



PARADISE LOST

by Errol Paulicpulle

In Tsunami ravaged northern Sri Lanka, help comes from Yonge & York Mills.

Thursday, June 2nd

3:46 am. Somewhere over the South China Sea, at 37,000 feet, I chase the dawn. Far behind me L.A. sits down to lunch, and even further, Toronto prepares for dinner. I nuzzle comfortably into my seat and look out at the night sky. The moon lights up the clouds, and Sri Lanka is still several hours away, as I let my thoughts drift.

It all started with an email. In February, two months after the Tsunami, a relative had driven through the hardest hit areas of Sri Lanka, and had mentioned to me that, in many places, assistance had not yet been received. I was shocked.

Like the rest of the world, I had watched the post Christmas devastation with a macabre fascination, and had donated, and assumed the reconstruction was well on its way.

The Red Cross, Unicef, and World Vision, along with a slew of other NGO's (Non government organizations) had quickly set up refugee camps, and were providing safe drinking water, food, shelter, and medical attention. But the majority of the funds had not been distributed.

In Sri Lanka, the larger NGO's that held most of the worldwide donations had set up a plan on how the money should be spent, based on the level of devastation, but had run into Government opposition. A twenty two year religious war that had ravaged the country was in its second year of a shaky ceasefire. And while local and state governments, were eager to get their hands on the money, the powerful Buddhist majority, led by the priests, were as eager to ensure that the Hindu Tamils in the north did not get any or, get only limited assistance.

A BRIEF LESSON IN HISTORY.

A teardrop shaped island on the south eastern tip of India, about 7 degrees north of the Equator, Sri Lanka has a total area of 65,610 square kilometers.

The Sinhalese arrived on the island in the 6th century B. C. E., probably from northern India. Buddhism was introduced about the mid-third century B. C. E., and a great civilization developed at the cities of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa.

In the 14th century, a south Indian dynasty seized power in the north and established a Tamil Kingdom. The Portuguese occupied the island in the 16th century, followed by the Dutch in the 17th century, and the British in the late 18th century. Given it's independence in 1948, Ceylon -- as it was then known -- changed it's name to Sri Lanka in 1972.

The occasional flare-ups between the Sinhalese and Tamils erupted into bloody riots in 1983, leaving thousands -- of mostly Tamils -- dead and homeless. This led to an ongoing pattern of revenge killings by the Tamils separatists and the Army. The Tamils who chose to stay neutral and support peace initiatives were systematically killed by the Tamil separatists.

This, in addition to government sanctioned torture, beatings, rapes, and killings of the Tamils by the Armed forces and police -- forced Britain, Canada, Germany, the U. S., and most of the west to give immediate political asylum and refugee status to Tamils who were fleeing the ethnic bloodshed.

After two decades of violence that has taken an estimated 75,000 lives, the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam formalized a shaky cease-fire in February 2002, brokered by Norway.

With literacy rates in the low 90's and an industrializing economy, Sri Lanka currently enjoys a GDP growth rate of about 5.2%. There are about 800,000 Sri Lankans working abroad who send home over \$1 billion. While modern western influences are creeping into everyday life, large vestiges of a traditional culture remain, that -- sadly -- include a brutal caste system.



The well organized Buddhist's were able to pressure the Government into postponing it's acceptance of the foreign aid plan, while they structured and submitted one that favored their own



Polonnaruwa - ruins from about 760 ACE

interests, at the cost of others. But the NGO's held firm, and finally the Government had stated that it would sign legislation in June 2005 to follow the NGO's plan, opposing the Buddhists.

But most of the orphanages, especially on the north and east coasts, still had no assistance.

To add insult to injury, the larger NGO's had an unwritten policy of staying away from orphanages in the belief that, if the orphanages were brought up to an international standard, a flood



Polonnaruwa - Stairwell to a temple 760 ACE

of parents would abandon their children in the hope the children would have a better life.

the beach is strewn with parts of lost lives..

