on that they have to feed, clothe and pay for all living expenses; obviously school is not included in the consideration. They also make cow dung patties for fuel but that mainly is for their own use.

Today I had the first experience of eating bread made *in* a cow dung fire; not an experience that I am anticipating repeating if I can help it. It tasted marginally normal if you don't consider how it was cooked, and although I ate with positive thoughts, I certainly can't say it was a culinary highlight. Being in that deeply impoverished area, there are no restaurants and we



ate at Satuwa Baba's ashram. That is how everyone here cook their food, with cow dung. It is the main if not only source of fuel and energy; needless to say electricity is a huge luxury. The bread (buns) are placed right into the cow dung fire and cooked in it, with HH Sai Maa and Satuwa Baba looking on while everybody ate..... I have to say that there was more eating than I would have expected, maybe because everyone was so hungry and exhausted from working under such harsh conditions. Sai Maa didn't eat more than one bite of rice, she doesn't eat much; wish I could have done the

same but I wanted to be present and share the total experience of the people. Well, at least as much as I could manage without completely driving myself nuts.

Tomorrow I am working with the state and local officials and IMA (India Medical Association) to organize the ongoing logistics of the distribution of anti-parasitic medicine and vitamin A for 100,000 children for the next three years and to develop potentially a bigger ongoing program. I am leaving for Delhi the day after and it will take me one whole day to get to Hong Kong from there. My mother is leaving for Vancouver that day and we may be able to have lunch together before she departs. I stay one more night and then I'll be on my way home. Yippee!

It is about 9:45pm and I am bone tired. The strain of traveling for miles on trying road conditions between horrendous traffic with suicidal drivers, pedestrians, pedicabs, tractor hauling brick wagons, oxen carts, bicycles, motor cycles, cows, goats, dogs, one elephant, the occasional motor cycle swallowing potholes and looking into the sometimes hopeful and oftentimes weary and blank eyes of the many frail and bony children and adults all day is wearing. I wish I could do so much more. I look forward to sharing with you my thoughts on how we can make a huge difference with a little money. Gratitude for our lives is so easy when one considers how many other people live.

Marilyn Tam went to India as the facilitator of a collaboration of three organizations, Us Foundation www.usfoundation.org, Humanity in Unity www.humanityinunity.org and Vitamin Angels Alliance www.vitaminangels.org to provide anti-parasitic medicine and vitamin A for 100,000 children. As the representative of Us Foundation, Marilyn took the lead in organizing this project and is responsible for implementing the program. Marilyn's group works with the local teams affiliated with Humanity in Unity, distributing the anti-parasitic medicine and vitamin A to prevent blindness, improve their immune systems and brain development and to educate and hand out hygiene and nutrition picture flyers translated into the local language so that the children, parents and teachers could take the information to their villages.

If you are interested in participating in a future mission, please log onto www.humanityinunity.org and www.usfoundation.org For tax deductible donations to this program, please send your donation to the India children's project at:

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