That's when I decided I would go. I had no red tape, no administration, and no committees to satisfy. I would raise as much money as I could and go to as many orphanages as I could, and buy what they needed. I contacted a small privately run NGO that liaises with, and promotes orphanages in the Eastern district. They informed me that many small orphanages were already stretched to the limit and unable to cope. Although most orphanages receive rations and assistance from the government, equal to about 10 Rupees per day per child, the actual cost of

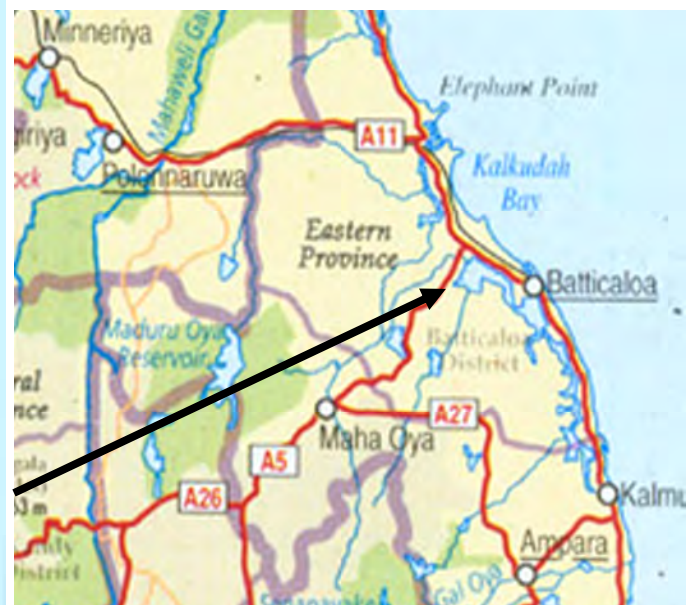
feeding the children are about 18 Rupees per day per child. They gave me a long list of children's homes, each with its own list of basic needs, including school books, uniforms, and shoes.

Saturday, June 4th

Colombo. The air is hot and thick with humidity, and the smell of diesel reminds me of my childhood here. I make my way through a city that is very third world. Pockets of lush, thick foliage, and houses with high walls and immaculate gardens mix with potholes, open sewers, and shanties. Dogs forage through piles of garbage that lie on the street, and overcrowded buses belch thick clouds of black smoke, as beggars, touts, and women dressed in exotic saris crowd the broken sidewalks.

As I head for a store to buy a hat, a woman approaches me. She is carrying a little girl who appears to be about six years old. They are both dirty and malnourished, and even though the little girl's face is covered in grime, her smile shines through.

The woman begs me for money for food. She tells me they are hungry, and points to man close by waking with another child – a girl of about 8 or 9, also malnourished, and mentally disabled. They all now surround me asking for me for money for food for the children. I point to a nearby café and tell them I will buy them food there. The man and the woman shake their heads



and tell me they are not allowed in the café as they are low caste, and chased out when they enter.

I walk in with them and the manager attempts to shoo them off. As I step in front of him my emotions are boiling - these are children and they are hungry. Although I'm about a foot taller than he is, and have a very intimidating look on my face, reason takes hold. I know if I yell at him, he will take it out on them the next time.

I drop my shoulders and smile and ask him to show them some compassion. I assure him I will pay, and order them four meals -- take out as they won't be allowed to sit the restaurant -- I include two chocolate bars for the kids, and give the mother 50 Rupees and ask her to spend it on the children.



Ruins of a Kovil. Kalkady, Batticaloa.

Thanking me they quickly disappear into the crowded streets.

At the store, I select a hat and make my way to the cashier, when I notice a whole shelf of dolls. Somewhere in the back of my mind there is a rule that every child should have toy, and I select two and walk out looking for the family, but they are nowhere to be seen. I circle the block in vain, but they are long gone.

Monday, June 6th

We make the arduous from Colombo to Batticaloa on the east coast, a distance of about 360 kms, which takes 11 hours. The roads are crowded and I sit on the edge of my seat, white knuckled, as we go from one close call to another, missing trucks, buses, bicycles, and pedestrians by mere inches.

Traffic thins through the centre of the island, and we drive by miles of thick, green, rice paddies,

Special Forces are made of more seasoned men who handle their M16's with a disconcerting ease.

and lush hills. We enter the eastern province where the landscape is parched, and covered in tall grasses and low shrubs. The military checkpoints now increase and we are stopped several times.

By Polonnaruwa the heat is oppressive and we stop for a rest and a drink of Thambili --fresh coconut juice from the nut -- and a quick tour of the ruins dating back to 677 ACE.

Near the coast the checkpoints turn into forts. Huge armored bunkers that annex the road are fortified with earthen walls dug out of the landscape, and are protected in all directions by a series of barbed wire fences. In daylight we are allowed to pass through the forts -- on the original road, but after dark we must circumnavigate them on bumpy, temporary roads. We also begin to see many burned out buildings riddled with bullet holes.

We reach Batticaloa by 11:00 pm and I call Dinah Barton from the NGO, she agrees to meet us by the clock tower and guides up back to their Office/living quarters. Dinah is a 30 something Brit, whose gone native, and seems quite at home on her motorcycle as she weaves in and out of the traffic. Their Office/living quarters consist of a small three bedroom house in the impact zone of the Tsunami, just beyond the 200 meter limit from the shore. The bedrooms are

bare of any furniture, except for two dubious looking beds, and the floors are covered in straw mats.

I am told most of the volunteers sleep on the floor; in keeping with the Hindu flavour of the organization. As an alternative Dinah suggests the roof, she tells me she sleeps there quite often, as it is cooler. I meet another volunteer -- David Taylor from Belfair, Washington. He has a construction background and is here for a month. We all sit on the floor and have a simple dinner of Roti (yummy, thin, flat bread) and vegetable curry, before I bed down for the night on one of the uncomfortably squeaky beds.

Tuesday June 7th

6:00 am. I am woken by the wailing call to prayer by a nearby Kovil (Hindu Temple). It is like a shrieking alarm clock without a snooze button. A small streak of light breaks the sky as I jog along the beach, which is like a war zone, and in this light -- surreal. There are no dwellings of any sort left within 200 meters of the beach. The only proof that a large community once thrived here remains in the many circular scattered, round concrete shells -- remnants of what was once a well. Neat piles of rubble have been made where once houses stood.

Nearer to the water the beach is strewn with parts of lost lives. An arm off a child's doll, a prescription bottle, pieces of furniture. The wave was as tall as a three storey building, and hit with an impact velocity of 600 mph. Dave later tells me that the construction here uses far too much gravel in their concrete, making the cement very brittle and unsafe, adding to the devastation.

I come across a man sitting on a log looking out at the water, who acknowledges me

with a painful smile. I do not ask.

As I jog, I listen to the ocean. It has no pattern, the swell and ebb is the only constant, some waves come crashing in, while others slip quietly to shore.

The sanitary conditions are beyond deplorable.

For breakfast the "Ammah" (Cook/House mother) serves us a lumpy potato soup, which I reluctantly try, and put aside claiming lack of hunger. We leave for two of the orphanages that Dinah liaises with, that are south of us in Kokkadichcholai. Although they are less than fifty kilometers away, the trip takes us over three hours. We head south through Kattankudi and leave the main highway where the road narrows to less than a single lane, and pass a few checkpoints and two Tsunami camps. They are easy to identify, large white, blue, or khaki tents, laid out in a grid format, with a large black 500 liter tank of drinking water in front, and the name of the NGO that administers the camp. These two are run by South Korean organizations. Dinah tells me the government policy with the Tsunami

refugees is that they must live in the camps for two years before houses will be built for them.

By midday we reach the ferry docks, and are questioned again by the army and Special Forces. By now I've learned to recognize the difference. The regular army seems to be made up of mostly young men who carry their Chinese made AK 47's with a little discomfort, while the



The devastation zone - 6 months after the Tsunami. Kalkady, Batticaloa



Ferry to Kokkadichcholai

Special Forces are made of more seasoned men who handle their M16's with a disconcerting ease.

The ferry -- if I may call it that -- arrives to collect our van along with several cyclists, and a few passengers. It is no larger than a flat bed, powered by two 25hp outboards motors fitted onto a makeshift cabin, built into the side of the vessel.

After a precarious and thankfully short crossing we reach rebel held territory. I am surprised there is no check point here.

The road is now narrower and broken, with a few spots barely large enough for our minivan to get by. On either side there is a drop of about six feet, down to a shallow marshy area.

By 1:00 pm we reach the first orphanage in Kokkadichcholai. It is a generous compound sur-



The shower stalls, boy's orphanage, Kokkadichcholai



rounded by a large, newly constructed, concrete wall. Inside there are two half constructed buildings, and a large concrete garden ornament off the entry. The Orphanage houses 40 + boys,

some from the Tsunami, others from before. It has four toilets, only one of which is functional. The shower stalls are mostly broken, and the kitchen is a small room -- about 8 feet by 12 feet with a

five foot ceiling. The cooking for all 40 boys is done on a stove made up of three carefully placed bricks, and fired by wood.

Most of the boys are in school, but the few who remain behind follow us around, fascinated by our cameras. We look around and notice they all sleep, eat, and live in one large room. And while they have five or six new bikes and sleep on mattresses -- all donated -- they have no toys, or any place to keep their few personal items,



The only stove in the orphanage

which are carelessly lumped around the edges of the room.

The sanitary conditions are beyond deplorable, and the man who runs the place tells us the new half constructed buildings, the new concrete wall, and the garden ornament were built by different local organizations, who determined that these were more important than toilets. He also points out that the land is mostly sandy and unusable for any type of agriculture. He tells me the Government allowance per child per day is not



enough, and they depend on donations from the community to survive. Because

they are mostly Tamil, they are supported by the TRO (Tamil Rehabilitation Organization), who ensures that a Doctor visits monthly.

The manager guides us to a Kovil for a short visit. We are required to take off our shoes near the gate and must walk to the Kovil on the sand, a distance of about fifty feet. It is blistering hot, and after a few tip toes the heat gets to us and we run in -- to the delight of the children. I am suddenly



The girl's shower stall. Kokkadichcholai

reminded of another reason why the children need shoes.

We then arrive at the Girls orphanage, which is in somewhat better condition. It consists of a two room house for 38 girls, with a working kitchen, and two toilets. A third toilet is

backed up and long unused. Their shower area has no floor, and is now water logged and muddy.



They have a partially finished school/eating room

We slowly make our way back, and are questioned again at the

checkpoint as we return to the Government held territory. Even though the cease fire has held, tensions and suspicions run high.

We stop at a local restaurant for a quick bite,

By later afternoon we hit checkpoint Charlie, the last checkpoint before we enter rebel territory.

where we meet Hettie, a twenty two year old Brit, who has also gone native. She too is a volunteer and liaises with several orphanages in the north, which we will visit tomorrow.

I head out to one of the stores and buy several toys before returning to the office/headquarters where I glance briefly at the bed and floor mats, before finding a hotel room for the night.

Wednesday, June 8th

We start out early. By now there are four volunteers: Mike is an easy going Iowan, Jonathan -



an energetic twenty one year old from Carlisle, Pennsylvania, David, and myself, with Hettie as our guide. We first visit a boy's home in Sitandy. It is a small compound, clean and well kept. They tell us they need school uniforms, shoes for the children, juice bottles, and fans. There is some question as to the cleanliness of the water, as their well has a sour odour to it.

We stop at a small local restaurant for lunch, where we eat rotis, lentils, fish curry and egg, under the curious stare of onlookers. I ask for Khotty Roti - a favourite of mine - a stir fried mixture of green onion, onion, carrot, chopped up rotis, and either meat, fish, chicken, or egg. But am told that is only available in the night. It is cooked on a flat grill by using two large cleavers that clang against the surface of the grill as they chop and stir. Most Khotty Roti cooks have developed their own beat and in the late evening you can hear them rhythmically whip out the meal. Sadly I must wait.

We then stop at Valechchenai, a nearby town, to shop. Hettie tells us the two orphanages we are about to see are too remote to get regular groceries, and they only get fresh vegetables once a month. While she buys beans, okra, and bananas, I pick up about 50 exercise books and several pens, along with a few mangoes.

As we travel north through the thirsty, rural, landscape, the check points are more frequent, and the number of burned out buildings increase. We are told they are mostly Muslim properties.



Kathiraveli girl's home.

By later afternoon we hit checkpoint Charlie, the last checkpoint before we enter rebel territory. The driver signs in the number of travelers in the van and we head north. The road is empty for miles, and the landscape barren, until -- up ahead -- we see another checkpoint. This one is manned by rebels dressed in jeans with that now all too familiar accessory - the AK 47.

We enter a devastation zone, still uncleared, and we can't help but slow down. The ground is littered with broken boats, parts of homes, and overturned trees - some that stood thirty or forty feet tall.

We drive by large areas encircled with yellow tape, and are told these are mined. In all I planned



Rebel graveyard

for my life, I had never intended to be this close to a minefield.

We continue north to a Kovil that is hosting a Padiyacha -- an annual, two month Pilgrimage for Hindu devotees, made on foot. It begins in the north in Jaffna and heads south to the holy



Bullet riddled Kathiraveli boy's home

city of Kataragama, a distance of about 350 km. The pilgrims sleep outside while traveling through the jungle, and in Kovils while in towns.

We meet Patrick Harrigan, the founder of the NGO, at the pilgrimage. He is a slight, soft spoken, American, with eyes set in deep sockets. He moved here many years ago and converted to Hinduism. He is bare chested, dressed only in a Sarong - a green cotton cloth wrapped around his waist. He only carries a bright yellow Padiyacha bag -- to hold his possessions as he walks, and a camera. A truck follows them with more of their personal baggage.

Patrick joins us as we go further north to Kathiraveli girl's orphanage, which houses 46 girls. The conditions are both good and bad. They have working toilets, and the girl's all at-



42 Boys sleep in this room

tend school, but they all sleep on the floor in one room, and do not get enough vegetables. Even here, as with most of the orphanages I visit, there are no closets for the kids. They keep their few worldly possessions in little suitcases or



Luuna

old discarded cardboard boxes, piled on the floor. We give out some toys and half the vegetables before visiting the boy's orphanage. Less than a kilometer north, the Kathiraveli Boy's orphanage is wretched, in the worst Dickensian sense. Both the interior and exterior walls are riddled with bullet holes, the roof is rotten and leaks and the kitchen they share with a neighbor is in dire condition. But they tell us

we pass several men in a field carrying wooden guns, practicing a drill.

there is nothing to do here, as they will be moving in a matter of months. An organization in London, England has bought land and has set aside money to build a home for them. Construction is scheduled to begin shortly. They tell me the kids need school uniforms, shoes, books, school bags, and juice bottles. I hand out a few toys, and as the kids clamber for them my emotions start to overwhelm me. I turn away as I fight back the tears.

We head south and stop again at the Padiyacha, and pick up more passengers. Luuna, an enigmatic and photogenic eleven year old, along with her grandmother, and Oochikutty, a seven year old boy. Both children have been on the Padiyacha since Jaffna, and have walked about 180 km.

We also pick up a handsome young man looking for a ride to Batticaloa. As there are no regular buses here, this is a common practice.

The van is now full as we head south, and I am thankful for the air conditioning. Oochikutty sits on my lap, with his eyes glued to the road. He is dark, black from the sun, and like the other males is bare chested, with a little sarong. Thinking he needs a bath, at first I am a little apprehensive, but he then turns to me with big sad eyes and shows me a cut on his finger, without thinking I kiss it and he smiles and cuddles into me. Soon he is fast asleep in my arms. Patrick tells me he comes from a troubled, mixed marriage. His mother is



Oochikutty

The cut on his forearm is a bite or puncture wound that has been infected with a parasite that lives in polluted water.

low caste Singhalese from a fishing village, who sells Kassipu (moonshine) to make ends meet, and his father is low caste Tamil from a fishing village who spends his time drunk.

As we head south, we pass several men in a field carrying wooden guns, practicing a drill. The driver slows to look, as Jonathan opens up his camera. I quickly insist that the driver speed up and Jonathan put away his camera, which they reluctantly do.

By now it is late afternoon and unreasonably hot, and we all vote to stop at a nearby fishing village

and take a quick dip. The water is deliciously warm and Jonathan and I spend most of our time in it playing with Oochikutty. I try playing with Luuna, but she is very quiet and unresponsive.

We stop at a Yoga Swami Girls Home which houses 38 orphans. It is clean and well run, however they need books, umbrellas, and school supplies. I leave the others and go outside to the van. Oochikutty keeps pointing to a bump on his arm and saying something to me in Tamil. I keep telling him that I do not understand and he finally looks away. Its early evening, and thinking he must be hungry

-- I offer him a mango which he devours. I peel him another and a third for Luuna. She takes it and smiles shyly and hides behind her Grandmother.

Night falls as we stop at Maria Nayam girls home. The fifty five girls share two toilets, a small outdoor kitchen, and have no closets to house their belongings. They also need some plumbing and fans as the interior of the building approaches 105 F in the evening.

Thursday, June 9th

We spend most of the day shopping. There are school books to buy, along with pencils, erasers, English books, school shirts, shoes, and much more. It takes most of the day, as things move slowly. I also buy toys for Luuna and Oochikutty -- because every child should have a toy.

That evening we visit Arudpany girls home. It is run by Reverend Puvenandren. Being Christian in a Hindu Tamil area, in a Buddhist country means he has no means of Government assistance. He cares for 29 orphans, 28 girls and one boy, along with his own five children. He tells me that, during the Tsunami, and for several months after, they all -- 28 girls, the boy, his own five children along with the adults and two staff -- lived in his little two bedroom house. He



Arudpany girl's home

points out very matter of factly that they will have to do it again when the rainy season comes.

The home needs nearly everything. Like the others, they all sleep on floor mats in one room with their belongings against the walls. The kitchen is made of corrugated metal and is hot and small and has no running water. They also need a new well, a new toilet -- as the 28 girls share only one



L - R. Jonathan, Krush, Hettie, Errol, Dave, Mike, and Raju.

-- and money for food.

Later that evening David and I do more shopping, as Jonathan takes Oochikutty and Luuna to the dentist. They have hyper fluoridation, and their teeth are brittle. The dentist gives them a calcium mixture to drink. Oochikutty is then taken to the Doctor. The cut on his forearm is a bite or puncture wound that has been infected

with a parasite that lives in polluted water. The Doctor gives him a prescription for painkillers, and tells him that if the wound does not heal within a few days, it will have to be lanced. I

the shower stalls have no drainage, allowing large pools of grey water to gather

notice a yellowish tint in the whites of Oochikutty's eyes, and white rings under his finger nails. I know by his size that he has suffered malnutrition at an early age, and this has stunted his growth, but I am not qualified to diagnose these symptoms, and plan to take him to the hospital.

We return to the Office and I brush their teeth as I know they will not do a proper job. Dinah is upset that we have given painkillers to Oochikutty, and takes them away. She believes in Holistic medicine and gives him a placebo. Since his parents have given him to Patrick for the du-



The sleeping quarters for 29 girls, at Arudpany

ration of the Padiyacha, and Patrick does not object, I cannot intervene. I mention to her about his eye colour, and that I think he is suffering

from malnutrition. She checks him over and tells me she thinks he has liver damage. She also tells me she has been practicing Holistic medicine for ten years, and has set up holistic clinics in a few orphanages.

Friday, June 10th

New volunteers join us: Krush, is of Sri Lankan origin, but raised in Britain, Garrett is from Los Angeles, as is Katie. I start the day by brushing Oochikutty and Luuna's teeth. I then talk to Patrick briefly about Oochikutty. He is proud of the fact that this is Oochikutty's fourth Padiyacha. He tells that he has great plans for Oochikutty; he thinks the child can be a great Swami in one of the Kovils. I think the boy has spirit and character, but needs to go to school and get an education. Patrick tells me Oochikutty doesn't like school.

I convince Dinah to allow me to take Oochikutty to a doctor tomorrow, if his boil does not get better. We try to finish up the shopping, and start work at Arudpany. A variety of problems slow us down to a crawl. The plug for the electric drill and saw are not compatible with the wall outlets. We buy two adapters, but neither one works properly. Raju, a tri-shaw driver who seems to have adopted the organization, helps out, and we send him off to buy a different adapter. While we wait, we begin to install the fans and lights in the main room. The fans are installed quickly but the lights are badly wired, and the receptacles cannot be properly mounted without a bit of tweaking. Finally Raju brings the right adapter, but the saw draws too much power and keeps tripping the breaker.

The construction of the home is poor, and the shower stalls have no drainage, allowing large pools of grey water to gather between the main building and the kitchen, which the girls generally walk through barefoot. We decide that any makeshift repair to the drainage will lead to more problems, and decide to dig a shallow trench in the soil, leading the water away to an open catch basin. We also dig a trench to add plumbing to the kitchen.

The wood for the shelves is of a poor quality. Most of it is bent, and some is rotten, but we make do. I return to the office to find that Oochikuuty and Patrick have gone back to the Padaycha. Dinah tells me that Oochikutty is scared of the boil being lanced and does not want to go to the Doctor.

She was then forced to turn the child over to the rebels, to be trained into a soldier. The girl was only eleven at the time.

Saturday, June 11th

I take Luuna into town with me to do more shopping. There, I buy her a hair braid, sunglasses, and shoes. She points to a bottle of nail polish and stick on pottu's (the dot they place on their foreheads) and I reluctantly give in.

We sped most of the day making shelves with lots of help -- the girls take turns in handing me the screws and holding the wood in place. The afternoon is very hot and we buy them all ice cream as a special treat.

Later on I talk to the reverend about some of the girls. He began the orphanage in the mid 1980's and has one girl who came to him a child. She is now twenty one years old. Another is about four, and was orphaned by the Tsunami. Others he has taken in and looked after because their mothers have died and the fathers have remarried, and the new family does not want them. Some are sent here by parents who cannot care for them, and some from broken and violent homes.

He tells me of one girl whose mother could not afford to look after her. When the mother's for-

tunes improved she returned to take her daughter back, but was then forced to turn the child over to the rebels, to be trained into a soldier. She was eleven year old. The rebels have regularly promised organizations such as Human Rights Watch, and UNICEF that they will stop the forcible recruitment of children into their army, but there appears to be a recent resurgence in this practice.

I look at one of the little girls on a mat on the floor. There is an angelic quality about a child sleeping, so quiet, and curled up, but -- to me -- there is also something inherently wrong about a child having to sleep on the floor. I realize there is no-one to peek in and watch over her, no-one to ruffle her hair and kiss her goodnight -- so I do, before slipping out to the van before the others.

That evening I see Jonathan. He has returned from walking the pilgrimage for a day, and tells me Oochikutty is still on the pilgrimage, and his hand is worse. It is now a large boil that needs to be lanced, but he still does not want to go to the doctor because he knows it will hurt. While I believe a child should not be making his own decisions about health, dental, and education, I can only make suggestions as I am not the parent of guardian. I suggest to Dinah that we find Oochikutty and take him to a Doctor. She tells me she has already seen him, and has treated him. She has given him silica (sand), which she tells me is a holistic medicine that expels poisons from the body.

It is late, and there is a lot to do tomorrow. Since Patrick is with Oochikutty, I hope he will see that the kid gets proper medical attention.



I realize that all she has in the world are a few school books, a small suitcase, a skirt, a shirt, a broken umbrella and an empty rice sack.

Sunday, June 12th

Due to a booking error I'm forced to move to another hotel, but I like it better, so it works out. The new hotel is set by the lagoon, and is very peaceful. It is also a favorite of other NGO's. In the morning I watch a fisherman make his way up the lagoon, as cows meander through the property.

We return to Arudpany to finish up. The new fridge arrives and the children play in delight with the large pieces of Styrofoam. We put the finish touches on the shelves and start to clean up, as the kids put their belongings away. I am brought to tears by one little girl.



She is no more than six years old and has a bright smile. I help her pick up her belongings off the floor and I realize that all she has in the world are a few school books, a small suitcase, a skirt, a shirt, a bro-



Mike & Steve building shelves at Arudpany

ken umbrella and an empty rice sack.

I want to try to make it out to Kokkaddicholai early, to both the girl's and boys orphanages in the south, but Jonathan and Katie have an accident and Katie needs to be taken to the doctor. By the time the van arrives it is after 6:30 pm and we load up and try to make it to the ferry. We arrive at the docks at 7:30 pm and are told service will stop by 8:30. If we miss the ferry back, the round trip will be about four hours on bad and unfamiliar roads, in rebel territory. I decide not to chance it.

Disheartened, we make our way back, and stop in Kattankudi to buy water, when I hear the familiar rhythmic clanging of a Kotty roti being made. Several minutes and a few Khotty rotis later, we head back. Dave promises to deliver the supplies to the south orphanages later.

Monday, June 13th

It's my last day here, and I want to distribute all the supplies I've bought. We head out early and make Sittandy by 11:00 am to drop off school books, shirts, shoes, mats, and whatever they requested. Then to Yogaswami Girls home and Maria Nayam Girls home, before returning to load up again.

On our way up to Kathiraveli we are stopped at a checkpoint where I see a soldier with an AK 47 in hand and a bunch of flowers in the other. I want to take a photo, but decide not to chance it. We make the Kathiraveli Boys home (the bullet ridden one) by late afternoon, and then to the

Kathiraveli Girls home.

As I leave I am swarmed by children from the refugee camp that sits on the opposite side of the road. I have few toys or emotions to spare. I give them several tennis balls and remind myself in future to have bags of extra toys - just in case. It is twilight as we head south along the lonely



Kathiraveli Boy's home

road, there are no buildings here, just dry brush. I spot two armed soldiers hidden near the base of a large tree -- or were they rebels -- in this light I can't tell, and I wonder how many others we have passed without noticing. We head south to the Methodist Boys Home in Valaichenai but are stopped again at checkpoint Charlie. The Soldier checks the vehicle out, and -- on spying the mats -- asks me for one. I have always believed when a man with an AK 47 asks you for something you give it to him. We stop at both orphanages in Valechchenai and return home by midnight.



Arudpany - after the shelves.



Tuesday, June 14th

I say my goodbyes to the volunteers and head south to Arugam Bay. Twenty one years ago I stayed there when it was a surfing mecca in its infancy, and I wonder how bad it was hit. The trip is slow, and we pass countless refugee camps. Dotted throughout the east are a few small knit Muslim communities, whom the driver tells me are hated by both the Tamils and the Sinhalese. When I question why, I am told that the Muslims are usually the wealthier shopkeepers or business owners, and stick to themselves, and share the business in their communities, keeping the wealth for themselves. Hmmmm, I've heard that nonsense before.

We reach Arugam Bay by lunch time. Parts of it look as if the Tsunami had just hit. Broken buildings and crushed vehicles mix with surfers and new hotels. By the number of tourists I know it will soon recover. We head inland to Colombo and pass a small group of schoolchildren, between five and seven years old, walking home, and offer them a ride. There are six of them; the first two get off about a kilometer away from where we picked them up, the next two get off about a kilometer further, and the last two get off four kilometers from where we picked them up. It grates at me that children this young walk that distance in the heat, but it's a rural area, and they all live in resettlement camps, and are probably better off than many others.

Thursday, June 15th

Somewhere over the pacific, at 33,000 feet I chase the dawn. Like the waves on that beach in

Batticaloa, I find my emotions ebbing and flowing, some strong, others soft. I return changed - sadder perhaps. I want to run home to a country that's safe, back to medical and dental health, to warm soft beds, and closets for little girls and boys, and clothes, and toys, and the comforting love of parents, and all that makes childhood great. And I want to take them all back with me. But I can't. A small consolation is that, within each orphanage they have made a family, and love and comfort each other as best they can, and for now that will have to suffice.

Luuna -- in the week that I was around, she would vacillate between being friendly and being unresponsive. I asked about making sure she was placed in a school, but at 13 years old, she would be far behind the others. While private tuition is an option, she needs someone to be around her to make sure she does whatever is needed to be done to get an education, but her Grandmother showed no interest. Her mother has no relationship with her, and she seems to be left to make her own decisions.

Oochikutty -- On my last day there, I traveled several miles to where the Pilgrimage was supposed to be, but could not find him. I never saw him again. I found out later that a woman on the pilgrimage had crudely lanced his boil. I hope someone had disinfected it too. I have offered to continue to assist him, with payments for health and medical.





Thanks to Harvey Kalles Real Estate Ltd, the agents, friends, and family, I raised over \$6,600.00 I visited 10 orphanages where we bought and installed over 15 fans, 10 lights, and 2 sinks, and shelving. We paid for part of a fridge, construction of new toilets, and a floor for shower stalls, and gave 25,000 Rupees for food. We bought a 500 liter water tank, and gave out 600 exercise books, 1000 pencils, 1000 pens, 500 pencil cases with instruments, 200 pen cases with instruments, 200 school text books, 200 sets of water colors, 150 water (juice) bottles, 150 school bags, 250 umbrellas, over 100 pairs of shoes, over 100 mats, 30

school shirts, 30 pillows, 15 mirrors, 10 bathing/washing bowls, 10 English/Tamil dictionaries, 10 English alphabet posters, and several brooms and household items.

And we gave away more than 750 toys -- because every child should have a toy.

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